

Commons for Justice

Allapattah CDC

Narrator: Elysa Batista-Delcorto

Interviewer: Gabriela Herdocia

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[0:00:15] Gabriela Herdocia: I wanted to ask you a couple of questions. My interview is divided into three topics. The first is race, then gender, and then the environment. So, with regards to race, can you tell me your full name and where you were born first?

[0:00:34] Elysa Batista-Delcorto: In true Hispanic fashion it's a long name. Elysa Maria Batista-Delcorto.

[0:00:41] GH: Perfect, and where were you born?

[0:00:43] EBD: I was born in Panama City, Panama.

[0:00:46] GH: And why did your family decide to migrate to the United States?

[0:00:51] EBD: Noriega. It's a big, encompassing word. So, the political situation with Noriega in the late eighties.

[0:01:04] GH: Do you remember coming to the United States?

[0:01:07] EBD: I arrived when I was seven.

[0:01:14] GH: Okay. Oh, when I came from Cuba I was seven years old. What was the biggest cultural shock when you came to United States?

[0:01:28] EBD: That everything wasn't Mickey. We moved into Little Havana, so it wasn't a very big shock when we moved.

[0:01:45] GH: Right, because there are so many Hispanics in the area. Have you guys always lived in Miami?

[0:01:50] EBD: No, so we lived in Little Havana area for two years—almost three—then we moved to Miami Springs, and then we moved [0:02:00] to Sweetwater. So, in the Dade County area but not what is considered City of Miami proper.

[0:02:11] GH: Did your parents have a hard time finding jobs when they got here or where they able to secure jobs?

[0:02:18] EBD: My dad had a job already lined up when we arrived, and then my mom was a stay-at-home mom for a while until we were halfway through elementary school or a little bit more, and she went back to school to validate her university degree so that she could pursue a master's here. Then she became a teacher here.

[0:02:50] GH: Oh, that's awesome. Did she teach elementary school?

[0:02:53] EBD: Yes, she taught Spanish for twenty years.

[0:02:58] GH: Do you feel like learning the language was hard for you and your family?

[0:03:03] EBD: When we were in Panama, I went to a trilingual school. I was learning English, Italian, and Spanish. I didn't have the difficulty learning the language because it was something we had already been doing. I mean Panama had a big relationship with the United States long before the canal was turned over. Most schools had English as a track due to all the interactions.

[0:03:35] GH: Okay, so you felt it was a smooth transition.

[0:03:38] EBD: Yeah, and for my parents, my dad already knew English and my mom, some basics, but the county public schools had adult learning. Both my parents would go evenings twice a week to my elementary school where they would offer introductory classes in English. And then afterwards, [0:04:00] my mom went to the Learning Center. I don't know if it's still there. It's off Thirty-Seventh Avenue. How long have you lived in Miami?

[0:04:14] GH: I lived in Miami when I moved from Cuba and then I moved away and then I came back, so not very familiar.

[0:04:18] EBD: A long time ago, in a land far away, there was this park on Thirty-Seventh Avenue Southwest, just south of Bird Road. And it was famous because it had this beautiful giant wooden playground built like a wooden castle playground for kids. What we didn't know, growing up in the nineties, is that that was built the park was built next to an incinerator. It was discovered that it was a brownfield, so the whole park had to be redone and everything else. The only reason I'm mentioning it is because that incinerator was next to this adult learning school called the Learning Center. That's part of the county public schools. That's where my mom went to keep learning English. But yeah, so there were resources in the community. And my family never shied away from learning the language, because they needed to do that. It was part of what we need to do. Although our first language may be Spanish, I dream in English.

[0:05:37] GH: Growing up were there any times where you felt unwelcome based on your heritage, or your family felt unwelcome?

[0:05:45] EBD: Here's the funny thing. Dade-County has had a lot of Hispanics for many, many years. So, depending on the school you were in, you would [0:06:00] most probably be part of

the majority. You wouldn't feel that unwelcomeness. Occasionally, you would feel unwelcomed when I attended two different schools that were predominantly not Hispanic. But those were one or two individuals in the giantness of the school.

[0:06:21] GH: So, within Miami, you feel like you've always felt welcome?

[0:06:25] EBD: Miami is a bubble. Dade County is a bubble. To a certain degree, Broward is part of a bubble, and Monroe is part of a bubble. Anything in the tri-county area is a bubble. It's when people go outside and they're like, Wait, what? After I graduated, I lived in Naples.

[0:06:51] GH: Oh yeah, I live in Lehigh Acres.

[0:06:53] EBD: Okay, so you live there, you're like, Yeah, we are not the majority. And you can tell you are not the majority. And so, it's different, you know, the expectations or people think who you are and everything else. I mean, that's blatant sometimes. But I actually got to move there in the transition, when there were more full-time residents moving in, more Hispanics moving into the area, seeking to escape a little bit of the bigger city for a little bit more of what call they call a slice of home—Americana-ish, if you will. I miss people being on time to meetings, because that's the way it runs outside of the tri-county area. It's just—it's different. So, if you're doing this as part of the project here, you will run into that. For a lot of people, they don't understand that concept of discrimination towards Hispanics, because Hispanics are the predominant majority here in the county. [0:08:00]

[0:08:02] GH: Have you ever noticed any racial biases within yourself or maybe within your family towards non-Hispanic people, maybe black Americans, for example.

[0:08:16] EBD: You have to remember, and this always comes out sounding so wrong, that Hispanics are racist as fuck. Pardon the language because we're racist towards our own people. The colorism within Hispanic culture, you name your country, it's there. And that's something that until we as a society—Hispanicness—can separate, sometimes we might not be the best allies. For example—this is very specific to Panama—which is the situation where the canal is there. In Panama, you have families that have members that are white, white, you have families who are mestizo—half Indian half white descent—mulatto—half indigenous half black—Middle Eastern, Japanese, Chinese, Southeast Asians, all in the same family. Because people have married, or a cousin—everybody. I'm not saying they're the paragon of getting along because Lord knows some people are not, but until that's dealt with, the colorism—and that's just the first part and then you have what I call the *clasismo* [classism]. Between colorism in Hispanic culture and the *clasismo* in Hispanic culture—[0:10:00] I am getting completely and totally off topic, I'm so sorry.

[0:10:11] GH: No, I appreciate your answer. Now I'm gonna move on a little bit to the gender side of this. What role did religion play in your family?

[0:10:20] EBD: We are Catholic. It played a very big role in our family. For a very long time, and to a certain degree till now—we were very devout to go to church until, this was quite a few years ago, until a priest likened someone from the Cuban diaspora as Jesus Christ. And my mom's like, I don't expect you to be in politics and name someone Jesus Christ. And so, we walked out. My mom found a different church that she liked, where the priests kept it about the faith and didn't try to bring politics in. My mom was like, I come to church to pray, please don't bring the politics in, *no estoy aquí para eso* [I'm not here for this].

[0:11:27] GH: Do you have any brothers and sisters? Are you a single child?

[0:11:32] EBD: I have a younger sister.

[0:11:35] GH: What kinds of expectations did your family place on you as an older sister?

[0:11:49] EBD: That's a very loaded question.

[0:11:51] GH: You don't have to answer.

[0:11:52] EBD: I'll put it to you this way. Every older kid in a Hispanic family has undue [0:12:00] expectations put upon them. No matter what you do.

[0:12:08] GH: Do you feel that within your community and within your family maybe, there were expectations that were specific to women versus expectations toward the men in your family?

[0:12:23] EBD: My dad wanted me to be an attorney and my mom wanted me to be a doctor. I struck out on both. I went into journalism; I didn't go for the glamor or for the money. According to my husband I like being poor.

[0:12:59] GH: As long as you feel fulfilled by your job, I think that's what's important. So going back to gender here. What do you think is the biggest challenge that women face within the Hispanic community?

[0:13:17] EBD: Honestly, it depends a lot on the family. And I'll explain why. Because my folks raised me and my sisters differently because we weren't alone here in the US. And so their expectations for us were to get good grades, go to college, get a degree, and be gainfully employed. If you happen to find a partner who makes you happy along the way, great. But your life needs to be determined with, have the grades, go to college, get a degree, find a job. It [0:14:00] would have been different if we would have had that extended family presence of what would be expected. So, to a certain degree, my sister and I grew up with more freedoms than my cousins did growing up in Panama or in Mexico.

[0:14:18] GH: Do you think it's because of them having more family around to kind of watch them?

[0:14:24] EBD: It's not about watching, it's part of conforming to social norms.

[0:14:34] GH: So, you think that in the United States social norms are like a little bit more flexible?

[0:14:39] EBD: They are, you know, they are much more flexible. And it also depends on—I call it the generational. My mom was the youngest of her siblings. One of my oldest cousins is like fifteen years older than me, so there's different generational norms. They grew up in the seventies, so it's different of what was expected at that time. I was born in the eighties, so I technically grew up in the nineties. So, different societal expectations have colored the upbringing of our family.

[0:15:31] GH: Growing up do you remember your dad helping to cook or helping to clean?

[0:15:39] EBD: My grandma made sure that my dad knew how to cook because my mom doesn't clean.

[0:16:00] GH: So, you feel like you grew up in a household where the gender roles were kind of fluid and diverted from the norm?

[0:16:10] EBD: Yeah, I need to work on my cleaning.

[0:16:25] GH: All right, so now we're going into the environment portion. How does your community prepare for hurricanes? Does your neighborhood come together?

[0:16:44] EBD: Funny story. We prep usually—we'll make sure our stuff is stocked and everything else. My husband buys, things are set, we let our family know, these are our plans, this is where we're staying. But with our neighbors, not really. There's a Hi, there's a Bye. Like my husband says, "This is not Naples." We don't know our neighbors like we knew our neighbors in Naples.

[0:17:23] GH: So you feel like in Miami there's less of that familiarity with your community? Or that connection within your community?

[0:17:31] EBD: Um-hm. (nods affirmatively)

[0:17:32] GH: Why do you think that is? You don't have to answer.

[0:17:39] EBD: (shrugs)

[0:17:48] GH: What about your family? Do you guys, if somebody loses power, do you all huddle into one house?

[0:17:56] EBD: We offer sanctuary, if need be, or sanctuary gets offered. Yes. [0:18:00]

[0:18:01] GH: And with the recent flooding, was your neighborhood affected by the recent flooding?

[0:18:05] EBD: Actually, we live out in the Westchester area, so no.

[0:18:11] GH: Okay. Well, that's it for my interview. Thank you!

*end of the interview*