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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LUCRECIA DAYCI CHIVUKULA

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Lucrecia Dayci Chivukula, on November 8, 2021, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for joining me. I really appreciate it. To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

Dayci Chivukula: Okay, I was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1953, right in the center of Havana. A very interesting place because a lot of the well-known artists, performers, and sports people come from that particular central part of Havana.

SI: Does that area have a particular name, or is it just Havana?

DC: Yes, it's called Cayo Hueso. That translates to Key West. It translates to Key West, because there were the migrant workers from Cuba, they used to go to Key West to work, and then they would return to Cuba. Then, they used to live in that particular area. That area, the translation to that, is Key West, Cayo Hueso.

SI: What are your parents' names?

DC: My mother's name is Virgilia, and my father's name was Gustavo.

SI: Do you know what brought the family to that part of Havana?

DC: A long history of settlements there. From generation and generation and generation, they were from there. I can track down to the previous one, but I know my father's side, my grandmother, my paternal grandmother, immigrated to Havana. It is not clear where she came from. There, she met my grandfather, and they got married. Cuba is like a melting pot. We have elements from Africans, Spaniards and Native Indians and even East Indians and Chinese, a lot of Chinese there.

SI: One of my colleagues is an expert on Chinese Cubans. It is interesting to see how many different groups are represented in Cuba as a whole. Now, you said in your survey that your father was Cuban and Indian.

DC: My father's father was from Cuba.

SI: Okay.

DC: He was, what you call, the mulatto. The mulatto means the mix of the Africans and the Spaniards, and he was a first-generation mulatto. From my grandmother's side, they were from India. Right from the homeland India, they immigrated to Cuba.

SI: Growing up, what did your parents do outside of the home? Did your mother work outside of the home, for example?

DC: Oh, yes. See, more than what my mother did, the important thing to outline is what my maternal grandmother did. My grandmother was a self-taught seamstress, and at that time, it was really very interesting, because we are talking about the '40s and '50s, where a seamstress had to

make the whole thing, like hats, gloves, and dresses, and she was very good at it. She had very important clients. My mother was very gifted artistically speaking, so she used to draw the designs. By profession, my mother was a teacher. She taught mostly elementary, and then she also taught in a school for reform kids. The kids there had a mile-long crime history and all, and my mother taught those kids how to read and to write.

My father, at the beginning of his life, was a real mess, like many teenagers. His Spaniard brother-in-law had an automobile shop. So, he took him under his wing, and he taught him how to be a mechanic. He became pretty proficient at that, because his brother-in-law owned the shop. My father really had opportunities to learn, so picked up a trade. He was an auto mechanic. He dealt with all the electrical parts.

SI: Now, when you were young, what do you remember about the street, the neighborhood, that area that you grew up in?

DC: Oh, I remember everything actually. I have very fond memories of growing up, because as I mentioned to you prior, the area where I grew up was the very center, you could call it, the cultural heart of Havana. You could go to the park and the park was about less than a block, if you went in one direction from where I used to live. In that park, a lot of people, a lot of musicians and composers, used to get together for jam sessions. I grew up around music, drums, everything. Actually, right now in the present, one of the old movie theaters is called now El Palacio de la Rumba, that means The Rumba Palace, just to recognize the contribution to the music and the folklore. That is if I went in one direction. If I went in the opposite direction down a street, I could see straight ahead the sea. The famous Malecón, that is Havana Bay, right there. What I remember about my childhood was music and the sea. If I was happy, I would go to the sea. If I was sad, I would go to the sea and contemplate, and it did help that we had the sea, so deep but so close by. There was one of the best ice cream shops in Havana. So, I went, I saw the sea, and I had a nice ice cream there, and to the park, I remember riding bikes.

They were different times. You didn't have to worry so much about being kidnapped. You wouldn't be concerned about a kid missing. There were many friends, running free. I would sit with the older people, listening to their stories, I used to love their stories. That had a great influence in my life later on, because as a teacher, I went ahead and I said a lot of the stories. My students would always go back and tell me how much they enjoyed my stories. I directly attribute that interest to my very early childhood when I would go and listen to the older people. Also, they had little shops near my house on the corner, where they used to make sugarcane juice. That is called *guarapo*, and it wouldn't be a day without *guarapo*. It was like a way, an early way, to really consume what was produced back then. There was a lot of other issues, historically, what happened, that if you want to ask me about the impact when the revolution came, I'd be more than willing to tell you.

SI: Yes, I definitely want to ask about that, but first I want to ask about some of these stories that you remember being told as a child. It is interesting to me that your grandparents come from these diverse backgrounds. Did you hear stories from them? Were they alive when you were growing up? Would they share their stories with you?

DC: My paternal grandfather was deceased when I was brought up. My paternal grandmother, I remember her always being very sad because she was left with ten children. The stories that I used to hear were mostly family stories. The older son was a journalist, and he was the one who actually got in charge and took the paternal [role]. Actually, thanks to him, I learned that my paternal great grandparents were from India, because he showed me the pictures growing up. Otherwise, that part of history, for me, my own personal history, would have been buried. But he [would] tell me a lot of things about how the family came to be, all their struggles. At that time, there were difficult times for somebody to bring up ten children. The funniest part is that all the ten children have different possibilities, even within Cuba, because out of the ten children, some grew to be big ethnic mix. The children, all of them have the same face, the same nose, but yet the skin color was different. So, the opportunities open to them, back then, before Castro, and even after Castro, were very much based on the color of their skin. The lighter ones were able to do better at the social and professional levels, like for instance, the older one, the journalist, who, by the way, was also gay. At that time, it was like, "Oh, my God," everybody tried to keep on taboo, and he had his partner. He lived in a beautiful home. Yet he brought up every single one of his brothers and sisters, but something nobody spoke about was his sexual orientation. He, himself, was very careful about how he walked around people, and that especially was his decision as a journalist, he wouldn't [come] out. Looking back, I can only relate to all the pain he must have had being such an outstanding human being.

That had a direct impact on my family, because of my father, a big response of my father was admiration for his brother, but yet he felt that he had to prove to the world that he wasn't like his brother. So, he engaged in affairs with all sorts of women. He was like the ultimate Cuban macho, and that's why my parents got divorced when I was seven. It's kind of how one social issue really triggers and affects the members of the family in ways that you don't expect would happen.

On my mother's side, I always heard the stories about my grandmother, who I believe is probably my greatest inspiration and the strongest woman I have ever, ever come in contact with. I told you, she was a seamstress. She also was, I will say, a victim of the social issues, the social taboos and problems, of her time. Her very first love was a pretty well-known Cuban composer. My grandmother was very musical. She had a beautiful singing voice. One of my regrets is that I never recorded her singing. "*Quiereme Mucho*" was one pretty popular song she used to sing. Celia Cruz, you may know who Celia Cruz is or not, I don't know, but she's one of the famous icons in Cuban music, but she actually sang in her repertoire one song from my grandmother's very first and, in my opinion, only love. [laughter] She married my grandfather in a rebound, and I always heard this story. [Editor's Note: Celia Cruz was a Cuban-American singer who lived from 1925 to 2003. She fled Cuba after the Cuban Revolution and settled in the United States, where she continued her music career.]

She taught herself how to read and she was able to go only to a certain academic point, but she didn't stop there. Whatever she knew, she used to write poems. She wrote a lot of poetry. One thing, she never let my mother or me come near her sewing machine. She was scared to death that I would develop the liking for sewing and the skill, because she wanted me in the books. She would tell me, "Not to the machine, you go to the books. Not to the machine, you go to the books." She never let my mother cook, because she was supposed to be a teacher. Being a

teacher was a very important and prestigious thing back in that day and one of those professions that women will go to, nursing, teachers, seamstress, or cooks.

SI: This was all before the Cuban Revolution.

DC: This was before the revolution, even during the revolution. That is how they brought me up. When I got married, I didn't even know how to fry an egg, and I got married at twenty-three. My grandmother lived to be ninety-six. My grandmother would never allow me in the kitchen except to wash dishes. See, there was certain work that I had certain responsibility that started at eight, when I was eight years old. Washing dishes, cleaning the floors, tidying up the house, that she understood, okay, because it was all self-care. But when it came down to cooking, she was afraid that I was going to burn myself and have to miss school. For her, school was the most important thing. That was just before and after. I have very interesting things happening before, because when revolution took power, I was six.

SI: I was curious what you were exposed to at that age, because a lot must have been happening around you since you were right in the middle of Havana. What are your earliest memories of that phenomenon?

DC: Well, let me tell you, there are certain impressions in your life that are so strong that they will never go away, no matter what. Somewhere, it's in the archives of your brain, and you never know when the memory surfaces. When I found out that I was going to have this interview, I kind of tried to bring it to my forefront, "Okay, what do I actually remember?" It took me on a very interesting journey through the different points and the different benchmarks, I would say.

When the revolution came to power, it was in 1959, and I do remember it as certain as it was today. It affected us somehow personally, because my grandfather, my maternal grandfather, was an employee of the previous regime, and he was kicked out. As soon as they came in, he was without a job. Financially, that affected us when he took power because they got rid of everybody. Whoever was very close, they either killed them or they put them in jail or the people that they suspected that had any kind of affiliation with the previous government, they will kick them out of what is called Palacio Provincial, and that was like the government, like the capitol, the equivalent of the capitol. [Editor's Note: The Cuban Revolution was an armed revolt led by Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement against the military dictatorship of President Fulgencio Batista, who was supported by the U.S. and led Cuba from 1952 to 1959. The revolution began in July 1953 and lasted until the rebels replaced Batista with a socialist state led by Castro on January 1, 1959.]

I remember a number of issues even leading to that day that I will speak to you about in a minute. But when Castro took power, all of a sudden, I see my grandfather loses his job. All of a sudden, I see that some of my dear neighbors and the neighbors I used to look up to, because they were the ones who owned the houses, they had the nice property, yet they were very much involved with the everyday of the neighborhood and the community, but they had different jobs within the government, and all of a sudden--this noise and this vision--I don't think I will ever forget seeing a mob of people going up the steps to the people who used to have nice apartments on the second floors, ransack their houses, and throw everything out of the balcony, all their

property, all the jewelry, money, everything, throw down to the street. You never knew when the noise was going to happen, because it happened like firecrackers. You never knew. They had really targeted different people.

Then, later, not immediately at that time, my mother now divorced, I was seven, and that was by '61-'62, I would say '62. She was dating somebody who had been one of Castro's bodyguards. We were, all of a sudden, somehow privileged. We were having a little bit more resources, a little bit more of this and that, not a great deal, but a little bit more because of his political connection.

I remember living in fear also, because as soon as Castro took power and soon after, a whole lot about the Vietnam War began. He got involved in the war as well, because he was supporting the Russians. It was a lot of confusion initially, because nobody knew which political direction the country was going to take. Were they going to follow the Russians, or were they going to follow the Chinese? It was everybody's guess. I remember how I felt to be living there, not knowing what is happening next. You have on one side Che Guevara, who wanted to follow the Chinese, and then you have Castro, who wanted to follow Russia. You were dealing with the loss of Camilo Cienfuegos, who was like the voice of reason and who would have done a better job, should he had been the prime minister. [Editor's Note: Che Guevara was a communist revolutionary who assisted Castro during the Cuban Revolution and ultimately became second in command. He then left Cuba and traveled around the world to inspire other communist movements. In 1969, he was killed in Bolivia by CIA-backed Bolivian soldiers. Camilo Cienfuegos was a Cuban communist who led revolutionary forces during the Cuban Revolution. He died on October 28, 1959 at the age of twenty-seven, when the plane he was in disappeared over the ocean and was never discovered.]

Everything started [changing]. You never knew. People that were you neighbors and your family all of a sudden had to be walking around wearing militia clothes, a uniform. That took [place] almost immediately, and there was always the fear that one of the family members was going to be taken to Vietnam, as some of my close friends later on were taken to Angola. I have a very close friend, who actually grew up in my teenager years, and he was taken to Angola. He came back completely mentally affected. [Editor's Note: During the Angolan Civil War from 1975 to 2002, Cuba sent thousands of soldiers to support the Marxist-Leninist group, the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). In 1960, Cuba and North Vietnam established diplomatic relations, and Fidel Castro visited Vietnam three times, including in 1973. Cuba sent support personnel to aid North Vietnam during the Vietnam War, and there are accounts of Cubans assisting in interrogations of American prisoners of war.]

SI: Tell me a little bit about your early education in general, but was that affected by the revolution, when Castro came to power?

DC: That was the most affected. I will say, if I have to pick one thing that was how I felt because when you're a child, you're defined by your social interaction and your education. That's what defines you. Your family is taken for granted. But I learned how to read when I was very young. This is what happened, and you've got to have this background a little bit, otherwise it will [not] make sense.

When I was nine months old, I almost died, and actually, I was baptized and given the holy oil at the same time because I wasn't expected to live. As a doctor was disconnecting me, he saw that in the machine, something went up, and he said, "Oh, she's alive." He said to my grandmother, "Look, it's up to you. I don't know what I'm bringing back. She might be a vegetable her whole life, but she may actually function at a low level." My grandmother said, "I don't care what you're bringing back, I want her back." That made a difference between me being dead and me having had a life. He brought me back. He did a study then in my case and he says, "You have to watch her very closely because the people who [have] this problem, one in I don't know how many thousand develop an enhanced capacity in the brain. It's almost like a shock. It either brings you down and most likely brings you down, or it brings you up in [one] case in thousands. Well, luckily for me, I was the case in the thousand. I have to explain that to you because now you will understand my academics.

When I was about two, two and a half, my mother's best friend, who was studying to be a teacher also, said to my mother that her mother had just retired, and she was going through some depression because she couldn't teach anymore. She felt useless. They would say, "How about taking Dayci to entertain her?" because I love to talk, as you can see from our conversation here. [laughter] She would take me there. The lady would give me a little bit of espresso coffee and fry sweet plantains. I remember the smell that filled her house, and I remember also she was very short. Her feet never quite touched the ground in her nice rocking chair. She would pull out the material that she had used in the past to teach people how to read. That is how I learned how to read before I was three.

Now, one day, I was visiting one of my great aunts, and I picked up a paper and I started reading. When I did that, one of her neighbors was sitting there and he was laughing, "Oh, she's making up these stories." Then, he picked up the paper and said, "Oh, she was actually reading." Luckily for me, his sister owned one of the most prestigious private schools in Havana, one that my parents would have never been able to afford. Now, this was in 1956. The admission time wasn't until a year later, 1957, but he gave me a full scholarship, including even bussing. My grandmother took care of the uniforms. They didn't know what level to put me at because I was so young, so they instructed me, I believe, in the first grade, and I didn't even belong there. In half a year, I was in second grade.

I was there from 1957 until 1959, because as soon as Castro came, within six months, he shut down private schools, and everything had to be a government-regulated public school. After that, I started in this school, but of course I was way ahead. I got really goal oriented, and for me, it was a shame not to get a hundred in something because I knew I could do it. I had a memory that I would look at things and that's it, I knew it. That gave me a lot of dislike [from] some of my friends and a lot of challenges. I remember in fifth grade, no, throughout the elementary school, even prior to fifth grade, I used to write little poems, rhymes, and also little screenplays. I used to write screenplays. I liked using all this stuff, but I was the writer, the director, and I did the casting. [laughter] So, I loved doing that. I would be participating in other events and I would be directing the plays. That was part of my academics, because you will see how it played later in my life. It was a basis for something, leading [to] my future life.

Then, by the time I was in fifth grade, I had the major heartbreak I have had in my life. I was walking on my way to school, when I saw my classmates and my best friend carrying a sign, this big, with the big letters, saying, "We are against Dayci." They were carrying that. The one organizer was my best friend. Why? Because they believe that I was being favored by the teacher because my mother was a teacher, and that close friend of mine had seen her eating dinner at my home. So, she assumed that I didn't deserve the grades; it was all because of my contacts. How I responded to that was I went home crying and I couldn't believe it, and then I realized that, "You know what? This I'm going to turn around." My grandmother used to make great cakes and great lemonades. I said, "I need you to make cake and lemonade," and that was available at the time. She did. I created flyers and I gave to the girls and I said, "Come to my house, and I will teach you how to get hundreds." Well, the kids [came], and then in my mother's apartment, I created my first classroom when I was in fifth grade. After that, I became very popular, but I never spoke to my best friend again. [laughter] That's for sure.

Later on, based on that, I joined a special program when I was in middle school for people who have an interest in exploring teaching. That was called *Programa de Monitores*. I was in advanced classes. My favorite subject was physical science and geology. At that point, I participated in a nationwide competition for physical science for volcanic and tectonic forces. I loved it. I was really passionate about that. They gave me special permission to participate in another one that was Spanish writing, creative writing, literature. My teachers had to go through great lengths to get me to participate in both. It had never been done. What happened is that I had half of the time for each one of the competitions because I have the first hour--every participant had two hours--I had one hour for one and one hour for the other. Well, I came [in] first in the two [competitions]. They told me, "We are not going to take the prize away from you, but you cannot be number one in both. You have to choose one." Luckily for me, it wasn't hard because I had to give up the number one in writing. I wasn't about to give up the science one. It went to my new best friend at the time, who later on became an attaché to the embassy of Cuba in Spain.

In a Communist county, news, sports, music, and education are schools of propaganda. I was never good in sports. I was horrible. But in the academics, that's all I did. In high school, I was allowed to participate in teachers meetings, when they were getting to collaborate. Me and my big mouth, once when they were complaining about the students and the lack of attention, I told them, "You know, you are not providing stuff that is interesting enough for them." They said, "What do you mean? How do you dare?" I think I was a ninth grader, in the middle of ninth grade. Then, one of them said, "Do you think that you can do better?" I said, "I definitely can." Here I was a ninth grader teaching a senior high school class, but I had a secret because the one who created all the trouble for the teacher was my across-the-street neighbor. So, she managed the discipline for me nicely, and I was able to really teach them. The teacher used to do the exams and all, but I used to teach that class.

Then, I went to the pre-university, they call *preuniversitario*. It's like the three last years of high school. I went first to one school based on my grades, and I didn't fit socially. People there were like the highest tier, because never believe what they say, there are no social classes in Communist Cuba, that doesn't work. I didn't feel comfortable. Also, [the treatment of people based on] the color of the skin in the islands is very bad. They talk about racism here. In the

islands, it can be even worse. I just didn't fit. I asked to go, after my first year, to transfer to the one in Central Havana. That's where I fitted socially. Academically, they could give it to me because they just had to pump me up one level, and that was easy.

When it was known that I was leaving the country, I was in the calculus class falling asleep because we were doing the sliding rulers, and I could hardly understand what the teacher was saying. Some new teacher had come, and I was literally falling asleep. Somebody comes and says, "The principal wants to talk to you." When I went down, he told me that it had come to his attention that I was leaving the country and that the revolution wasn't going to educate me to make money in the United States. You know what, you work so hard academically, you try and you do all what you are supposed to be doing, and all of a sudden, your entire academic history gets torn. He got a paper shredder. He didn't even leave my elementary years. Every single record of my education went down. I was feeling so upset. But I was pretty arrogant; young people sometimes tend to be a little bit arrogant, fresh. So, I removed some hair pin, I let my hair all loose, and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm waiting for you to put my head on the shredder because that's where the real knowledge is. Your papers are just papers." He kicked me out of his office so fast, and that was my end. Formally, I didn't graduate from high school back in Cuba, because once they realized that I have consented papers to leave the country, I was blackballed.

SI: I want to ask more about your early years, but just for context, how and when was that decision to leave the country made?

DC: Oh, that was probably the hardest thing that I have faced in my entire life. That transition time, imagine a transition time that takes twelve years. My grandmother, I tell you, she was always the motor, the engine behind every move. When I was eight years old, after Castro had been in power for two years, she saw that my mother kept on dating this guy. It was a long relationship. She refused to marry him, even though he had asked a few times. But my father had left the country earlier. My grandmother said: "We have to leave this country to enjoy any progress. This is not going anywhere." She saw that early on. She presented the papers without my mother's consent. She tricked my mother into signing the papers and she presented it. She had everything going. My uncle was also coming.

They opened the flights, and then it became possible, because Cuba had different immigration waves. Whoever had money, whoever really had a lot of money, was the first wave. Who was really, really educated, not everybody was able to leave, because doctors and all, they were not allowed to leave immediately. The second wave began with the family of the very wealthy and the older people, then everybody who had relatives. Then, Castro, to discredit the immigration, opened the gates to people who have committed felonies and the undesirable people, and he did that to discredit the early job [opportunities] of all the Cubans.

One of the senators, Senator Bob Menendez's parents actually saw what was coming and left the island in 1953. Other prominent Cubans immigrated and came thanks to Operation Peter Pan. [Editor's Note: Bob Menendez has served in the U.S. Senate from New Jersey since 2006. Previously, he served as Representative of New Jersey's 13th District, from 1993 to 2006. Menendez was born on January 1, 1954, in New York City. His parents left Cuba only a few

months prior. Operation Peter Pan was a mass exodus of over 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban minors to the U.S. between 1960 to 1962. The U.S. State Department and Catholic Charities of Miami sponsored the program, which reunited children with family members already in the U.S. and placed unaccompanied children in orphanages or with foster families, until family members in Cuba were able to settle in the U.S.]

In my case, I was eight, and my grandmother made the decision, consented the papers. It took a long time. It took actually twelve years from the time that we put [in] the paper first to the time we got permission to leave. We got permission to leave when I was twenty years old. We went through a lot in between, a lot, all sort of problems. What I referred to about that kind of punishment, how they came to know that I was leaving the country, because everybody keeps it very quiet, but they came to know that I was leaving the country because, again, my best friend at the time, from high school, sold me out in front of five hundred people. I was being proposed for a leadership role within the Young Communist Party, because I always did my work. Wherever I was, I kept my mouth shut and I did the best I could do. [laughter] It's good behavior for the Communists. My friend, in front of everybody, sitting next to me, she got up and said: "Oh, Dayci cannot represent us because she is a traitor of the revolution. She's planning on leaving the country." After that, then all hell broke because after that, some people who were also hiding, like me, came quietly to me to give me some sort of support. Other people, who used to be my friends, were looking at me like she is, what they used to call, a worm, a *gusano*, "She's just a *gusana*. She's leaving the country."

By the time I came back, a month or two went by before the papers were done. I was in my earlier [teens], sixteen, something like that, sixteen, seventeen, and then they kicked me out. They kicked me out of the school. Then, not only that, but they kicked my mother out of her position as a teacher and they kicked my grandfather out of his job, so we had no money. My grandmother had already left the country because she was already living in California at that time. She was living in California because she had a cousin that made all the paperwork.

Immediately after that happened, I had to help support my family because I had a younger brother too. What I did is that I offer tutoring service for little kids and for grownups. I had a few adults that I was teaching how to read and how to write within the revolution, but if they had caught me doing that, I would have [been] given a big fine or put for some time in jail because of that. I was eighteen already at some point. I used to go from one place to the other, and that is how I was able to put food on my family's table, just by teaching. That was that.

SI: Well, going back earlier, in the early '60s, in the first few years after Castro took over, do you recall events like when the Bay of Pigs invasion happened or the Cuban Missile Crisis and how those affected your family, if at all? [Editor's Note: In April 1961, CIA-trained Cuban exiles invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in an ultimately doomed effort to overthrow Fidel Castro's communist regime. In October 1962, photographs taken by an American U2 spy plane revealed Soviet nuclear missile installations in Cuba. President John F. Kennedy responded by ordering a quarantine, or naval blockade, around Cuba to prevent more Soviet weapons from getting there. For thirteen days, the public feared the possibility of nuclear war between the U.S. and Soviet Union. The Cuban Missile Crisis was resolved when Soviet leader Nikita

Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles from Cuba, in exchange for the U.S. not invading Cuba. Secretly, the U.S also agreed to remove its missiles from Turkey.]

DC: Oh, yes. It did affect us a great, great deal. Actually, of all the problems, the Cold War affected us the most, because every single thing that was happening, they attributed it to the actions of the United States blockade, and because the Cold War, I mean, you could see that alliance that they felt that they had to have with Russia. That really affected every single citizen of Cuba greatly, because to make Russia bigger and greater, Cuba had to sign all sort of agreements to get products and things from Russia. So, Cuba was sending all the food, well, most of the food, and we have to live with a little ration notebook, where they used to write what we could buy. Food was very scarce. But the blame was always on the United States. So, they had to help Russia. They had to really support what they were trying to do. What they used to do was to buy equipment from Russia, whatever became obsolete in Russia. For instance, Russia would have a tool to pick up potatoes. Well, Cuba doesn't really process that much potato, but they bought plenty of machines from Russia and they got in debt with Russia. They were sending more and more of our food, and be sure that Russia was selling to somewhere else and making a profit. But yet we were not only stuck buying machinery and tools that we didn't need in Cuba, but the land, miles and miles of Cuban land, was occupied by these machines, covered with something to protect it, that nobody would use because they didn't have any need. It was like, "Why would they do that?"

Another way that this really affected everyone and me particularly was the time that I had to walk [in] the riots. They make it appear that people are at those riots because they want to be there, but that is not the case. If you are a student, you don't have a choice. They always tell you that you are a student, free education, which is not so true, they get free labor from you. At the time when I was growing up, I had to work in the tobacco fields for every single step of growing tobacco, caring for the plant, collecting it, making it dry. I had to do every single step of planting sugarcane, of harvesting tomatoes. I still have some roughness in my fingers, so many years [later], from the amount of acid from the tomato plants that really damages your skin. They would send you for forty-five days. At the time that I was in high school, it was three months. There was only one break in between. They took me away from my family, and they made me work in the field. But yet education was really free, and they did that.

The Bay of Pigs, do you know psychologically it really affect us? That was overly played. They will do blackouts and say, "You have to get used to when this happens, because we are going to be invaded any time by the United States." The fear, and once it became actually a fact, it was in 1962, right, am I correct? The Missile Crisis, 1962?

SI: Yes, the Cuban Missile Crisis was fall of '62, yes.

DC: In 1962, see, I remember. I had the fear of being invaded and all of us being killed. They used that in Cuba as an excuse to arm and to uniform more of the civilians. So, it was like you didn't want your uncle, your cousins, your family to be armed, and that was the constant fear. Living under that, it was like Damocles' sword. You're going to get it, any time it will fall, every time it will fall, and what side are you on? It's a horrible, horrible feeling, psychologically, materially, because every single thing that we didn't have, it was because of the United States. It

was difficult. [Editor's Note: "The Sword of Damocles," from a parable popularized by the Roman philosopher Cicero, alludes to the imminent and ever-present peril faced by those in positions of power.]

The Vietnam War, I'll tell you, that was the longest--I think it started in 1955, if I'm correct. I remember, I was in this country only for a year, in the United States, when it had stopped and I remember it stopping in 1975. When it stopped in 1975, I was the happiest person, because I knew people from Cuba who have died there, because Castro would send them. Growing up, my biggest phobia was to have my brother being sent to one of these wars. I mean, nothing that they can do physically to you [could] compare to the fear of what would happen to your loved one, what would happen to your family. The parades in support of Ho Chi Minh, I remember myself singing, "Oh, Ho Chi Minh." I didn't even know who Ho Chi Minh was, but you have to chant Ho Chi Minh and the words of praise and support. So, it wasn't a good feeling at all. [Editor's Note: The last U.S. military unit withdrew from South Vietnam in 1973. On May 1, 1975, Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, fell to North Vietnamese forces. Ho Chi Minh was a communist revolutionary who led the movement for Vietnamese independence from France. He served as a leader within the communist government of North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. He died during the war in 1969 at age of seventy-nine.]

SI: You mentioned earlier that they would take you out of school for--you called it the riots. Can you explain that a little bit more?

DC: Oh, yes. In the Cuban Revolution, propaganda was a big piece. They wanted to show that people at that time supported the Castro regime. When you look at the numbers, if you look at a plaza, they have a big place, a gathering place, that was called La Plaza de la Revolución and they have Jose Martí, one of the Cuban statues, they had it there at La Plaza. But what they will do is during the school day, you were in a school, but you were not receiving your classes. They got you in trucks, pickup trucks, whatever they had, to transport you. They will take you as a student to that, and then they will say that the students are here because they support it. They will do it usually [on] pay day. When the workers were supposed to get paid, they would take them there and give them the money there. If you don't go to those riots, you don't get paid. That is how they did it. Once you're there, you're stuck really, because if everybody is going, "Yes, yes, yes," and you are not doing that, you will stick out. When you see all these people going like this and you say all the people are excited and support it, no, you're looking [around] and it's not volunteer at all. If it were volunteer, nobody would show up. That was how I went. [Editor's Note: Plaza de la Revolución, or Revolution Square, is an open plaza in Havana, Cuba. At one end of the plaza is the Jose Martí Memorial, dedicated to the Cuban poet, intellectual and independence leader who lived from 1853 to 1895.]

SI: You mentioned having to go and do this unpaid labor as part of this as well. What were the conditions like, for example, when you were being sent to work collecting tobacco and producing tobacco? What were the conditions like?

DC: Okay, they have like camps. Imagine here when you go to camp, and you go and they have bunkbeds and they assign one to each student. You are responsible, when I say you, different groups at a time, of the cleaning. It's up to the students who are inhabiting it how they maintain

the living quarters. There was not a special arrangement, nothing is special. They provided food, but the food was really lousy. It was horrible. They allowed your family to visit you on the weekend, but usually that is in the countryside, a little bit far from Havana, but it was doable. Your family would bring to you whatever they could gather, and they would give it to you when they came. You made it last and you shared it with your friends. Every so often, they have meetings to indoctrinate you. There were competitions about which team would collect the most, and that is how they got the production really high. Every so often, they had a fun night, where people would sing, dance, and tell stories, but the main thing was the work. It's not like you're here to have fun and then you work, no, no, no. The working conditions, it depends how you look at it, how you think [about] a middle schooler or a high schooler, who is not a farmer, on the field, picking up potatoes. Sometimes, there were potatoes, and have bugs all over, or go with big sacks, huge sacks of pieces of sugarcane to walk in the field while planting that. Child labor is child labor, no matter how you view it. In middle school, you're still doing child labor, and that is how we were doing it. We would be in the sugarcane fields after they had burned the leaves to gather the sugarcane. You would come back dark, and that's that.

SI: At any point, either before or after the revolution, did religion play any role in your family?

DC: Religion?

SI: Yes.

DC: A Cuban's religion, it's a very interesting and sore topic. Look, my family was practicing Catholic, but in Cuba, history and religion are very close together. Cuba has what you call syncretism, and syncretism is when you get the African religion from Nigeria and the Christian religion, the Catholic religion, and they are put into one. That same phenomenon happened also in Brazil, but in Brazil, the elements are a little different because instead of being with the Spaniards, it was fused with the Portuguese and that brings around little differences. The Yoruba, what is called Yoruba religion, it was very much a religion that worshiped nature. They did a lot of things with nature. Being that my family was partially from Africa, like Nigerians, it was embedded in that. There were some parts of my family members who worship through syncretism, bringing in the Yoruba elements with the Spanish mixing in and resulting in a brand-new religion, too Catholic to be really African and too African to be really European. That was what I saw prior to Castro taking power.

After Castro took power, then Christianity, the church was looked upon as an enemy, and people were forbidden to be going to church. It was really a strange time. Now, they are more lenient towards that, because they have to globalize in Cuba, but at that time it was nothing. My grandmother was a devoted Catholic. She would pray at home and she would teach us about Christ. But it's very hard to be in your house where they tell you that Jesus Christ is the lord and then you step out as a very young girl and hear that religion is the opium of the masses. As a little kid, your mind goes really crazy. At home, I follow whatever my grandmother said or my grandmother did and I wouldn't insult her. Outside of the home, I kept my mouth shut. I didn't speak in favor or against.

It was strange because from Cuba, I lived in Spain for close to two years. When I was living in Spain, you know in Spain, people are extremely Catholic, they are really, but for me, I would visit churches, yes, and I would pray, but I couldn't pretend that I could be a hundred percent Catholic and follow all the rituals and things of the church. For me, it was hypocrisy because I felt that half of my life, for most of my life, I had been praying only at home, not fulfilling the mandates of the church for most of my life, so all of a sudden, I couldn't understand what was expected.

Yet, when I got married, I got married in the Catholic Church. I followed the Pre-Cana, whatever requirements were done. When my children were born, I baptized them, both of them, in the Catholic Church. But my position towards religion, based on the experience that I have in Cuba, is I'll share with you, but you're free to choose, and that's what my kids have done. Well, I married a Hindu. My husband is Hindu, but it's mostly a philosophy. But we both respect each other's belief. I am a Christian, I believe in God and the precepts and all the commandments, but I'm not a practicing Catholic. I don't go to church if I don't have to. [laughter] My daughter is Baptist. My son is agnostic. We have a very casual position towards that.

Religion in Cuba, that syncretism that I am talking to you about, plays a key role in the whole island's identity, because that permeates into the culture, the art, the performing arts, the folklore. When they take out folklore to other countries, all the performers do things that are heavily charged with the Yoruba and that syncretism. That's what they present as representative of the island.

SI: You mentioned you were living in this place where you could go to the sea. You could go to the plaza, where they played music. Did you remain there the whole time you were in Cuba, or did you have to move around?

DC: I remained there. See, we lived in a building--and I have pictures of what it looks today and we will talk later about the pictures. The building is still up, the one that I grew up in, because just for a weird, I would say, coincidence of life, my half-sister's cousin ended up living in the same building like fifteen, twenty years later; there are still neighbors that used to be my neighbors when I was growing up. It's really a very, very strange feeling. I lived there all my life until I left. Then, from there, I left for Spain. In Spain, I moved around a lot, and even in the United States, I move around a lot. But there, that it is not so easy. My mother lived in apartment number two and my grandmother lived in apartment number five. For me, it was going up and down the steps, that's why I was so close to my grandmother, because she really was the one who brought me up. My mother was more like my sister. Yes, I lived there all my life.

SI: After Castro took over, did the things like the music in the plaza continue, or was that reigned in or stopped?

DC: No, music is a big part of Cuba. They just changed the message because you couldn't say anything against the Castro Revolution. When the other guy was in power, people talked against the government, nothing happened. But after, Castro took over the music, the dance. You see, Cubans' nature is such that Cubans make fun of their suffering. Even the worst, the most adverse

condition, something comes out being turned [into] a joke, as something funny, as something with music, as a parody. It's a very weird, almost twisted way of black humor. It's part of the nature of the island. Everything continued, the dances, but you have to be more careful, because especially with the missile crisis, there were curfews. After a certain time, you couldn't be out. It wasn't that long, the actual crisis wasn't that long, but the aftereffect was like having an earthquake. We were being threatened by the missile crisis. Something like this could happen, let's get prepared. When the crisis happened, "I told you that this was going to happen." After that was over, then the fear this will happen again [was] on everybody's [mind].

SI: You mentioned that when you were about sixteen, you went into this kind of internal exile, where you were not allowed to be in school, you had to tutor to kind of keep your family going. What were some of the other ways that you fought through that or kind of made ends meet during those years?

DC: Yes, oh my God. The only reason why I was protected at the time, I instructed only maybe two students and I was charging very little money to those students because I didn't know anybody. But those two students were very important because they were the children of one guy that was really high up in the Communist Party. He would protect me, and that was very important. So, I charged less. I taught the kids math and all, because I always used teaching as my saving grace all my life, and you will see later on how it played. By word of mouth, the success of the kids brought me more kids and more kids. Then, it got a bit out of hand, if you want to learn and your kids to advance, you will get them help, and then I began getting kids with learning differences, because I had the patience and the knowledge.

Let me tell you, because that is a very interesting question and I'm glad that you're asking me because I wouldn't have thought about bringing it up, and I think that that was very important. I would start around maybe seven o'clock teaching or tutoring, and I will end, my last class, believe it or not, at eleven o'clock at night. I would eat whatever lunch I got, a sandwich, on the way to my next tutoring. Remember, I had to provide money not only for me but for four family members. Among them, my mother had gotten a lot of nervous breakdowns because she was torn between what she had to do and what she wanted to do. My grandfather was going through some depression at that time that affected his heart, so he had gotten a couple of heart attacks. My brother used to have chronic asthma, and every so often, he will pass out. So, he needed good food. He needed something, and with money, you could buy it in the black market. That was always available in Cuba. You could always get something. I was that young, but all of a sudden, I was living with two people without a job, three people who were not going to be able to do anything, and me the only viable person. So, I took on the responsibility.

Working that much, [at that] level, I just started then teaching less time and asking for more money, because I could at that point and I needed to. From ten to eleven, I used to teach one lady who worked a full day and she needed to learn how to read, she never learned. Either she escaped the literacy campaign of Castro or she never felt comfortable. So, I had to tutor her one on one. But by doing that, I was able to bring home almost twice the amount of money that my mother and my grandfather were bringing when they were employed. So, you could imagine how low salaries were in Cuba at that time. I was working independently, but I didn't rest.

Now, what happened after, at a point that I had a business, a thriving business, they open again where your case to leave the country is going to be reexamined, because after they did all that, they came to us and they said, "You can never leave the country." After they have destroyed our life, I mean, our life is finished there, they open an office, it was about a couple of hours away from my house, for immigration. I used to go every single day, every single day. I'm doing all that and they tell me, "Okay, you cannot leave the country. You are no longer eligible," what do we do next? At a point, I told my mother and I told my grandfather, I need time to really check. We have saved some money, put some money aside. So, I started going to that place. That place was called El Laguito, the Little Lake. One of the officers actually threatened to put me in jail. He said, "If you come again, I will put you in jail. You don't have a chance to leave." Now, I'm a minor. I'm still a minor, and every single day, I would walk. I would ignore them and I was defiant. I said, "You guys destroyed my life, my family's life, what are we going to do?" He gave orders. They would show me guns. They did everything. Listen, at that point, my grandmother was going through some heavy depression in California, because she was missing us. My father tried to do whatever he could. He was living in New York. All of a sudden, my family depended on me. So, I took those two weeks, and I showed up. Well, they didn't know what to do with me.

At the end of the second week, the guy comes and tells me, "You are not leaving the country." I remember, he started pounding on his desk. He pounded on one side and I pounded on the other side, and he said, "You're not leaving." I said, "I'm leaving. My life is destroyed." He said, "You have seventy-two hours for your family to put money for all four of you to leave through another country." The only two ways that could be accomplished was through Spain or through Mexico. Mexico was cheaper, so the waiting time was longer because most people were there. Now, I had seventy-two hours to do that. He said, "If you don't have that in seventy-two hours, all that money here to go, your case is going to be closed." Now, what I was thinking, "How [is] my grandmother going to come up with that money. How is she going to do that?"

I immediately contacted my grandmother in California. She borrowed money, I don't know how she did it, the poor woman, but she asked for some money from my father. Well, I had the bank transfer in forty-eight hours, not seventy-two, forty-eight hours. In forty-eight hours, with all the information about the transfer, the money there, I went back. When I went back, I never said I have the transfer and he said, "Why are you coming? Do you want your case closed now?" I said, "No, sir, I want you to keep your word." When he saw it, he couldn't believe it. Listen to the rest he did. He said, "Okay, you got the permission, but along with the permission comes a requirement that you have to work in an assigned place from now until your permission to leave the country comes." At that point, I think I was seventeen, something like that. I was still a minor, seventeen.

SI: This is around 1970?

DC: Yes, around that, '70. I was seventeen. When I call, they send me to the fields again, but this time, what do they do? They send me to a place where there were no people who were planning to leave the country. There were no women. I was the only woman, at seventeen. I had to pick up a bus full of men, of rude farmworkers, that will go from Central Havana to the countryside, and I was the only woman.

The first day occurs, I had to stand the whole day. I had to take that bus at four o'clock in the morning. When I got the first time to that field, the boss of the farm looks at me and he says, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Well, they sent me here to work in the field to earn my right to leave the country for me and my family." He said, "That can't be, because I have no condition for women here." I had to beg the guy to [let me stay]. I said, "I beg you. No matter what, I need to stay." He said, "Well, where are you going to go to the bathroom?" Oh, my God, that was the first day. To change your clothes, do you know what my place to change my clothes was? An old refrigerator that was out of order and that the moment you opened it, you were attacked by thousands of mosquitoes. It was dark, smelly. That was my changing place. So, I went through that, I did it.

Then, I went through that for a year, a whole year. Imagine, you are from the city, but by five o'clock, I had to be in the field harvesting flowers to make wreaths for funeral homes. That was my job. I had to give up the money I was making to help my family now because I couldn't do it, to get like a fourth of what I was getting. Then, my family had to adjust. But the immigration officers were hoping that I would give up, because they didn't expect that I will survive those conditions.

Then, God is always there. I became friends with the farmers, and I became part of some of the farmers' families. So, they would help me; whatever they could grow themselves, they would put a little bit for me to take home to feed my family. They will milk the cows and save a glass of milk for me. Simple people, loving people, they adopted me as one of them. I didn't want to leave the place. That's how much love I got from them. The head farmer had two daughters who were trying to get into nursing school, but they were having very low scores in math. I offered to tutor them, so I only went to the field in the morning. In the afternoon, I worked with the girls. They both got into nursing school, so here I have a happy, grateful boss. As for the wife, I started making waves with her because she had a lot of work, and I said, "Don't worry, I'll do the dishes after all your workers go." So, it's easier doing the dishes than working in that horrible sun in the afternoon out in the field. I got his wife in my pocket, and she was very happy with me.

After a year, I was still waiting for the final permission. I'm fulfilling this requirement. I was eighteen at that time. An inspection comes, and they tell me, "Well, we have decided that you're not eligible for this kind of work. You should never have been sent here because you were a minor. Now, you can work in the city." I go, "Oh?" I didn't want to leave the fields, because I had it made in the countryside. For the same amount of money and then no food, I said, "It doesn't make any sense." Then, they send me to a florist shop next to a funeral home. But there, the advantage was that I had people around who were also leaving the country. They were all waiting. All that business was being maintained by people who had been taken from their previous jobs and sent there. So, I got a network, and that helped me a lot later on. So, I got that, and that went on for about a year and a half.

After a year and a half, they tell me, "Your numbers are going to come pretty close." I am nineteen and a half. They said, "That's it, no more work for you. You complied," and they kicked me out. Again, I have no income. What do I do? Some of my students, I never really

lost them, because I was teaching them on Saturdays and Sundays. Even though I was working there, I was still getting a little bit of money. I didn't see everybody, but I had some people left. So, I would work straight all this time. For about six months, seven months, I continued straight tutoring like that. I got most of my old clients back, everybody was happy to see me. I was getting enough money. Combined with that, it was all the good will that I had built throughout the years.

Then, my brother, that was another area of concern. My brother was getting older, and after fourteen or fifteen, they don't allow the people to leave the country, because they have to go to the military service. Imagine, after all that, my brother was getting there. Somehow, at that point, it comes, "You've got the permission to leave the country." I was twenty. From eight to twenty, twelve years, all that happened in that time. They come with the permission to leave when I'm twenty.

We had to leave everything. Because the need was so bad, all my clothes, whatever I had, I left behind for my friends and my family. We all filled our suitcases with rags, because you couldn't leave without a suitcase, because if you did, it meant that you didn't have anything and it would have been a bad thing for them. We were kicked out of our apartments, so we had no place to live. All our relatives refused to let us in their house because we were the enemy. Only one family, the family of my Spaniard uncle, my father's side, my aunt fought with everyone, and they said, "No, they are all coming here." Then, we left for Spain.

In Spain, it's still the same scenario of people. I get on the plane, and I remember when people were asking me, "Why are you doing that?" I looked down from the plane and I opened my eyes really big. People were saying, "Dayci, why are you doing that?" I said, "Well, I'm doing that so I never ever feel the need to come back to this country again." I want to take a snapshot of the island in my heart, and that's all I want.

I left, and where I'm going, I start looking for wanted ads to work in Spain, because we had no money. My grandmother and my father have sent everything they had. There was no money, and we were homeless. We were sitting where they received the immigrants, all the four of us were sitting there. I am looking for a place where I could work. Surprisingly, one of the ladies, my coworker for the florist shop, read on the list that I was there and came with her husband to pick us up. They took us to her house, but she lived in a small apartment. She said, "You can be here for a week." After two days, she said, "Man, you've got to leave. We can't be here with so many people." The people who had rented the apartment to them were giving them a hard time.

After two days, I had found a job as a coat checker in one restaurant in Spain, and it was the time of Francisco Franco. Franco was still in power. We are talking about 1973, around that, end of '72, '73. We subletted one room, one bedroom, one huge bed though, it was a king bed. We had to manage. I was able to use tips to put food on the table for my family. Then, eventually, we were able to rent a little apartment. We had to wait for the U.S. permission to come to the country. [Editor's Note: Francisco Franco held power in Spain from 1939 until his death in 1975.]

It wasn't easy because after that, I had to change jobs because I wasn't a coat checker, but a number of things didn't go right. So, I went to work at a very fancy cafeteria between the sport palace and the bull fighting ring. They had a very up, up class place. Initially, I was a cashier. Then, they thought I could do more. They made me an inventory clerk. Then, they saw I could handle those two jobs and they gave me the waiter's percentage and payroll accounts. So, they were exploiting me royally because I was doing the work of three people and I was getting paid near nothing, until I got permission to come here.

SI: I want to ask a little more about Spain, but first, your brother, around the time you got taken out of school or forced out of school, was he also forced out of school, or was he allowed to stay in school?

DC: My brother [was] in the elementary school, they didn't get to him, no. My brother wasn't able to go to school when we were in Spain, but in Cuba, they didn't [get to him]. They let him be there, but he wasn't allowed to participate in some political activities and some stuff. He was isolated.

SI: From what I have read, there was a relatively large number of Cuban refugees living in Spain at the time. In general, were they kind of exploited like you were describing? What was the situation like?

DC: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Look, when I got there, there were already a considerable amount of Cubans, men and women, who had been there a year and they didn't get a single job. They didn't. People were shocked when I said, after two days, the third day I was working. I learned early on, you cannot sit down and blame. I always feel that in life you have to take charge. Therefore, I started looking for a job on the plane. I doubt very much that they did that. Everybody was leaving Cuba. Everybody was happy and felt liberated. They were coming to a better world. I was never that optimistic. I always said, you know, Murphy's Law, if something is going to [go] wrong, it's going to go wrong, based on my previous experiences. So, I got here, meaning I got to Spain, and immediately, I said, "What can I do?" There were people always trying to steer you in the opposite direction.

I had so many horrible experiences in Madrid. Some people say, well, [it's] because I arrived [at] twenty years old in Madrid. I worked at a restaurant, a high-class restaurant. That's what I was doing, right in La Puerta del Sol, the main place. I worked the shift from eleven o'clock in the morning until twelve o'clock at night. Then, I left that job because of exploitation. They changed management, and then it became until whenever the last customer left. Well, they had parties there and sometimes the customers never left until two o'clock in the morning. They expected me, a coat checker, to be there until three o'clock in the morning. That was unacceptable, and I was very furious. I have to tell you that when I quit that job, I didn't have another job lined up, nothing like that. There are certain things out of dignity you can do.

There was also the bad reputation that they gave to Latina women because they will feel that since you didn't have money, Latinas would do anything they wanted for money, and you had to fight that stereotype in Europe. You are from the Americas, that means you're easy, and you don't have money, you're a broke Cuban, you will be easy. If you don't fall in that, you are not

that, you have to fight with your nails and teeth, because you have to really break out of the mold that they tried to create.

During my stay in Spain, because I would walk home late at night, at that time Francisco Franco had the curfew for young respectable women. By ten o'clock, they had to be home. Well, I was an immigrant. I had a job that didn't let me off until twelve o'clock at night or later. I couldn't depend on my family to take me any place. At twenty, I had to do [it] by myself. It was like, "What is this single twenty-year-old woman doing at night, after ten o'clock?" I had to fight attempts, everything, and once I almost got kidnapped and I was lucky enough not to. Madrid, at the time, had every single issue that any other big city would have, and back in the day, it was really bad. I knew a lot of people who didn't have a job who had been there for a long time, way before me, and they were still eating in the common places for immigrants. That's why I don't have any false pretenses. You had to get through that, and then you have to wear clothes that, thank God, other people had left. You don't have that false pride, "Oh, somebody wore it, I don't [want it]." Second hand, it covers me from the cold, I wear it, I have it. Yes, it wasn't easy. It was a difficult time, and I had it hard. Some people were having it harder because they thought that they were in transition. I saw that I am in transition, but I am still [going to work], because we had working permits. Spain gave us working permits as soon as we got there, so that wasn't the issue. If you have permission to work, then it's on you how you turn this situation around. So, that was that.

SI: Were you able to continue or get more education, or were you able to tutor anyone during this time as well?

DC: No. When I got to Spain, we met one lady who had a lot of money, but I didn't have good vibes from her. I expressed to her that I wanted to learn English to prepare to come here because I didn't know any English. She offered to pay for some cassette tapes and things, provided I guided her granddaughter in her studies of English. I agreed with it, but then she kept on trying to outsmart and do things that I wasn't really comfortable with. I just said no and I didn't work with the daughter and I completely escaped. No, I didn't do anything academically with it.

I used my math all the time because there were no calculators and a lot of nothing there and I have to keep a lot of the inventories. I was able to use my knowledge, but I wasn't able to gain anything else beyond that. I bought myself a little record player, a little record program, in English just to say the basics. I had practiced already, [from] the moment that I realized I had to come to this country. When I was very young, I had a classmate who happened to have a manual typewriter, an Underwood typewriter, one of the earliest, earliest models, and I had to walk close to three miles back and forth to go and practice typing, but I did. By the time I got to Spain, I was already a typist, a self-taught typist, when you have to change the ribbon and all those things. That helped me. That was very relevant for my later life, knowing the typing aspect, because I utilized that skill and it helped me a lot.

SI: Were there other ways, being in Franco's Spain, that the fascist government or any form of oppression affected your life?

DC: Not the repression, but there were a couple of incidents, let me put it this way, some of it positive and some of it negative. In Franco's Spain, there was this system of what they call *el sereno*, or the night guard. In Franco's Spain, people who lived in an apartment building in Madrid wouldn't have key to the main door of the building. If you wanted to get in the building after the door was closed at night, you needed the night guard to open it for you. The night guard who opened the door expected a little tip. You didn't have to, but if you gave a little tip, you would get better service. You're waiting time for the key reduces. I was also going back home late, so I would tip two different night guards, because they all have their zone, their area. I [had] money to get a taxi, after I finished my shift, but that taxi money was the only money I had to buy breakfast for my family the following morning, so I walked. It was cheaper for me to tip the night guard than spend my taxi money, and besides, it wasn't safe to be going in a taxi for a single, unaccompanied woman. One night in particular, the one that I referred to that I was about to be kidnapped, I started screaming for the *sereno*, and since the *sereno* was waiting and knew the time I usually went by, he came running. He came with what they call a *chuzo*, that is a stick, because they don't wear weapons. He stopped the kidnapping. If Franco wouldn't have been there and having that in place, I wouldn't have been around probably, okay, because the streets were not safe. That is one in the positive.

The one in the negative--the right-hand man of Franco was Carrero Blanco. Carrero Blanco was the advisor on everything. Carrero Blanco went every single morning to pray [in] a church that was within my walking path to work. The chauffeur of Carrero Blanco spoke with me every single morning when I went by, while Carrero Blanco was praying in the church. That's how he started his day, the chauffeur will wait for him outside and I engaged in a couple of nice conversations with the chauffeur, an elderly gentleman, very pleasant, very nice, and we talked for a short period of time. Now, one particular day, I don't know, I still cannot believe how I woke up and I told my mother, "I don't feel like going to work today." She said, "You're never out of work." I said, "Yes, I know, but for some reason. I'm going to call to see if they will give me the later shift." I called them up, they changed my shift to the later shift, no problem. I stayed home. All of a sudden, a little bit later, "boom," there was an explosion. They had a device and they blew up Carrero Blanco. His car went up five floors. Luckily for the chauffeur, he only got minor injuries because he was outside, but it would have been exactly at the time that I would have been walking there. That was during Franco, and that bomb was because of the terrorism based on the strong dislike for Franco's regime. [Editor's Note: Luis Carrero Blanco was a Navy officer who served during the regime of Francisco Franco as Undersecretary of the Presidency from 1941 to 1973 and as Deputy Prime Minister from 1967 to 1973. In June 1973, he became the Prime Minister. On December 20, 1973, Blanco was assassinated in a car bombing near San Francisco de Borja Church on Calle de Serrano in Madrid. The assassination was carried out by members of the Basque separatist organization ETA.]

When I lived in Madrid, the food wasn't expensive. It wasn't a democracy, but the country was more organized. I could tell you that, because I have been in Spain after. In the '90s, I went, and I saw a bit of chaos there.

SI: Well, we are almost at the two-hour mark. I want to save coming to the United States for another session, if that is okay with you.

DC: Oh, yes.

SI: Yes.

DC: That's a long [story].

SI: It seems like that will be a lot. I just wanted to ask a couple of follow ups about life in Cuba. You talked about how you would occasionally be able to contact your father in New York and your grandmother in California. How would you do that under Castro's regime? Were you allowed to send a letter or make a phone call, or did you have to go through some kind of process?

DC: There were telegrams. You send a telegram. That's how we got the notification that the money had been [sent], through a telegram. We wrote letters, and in the letters, my father sent, not to Cuba but later to Spain, money orders, and phone calls. It was hard, but it was possible to make phone calls. It was very difficult to get a phone call, and they would always monitor them anyway, they would know.

SI: I was also curious, when you were still in school, were you affected by the literacy campaign? Were you old enough where they would send you to rural areas to teach people?

DC: No, but my sister was.

SI: Oh, okay.

DC: Actually, I mentioned to you about a half sister. My father was married before, and actually he was married before to what you could understand almost as a celebrity, because she was one of, what they were called at that time, the *Mulatas de Fuego*. They were singers and dancers who actually had been featured in some movies. Her mother was one of those ladies. Later on, after she divorced my [father], she went to Italy to work. She got a contract in Italy and she went there, but she left my sister. Now, my sister was being brought up by her grandparents, and her grandfather was a shoemaker and her grandmother, she used to stitch just little things, but she was mostly a housewife. She would take care of the kids and grandkids.

My sister went to get herself the credentials to become a teacher as part of the literacy campaign. The literacy campaign affected my family in that respect, because I was always close to my half sister. She went, she came back with her credentials, and she did it. My mother also had been a teacher already, she applied whatever she knew, and she taught some people how to read and write. I wasn't involved directly at that point because I was too young to do that, but both my sister and my mother, they were, yes.

SI: Did your sister remain in Cuba?

DC: For many years, she did. Even though my father tried to bring her over many times, my sister didn't want to leave the country because she didn't want to leave her aging grandmother. Eventually, her mother, from Italy, went back to Cuba. She had two children, so she didn't want

to come, but she would come and visit when it was possible for her to do it. She made three visits, before she decided to stay. Throughout all that time, we always stayed in touch.

SI: Well, is there anything from your pre-United States life that we should talk about in this session? Is there anything I missed or anything that I skipped over that you would like to talk about?

DC: I just want to say that throughout all my life, from Cuba to here, education, not only getting education but making sure that other people also have access to it, to share whatever you can, to educate others, have taken a big priority in my life. That is a feeling or a philosophy that has been with me all my life. Maybe what really, really triggered that in me was the fact that in fifth grade, I ran a tutoring program for my classmates. But I have to say that probably it's even before that, when I saw how generous this retired teacher was and how much she instilled in me the desire to learn. I saw myself as a force, to try to instill that in others. I define myself and I have defined myself all my life as an educator, not only an educator in concept but an educator in things in life. I am sharing these experiences with you, but I have often shared, I would say, clip pieces of this with my students throughout my life, both at Rutgers, as well as my students in high school and in middle school.

SI: Okay, very good. I appreciate all your time today, and I look forward to continuing our conversation. If anything comes up in the interim, I encourage you to write a note and then we can talk about it.

DC: Actually, I have it here, because I figured I'm prepared. I have my pen.

SI: Very good.

DC: When I reflect, as soon as I finish, I will say this or that.

SI: Oh, very good.

DC: Yes.

SI: Well, I am going to end the recording. Thank you very much.

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----

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