

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

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 the second oral history interview with Lucrecia Dayci Chivukula, on November 12, 2021, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for joining me again. I really appreciate it. Last time, we ended with discussing your time in Spain. Was it a year or two years in Madrid? How long was that?

Dayci Chivukula: About two years, about two years.

SI: All right. Tell me about hearing that you were going to come to the United States and what that process of getting ready to leave was like.

DC: Well, it was a very interesting process and a little bit of cases where luck, as you may say, play a role. When we got permission from the United States to come in, everything had to go through the American embassy in Spain, but we had to, of course, purchase the tickets. As I explained to you before, my grandmother had already borrowed so much money, and every so often they sent us some money to Madrid, dollars to be changed to pesetas at that time. When our permission came, my mother didn't tell me anything. I didn't make so much money. Therefore, my mother was forced to really go into our savings, the money that was put aside, to pay for the tickets. She thought that it would take longer for us to get the permission and that the money could get replenished. So, I'm getting, on one hand, the permission to come to the United States, and on the other hand, I get my mother's account that tells me that we have close to zero dollars to buy our tickets to come to the United States. You could imagine my distress.

That is fate, what happened later, because my grandfather didn't know. We tried to keep him off the loop as much as we could because he had a heart condition. So, I was like, "What do we do now?" I couldn't possibly go back to my grandmother or even to my father because we knew they didn't have much. My grandfather came to know about it, and he had, I think, very little money in his pocket. He was sitting at the park with my brother and he gave my brother the money and he said, "Look, this little money is not going to do us any good." You see that, in Spain, the people who sell for the lotto are blind people, and all the proceeds go to their institution, to help the blind. My grandfather was a really good soul, and he said: "Give that money to them. It will do some good." He said, "But you have to buy from that one that is coming here." My brother went and gave him all of the money, whatever money was there. The guy gave him the tickets, the lottery tickets, and he got three pieces. Well, let me tell you this, to make this story short, he came in the first place, and that is like the biggest [prize]. I could almost call it a miracle, because then we had money to pay for the tickets. It was like a big-time prize for four people from Spain to the United States, to New York, and we even had money to buy suitcases. It was like, "Wow," and it came right at the time that we needed to pay for the tickets. That made me very optimistic about what was going to come.

Then, I call it arrogant generosity, arrogant because I thought I wasn't going to need anything anymore and generosity because I thought about giving; what I did is that, again, new immigrants were coming to Spain, so whatever clothes we had, blankets that we had gotten, we donated back to the different institutions and places that helped us, for the people that were going to come back. We didn't believe we were going to need any of it. After all, we were coming to the United States. Well, we, again, came back with the bare minimum in our suitcases, some rags, some things, so that way we didn't look like we had nothing.

Then, when we got here, of course we go to the JF Kennedy Airport, and we realized that we had to go separate ways, because of the papers, the way they were filled out. My grandfather had to go with my grandmother to California, and his connecting flight was already set. My mother couldn't stay where we stayed, because my father had remarried and he was living in New York. My mother left with some cousin. My brother and I went to live with my father.

The surprise that we didn't know, my father lived in Fort Apache, the Bronx. Fort Apache, the Bronx, in the '70s, was really, really not a pretty picture. Think about my state of mind at that point. I left Cuba for a better future. From Cuba, I leave to Spain, a beautiful country, great things. Then, I come to my destination, my final destination, and I see Fort Apache, the Bronx. I thought the whole United States was like that. I cried every night, trying to get back to Spain or even to Cuba. We are talking here 1974, and across the street were burned buildings. The rent was under a hundred dollars a month. My father was saving money that way. For him and his wife, it was like no big deal, but we really wanted better. I was afraid for my brother; there were gangs there. So, it was really very traumatic, very, very traumatic. [Editor's Note: The 41st Precinct of the New York Police Department, located in the South Bronx, was nicknamed Fort Apache in the 1970s due to high crime rates in the area. The name was popularized by the 1981 movie called "Fort Apache, the Bronx" starring Paul Newman.]

Then, the real challenge began because I'm living now with my father and his new wife, who I didn't know, and every single day, she would remind me how expensive everything was, at that time. They were not willing--my father tried here and there, and I, again, started getting help by his wife's relatives mostly. But still, we went cold a few nights, and there were a few times that I wished I had one of those warm blankets that I had in Spain or that I would have been in Cuba, where you needed no blankets, because I was cold. She kept on reminding us how much the food was, how expensive it was. I didn't step into the United States in the land of plenty. I came in the United States in a place that I didn't really want to be. I didn't want to be here, so I cried quite a bit.

The biggest challenge, I didn't speak the language. Some people told me, "You have to go for welfare. Everybody gets welfare here." I was like, "Wait a second." I was twenty, almost twenty-two, at that time. "I didn't come here to live off welfare. I came here to work." Well, they said, "Don't worry, everybody begins somewhere." I said, "Okay." Well, they sent me to the welfare office, and as a young woman, what I looked at around me wasn't a pretty picture, addicted people. I knew already what is the aftermath of that, you could see the arms, the mark on the arms. I was brought up in a different way, so that scared me very much.

Then, they sent me to a social worker who had said he spoke Spanish. Well, he didn't. So, I sat with him, and he understood words here and there about what I said. I told him I used to work in Spain at a restaurant in the coat check, but he didn't get coat check at all. He got restaurant, so he wrote down on my application that I was a cook. I didn't know how to fry an egg. [laughter] Up here, he sends me to a restaurant in Hell's Kitchen in New York. My stepmother said, "You're not going there by yourself. I'll go with you." Well, the tokens were thirty-five cents at that time. We got the tickets. From the welfare office, I got a check for thirty-three dollars, sixty-six cents for expenses for transportation. So, I go there, and all of a sudden, this nervous little guy

comes out and he looks at me and he says, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Well, they sent me here," and he says, "We need a cook, you're not a cook." I said, "You're right, I'm not a cook." [laughter] So, a big guy comes out and looks at me. Luckily for me, the guy was Puerto Rican, so he spoke to me in Spanish. The other guy was African American, he didn't know a word of Spanish, but was very angry because he needed a cook. The guy tells me, "Look, you're not a cook and you'd better leave this place very quickly because this is not safe for a young lady like you." Well, I was really scared. I went straight to the welfare office, and I returned my first and only check from the welfare office. They didn't know what to do. They said, "Nobody ever returns anything." I said, "Yes, but I don't want it. You do whatever you want because I'm going to make it in this country on my own. I don't want your help." I left it and took off very quickly, because I was thinking, "If they had sent me there for that, I will have to continue going to places like that," and I was a nervous wreck. I wasn't really good.

After that, I decided that if I wanted to get ahead in this country, I had to learn the language. That was my number one goal. I started searching desperately for opportunities to learn English, and I said to everybody, "I don't want to talk Spanish. I don't want to read in Spanish. I want to read in English." I started to watch soap operas, *As the World Turns*, *Guiding Light*, every possible way, because they speak slower and I could kind of figure out what they were saying. I remember my first phrase was, "I have a wonderful idea." [laughter] Every time I had the opportunity, I will tell somebody, "I have a wonderful idea." That was my beginning of the English language.

Then, after that, I found out about programs. They had some programs that were called Manpower programs, and they will guide you into two different trends. They will guide you towards the business trend or the college track trend. Again, they had no history of anybody doing the two trends. I really didn't even know that you were not supposed to do the two trends [laughter], but I plan it so that way I could do the two trends. [Editor's Note: The Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962 was designed to provide training to unemployed adults and a small percentage of youth workers whose skills needed to be upgraded to enter or re-enter the workforce.]

The first thing I did was to take advantage of the language classes. They will have one of them for sixteen weeks, and they will give fifty dollars a week for you to be able to pay for the subway tokens. I remember that it averaged for me, because I was helping and giving money to my brother also, it averaged to about maybe a dollar. On the way there, I wanted a gyro, so I rather spend my money on one than on transportation, so I went by train only when I definitely had to. Otherwise, I would walk a really long distance, so that way I would have that dollar for the gyro. It was rough. It was really rough, but I did my sixteen weeks and I learned the basics very well.

Then, based on that, I went first for the business part because I knew typing and they had what is called BOP, Basic Office Practice. They will teach you how to type, but you needed to read. I was a very good reader, and even in English, it was very easy for me to decode, because the words, the harder they were for other people, the easier they were for me, based on the Latin roots. My scores were much higher than some people who were born here, and all of a sudden, I was in the top. They started sending me out for interviews before, but by that point, midway of the program, I decided that I really wanted to go to college. People were laughing at me,

because I hadn't even been in this country for a full year and I was telling everybody, "I'm going to go to college" and people were saying, "The audacity of this woman."

They had the equivalency diploma that you could take in Spanish or in English, and it [assessed] your basic skills and a little more in math and the reading level in Spanish. Well, I went to one of the sessions that they had, the orientation, to take the diagnostic test, and the teacher kicked me out after I took the test. [laughter] It was supposed to take an hour, and I finished it in twenty minutes. So, he said, "Get out." I said, "What do you mean by get out?" He said, "You're not eligible." I said, "What do you mean you're not eligible? Oh, my God, I blew it." He said, "No, if I keep you here, they are going to give you my position to teach the people. You leave. This is the day for the test, you just show up." Okay, so, I waited for the date of the test.

I got to the date of the test. When I took the test, you needed 235 points to pass, and I got 360. Now, 360 represented the perfect score, and nobody had ever gotten it. Then, they were [in] such shock that then the City of New York offered me a full scholarship to any college that I wanted within the city, CUNY. So, I wanted to be an architect at the time. I didn't even speak much English, when all this was happening.

I then decided to apply to CCNY and that was a very important move. You will see later why. I applied to CCNY and I got in on early admission. I wanted to go to a five-year program and CCNY was the only one within the city that offered that for architecture. Now, parallel to all that, I am still in the BOP training and they kept on sending me to interviews, but I would land a job and give an excuse because I wanted to go to college. [Editor's Note: The City College of New York (CCNY) is a public college in the City University of New York (CUNY) system.]

All this is happening, and somebody knew that we were struggling in this country. At that point, my family had already reunited in Uptown Manhattan. My grandparents came from California. My mother was actually living with me, and my father was more present than before. Somebody knew that we were struggling and offered a job for me in a factory, making at that time 125 dollars a week, and that was supposed to be a lot of money. I turned it down. I said no. Then, I had a big family meeting and I said, "If I take care of our present, I'm going to be blocking my future. If I do well, all of you are going to do well." That was the hardest talk I ever had to give, because I knew that my family needed the money. I knew that, but I had to be strong. After rejecting, the program already realized that I wasn't going to take any of the jobs, so that was closed. Now, I am strictly on the college-bound track.

If you look at the dates, so that way you have an idea about the period of time, I got to the United States on June 14, 1974, and I got early admission to college in New York City in March 1975. Around that time, I had already learned the basics of English to get around and gotten myself in college with the scholarship and I [had been] brushing up on my skills that were marketable, and that was very important later on. Then, once I got in college, I had to take remedial everything, except for math. Math, I never had to take a single math credit, because I was already in Calculus II. My major didn't require that high, so I didn't [have to take math]. I said, "If somebody's paying for this, I'm going to take the best possible courses because it's my education." I got a start of my scholarship bill. I got a college work-study in the architecture library. That was extra money, and I was able to help my family with that.

That was very important, because that's where I met my husband. He was also studying in City College of New York. He was doing his master's in electrical engineering, and he would do some work in structural engineering. He was also subsidizing his expenses by curating and working in the library, the main library. We met and we were friends. Actually, a lot of things had happened, he was having a rough time too, because he had come here from zero. He had struggled a lot. He went through a lot. Then, we found that we had a lot in common. We care about our family, and we worked together towards that.

I got to college, and while I was in college, I realized that summer was there. In March, I got the early admission. Immediately, they gave me all the remedials. Then, they told me I had two months. I didn't have to go full time for the summer classes. In that break, I got myself a job, a full-time job, in a publishing company. Then, once I got that job in a publishing company, it was a full-time job, I started doing some work for them, and then they would allow me the hours that I could work. That was good. It was called Plenum Publishing Company. It was a company where they did the translations for scientific books, from Russian to English and from Chinese to English. I don't know those languages, but I knew enough about the dynamic of working as a translator and running an office, and that became extremely, extremely helpful.

Then, I went through and I did a lot of classes. All of a sudden, the City of New York went bankrupt. It went bankrupt in the '70s, right, remember. That affected me directly because as an architect major, I saw myself as a strong possibility of being unemployed. Why? Because construction stopped, and if I was going to have a chance, I was going to have to have a chance with the city because the private companies were not going to hire, first, a colored woman, with an accent, who doesn't have a history in the United States. I figured that that wasn't going to happen. Then, I thought about getting into urban planning and development. Then, I said, nothing is being built within the city and I have very little chance of going out of the city. So, I changed my major, and I was very grateful that they agreed to change my major from architecture to Spanish theater. That is Spanish theater. I was a minor in anthropology. I thought I was going to have a hard time because I got in one major and that major took five years. Now, I'm asking them to do that for a major that only takes four years, but I was already on the dean's list and I think the dean put in a good word for me.

I went through that, and by then, I understood that the United States wasn't only the South Bronx. I knew already that there were a whole lot of possibilities and that I have a chance. Even the fact that they allowed me and rewarded my hard work at the time was a testimony that I could make it here. I really worked hard.

My husband today, we met in February 1976 and we got married November 1976, after breaking up several times because of the difference in culture. My husband is from India. I am from Cuba. So, it was a big shock to his family there and to my family here. People were betting, "They're going to last two weeks." "No, no, no, a month." "No, no, no, a couple of years." Well, we're going to be married now for forty-five years, so that's a lot.

SI: Yes.

DC: Okay. Well, I finished, I graduated, we got married. While I was still in college, he had graduated. His first job was working for CBS. He made very little money. He went through a real hard time finding jobs. We worked very hard together. We sent about 340 letters, applications, to different companies. He only got one response back, and that was the job he got. That was for EAI, a company that did nuclear simulators. He made a lot of friends there, and it was a good opportunity for him.

By the way, immediately, I was expecting my first son, and I was taking college [classes]. I didn't miss a bit. At that time, I was living in Ocean Township, because the company he worked [for] was there. I had to travel at five o'clock in the morning with a baby in the stroller to take the kid to Uptown Manhattan, so that way my grandmother would babysit for him and I would sit in my physics class at eight o'clock in the morning. I did it twice a week. It was my first kid, stroller and all, and then I would get all my classes. We lived in Ocean Township for about two years.

SI: Wow.

DC: It was rough.

SI: Yes, I can imagine. I am curious, there were a lot of barriers thrown up that you overcame. Were there other challenges or things that just surprised you about life in America, other shocks, cultural shocks maybe?

DC: Well, the one thing that surprised me was the concept of the suburbs. In Latin America, the people who live in the suburbs are the poor people, because they cannot afford being in the city. That created some confusion for me, because I thought that the people who had money would always be in the city and then the people in the [outskirts] would be the poor people. But here it was the opposite, because the moment that people had money, they didn't want all the buzzing that was going on in the city and they will be in the affluent part that was the [outskirts]. I thought that that was great because I never really considered myself a city girl. I really wanted a nice [house]. Then, my goal started to be to have and own something, a little house somewhere. I really set my goals, and that was that. After having all the challenges and owning nothing in Cuba, I went from that to having hope so I can do this.

Another thing that shocked me was the extreme democracy, that everybody could do whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted. I was coming from, I grew up in a country where you had to do what you were told. You move with the herd. Then, being in Spain and seeing that because Franco was there, everything was regimented. Even the Catholic Church had a lot to do in the way that people acted. So, being here and seeing that extreme freedom worked for me in two ways, because I saw it as a positive thing on one hand and then I saw it as a negative thing on the other. A lot of the crime was in the city, but it marveled me that somebody could go anyplace and scream that the president was an idiot, that he thinks he was doing evil. In Cuba, they would have had your head for that, so that shocked me, really.

SI: Did you face any difficulty with the immigration service or dealing with getting citizenship?

DC: No, that wasn't a problem, because when we Cubans come here, at that time--I don't know now, I have been out of the loop--but when we came, we came with a special immigrant status. In the '70s still, things were really tense between Cuba and the United States, so we were Cuban refugees. We came with privileges that other people, people from other countries, didn't have, and that was as soon as we got here, we have a working permit. I was smart enough to go and do this and research and find out and see opportunities and wait it out, but I never had an immigration problem. But I feel a lot for the people that do because I know what it is like to flee your country or to have to leave your country for a better opportunity and then have to face a lot of the problems.

Even though I feel the biggest answer is not to flee the country like that, I think it was trying to change things around, because there are too many countries where there are too many problems. So, Latin America, what are they going to do? Latin America and the United States, maybe the United States can work very closely with some of these countries to help the governments, but the corruption is so great in a lot of these places. It's really a sad thing. Yes, it's definitely a point to think.

I was concerned about my husband, because my husband, being that he is Indian, I wasn't even nationalized yet when we got married, I was concerned, and he being so qualified and a professional and all, he got his working papers, but it took a long time for him to compare to just being there.

SI: Initially, after you left the city, you were in Ocean Township. How long were you there?

DC: Well, as I told you, my husband and I were actually moved by the same, I will say, the same sense of duty and we both got stuck, you could say, stuck, because in the Indian culture, the oldest son is mostly responsible for the family. Even if we were not, my husband wouldn't have it any other way. In my culture, the guy usually doesn't do much, but it's up to the older daughter. So, I was the oldest daughter, and he was the oldest son. We have two families here that needed us. I left the city. When I left the city, I left my family in the city. My brother was older. He was already in high school and going to college. But I felt a little bit of guilt because I was moving out, but my family was staying at the same level. I was helping them financially whatever I could, but now I had a family of my own. I had my little son, and then in 1980, I had my daughter. At that point, I felt I really needed to do that.

Then, my husband and I set the goal of buying a home somehow. It was a dream. He was earning money, but his very first job was with CBS and he wasn't making much money. That was his very first one, when we were in New York and he first got his working permit. But now that we were in Ocean Township, we were in this apartment with the kids, but we have to save enough money. Then, my husband got another job. He went to Pennsylvania, and we moved to Pennsylvania. One of the biggest incentives was the fact that the rents were cheap. We saved so much money when we were in Pennsylvania. We were in Hatfield, Pennsylvania, near Allentown, and we lived in, I call it, the basement apartment, because it was a very low floor, but the rent was considerably less, and we saved money like crazy.



My husband, however, got an opportunity to work in Jersey for AT&T. He left the company that he was working for, and he went to Jersey, where he got a roommate. I said to him, "Look, if we all go back to Jersey, we are back into paying that much rent. We will never own a house." I stayed in Pennsylvania. He would come over there on the weekends, until we had saved enough money to buy a house.

We moved to Howell in 1982, it was around 1982. It was our first home. We pay about 75,000 dollars. It was a beautiful home, our dream come true. We borrowed money from everybody, because even though we had savings, we couldn't afford it. It was really difficult. We didn't complete a year in Howell, because at that time, Howell wasn't very integrated, and in a community of farmers and the majority Caucasian, we were, in some places, the only colored people in the town. I got very upset because my son, some of the teachers couldn't pronounce my son's name, and they referred to him as the "Brown Boy." My son used to come home and scream and shout. When we used to tell him, "Come on, let's go, and you play basketball and you do this with your friends." He said, "What friends? I have no friends." But for a couple of really nice neighbors, that was the case. I told my husband, "You know what?" When my kid came and said, "I don't want to be brown anymore. Why do I have to be brown?" I told my husband, "We've got to move," because I couldn't emotionally handle what was going on in my child's mind.

We started looking more for convenience. I was already teaching. I went back to school to Rutgers. I was in the Spanish and Portuguese Department, and I started a master's in Spanish and I was already a TA [teaching assistant]. My first teaching was there. I said we could find something near Rutgers and a more integrated place, so we found Franklin. We did not even complete a year living in Howell; we came up here to Franklin. Again, we had to borrow a lot of money to put the down payment because we got barely what we put in the house. We paid the mortgage, we left, and we came here. It was hard.

All these things that you hear, you never imagine that it will affect you personally. It wasn't even open racism. I cannot tell you it was an open thing. I won't lie. But why wouldn't you make an effort on learning a kid's name and refer to him by the color of the skin? I didn't want my son to grow up filled with scars. My husband agreed with me. We came to Franklin, and that's when we decided, that since we were in a very cosmopolitan and a very well-integrated town, that we were going to be really getting into different aspects. That motivated my husband to get into politics, and that motivated him to be the coach in the soccer teams and me to get my daughter involved in Girl Scouts. From the very beginning, we decided that we were not going to be spectators in a community, but we were going to be participants. Looking back, I think that was a good decision.

SI: Was it difficult to make those kinds of ties with the community in Franklin at first?

DC: No, no, it wasn't. No, it wasn't. Listen, when we moved here, not only we had the house and all, but we bought a new house over our planned budget and we have loans to pay. My husband was still employed. He was getting good money, but we were basically living on one salary, plus the little money I made as a TA, which wasn't a big deal. Getting involved, we made time. I started teaching in the after-school program, and that brought a little bit more income, as

well it got me more involved with the community. We always tried to give money for the food bank, and my husband joined the political club, I think JFK Club. I wasn't in it because I decided, "If you're going to go into the politics and the community thing, I have to concentrate on the kids." Then, through the children's activities, everything was easier. My son was practicing martial arts. His teacher was very much involved with Rutgers. He was one of the counselors at Rutgers. It was seamless. It was a very easy, nice and enjoyable transition, especially with the Rutgers community.

SI: What led you to Rutgers as opposed to another school?

DC: When I was studying at CCNY, my mentor was a Spanish professor from Spain. We got very close. Actually, I would take independent courses. I would take about eighteen to twenty-one credits a semester, because I wanted to finish quickly, and he was used to working with me. I worked in things at a thesis level, graduate work, thesis level, as an undergrad. So, he felt that I had potential, and he recommended me to Phyllis Zatlin. She was, at the time, the chairperson of the Spanish and Portuguese Department. Phyllis Zatlin, Mary Lee Bretz and, later on, Carl Kirschner, who is one of the deans now. I felt that going to Rutgers was the logical thing for me to do, and also my husband at that time was starting his Ph.D. with Professor [Narendra Nath] Puri. He didn't finish it, but he was doing it at that particular time. I found a home. I found a home at Rutgers, which also, later on, because of the proximity there, in 1985, I joined as a teacher in a Catholic school, Saint Peter's High School. That is right around in the same area. Geographically, it made sense to me to be at Rutgers, to have those jobs. [Editor's Note: Dr. Phyllis Zatlin is Professor Emerita of Spanish and French at Rutgers. Active at the university from 1963 to 2008, Dr. Zatlin served as the department chair and graduate director for the Department of Spanish and Portuguese from 1980 to 1987. Dr. Carl Kirschner was a Professor of Linguistics at Rutgers. He also served as Dean of Rutgers College for thirteen years and as the Interim Athletic Director twice. Saint Peter the Apostle High School was a Catholic high school in New Brunswick, New Jersey that was in operation from the early 1900s until 2007.]

SI: I am curious, as you were raising your kids, did you make any conscious effort to integrate both your cultures, your family background cultures, or did things just sort of happen as you went along?

DC: Well, see, that was difficult, because, first of all, I spoke to my children in Spanish. My son's first language was Spanish because my grandmother and my mother used to babysit for him, and he preferred that. My daughter had less exposure, because at that time, she was in the after-care program. She went to Rutgers daycare, because I was also part of the faculty there; the Child Development Center, that's where my daughter went. My husband and I, from the beginning, agreed that we were going to bring them [up and] try to do equal part for Spanish culture and the Indian culture. So, they were exposed to going to temples and participating in different holidays. Also, around Easter, they would go to church. They will try to speak the language, Spanish; they were exposed to the TV in Spanish. The food they eat would be Spanish and Indian because they were eating--both type of food, I would cook. My husband is a strict vegetarian, and I am what you may call a strict non-vegetarian. [laughter] I will cook two different types of meal. Even my husband ended up learning Spanish. My husband knows some Spanish, and my kids understand more than they can speak. They love the Spanish music, and

both of them can dance. Their Spanish is no good, so I tell my children, "Never tell anybody that your mother is a Spanish teacher because it will embarrass me, so don't do that." [laughter] But it's a job we had, bringing children up within those cultures, but I think that my husband and I had the right attitude from the get-go.

SI: You were an adjunct professor at Rutgers for a very long time. What classes would you teach, and would you do anything else at the University?

DC: Well, I think I have taught almost all the courses on the undergraduate level--I don't know right now what is there--except for the translation courses. I took the translation courses, but I never taught that. At the graduate level, there was one course that initially was undergrad and then it became grad, about the Guaranis, the culture of South America. Actually, I was responsible for getting the grant for the University for that, because I thought that was an understudied culture, because everybody knows about the Incas, about that, but the Guaranis' presence is still relevant today. So, I wanted to bring that in, and that substituted another course that they have there that I wasn't very happy about. I like to think that I contributed quite a bit in decision making. Actually, at a point, I became almost like a troubleshooter, because when there was a little problem in one course or the other, I silently was moved to teach that section because I was very outspoken and I will say, you know, this needs to be fixed, this needs to be done. Yes, I have worked at different levels. [Editor's Note: The Guarani people are an indigenous South American group who live in what is now Paraguay and parts of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Bolivia.]

Also, before I retired, I taught "Methodology of Second Language Acquisition" at the Language Institute. When I saw the direction that the whole language teaching was taking back in the '90s, I went back to Marianne Yudow, at that time, she was the head of the World Language Institute, and I told her, "Look, let's get ready, this is what is coming. There is going to be a lot of need for teachers training," because Fairleigh Dickinson was really advancing very quickly and I said, "Rutgers needs to get on it." I'm happy to see that so many teachers have been able to get their MATs based on that. I still keep in touch with some of them, and even some supervisors in the public schools are a product of that. I get many letters every so often from different coordinators, supervisors, educators, who were actually my students. I feel that I have gotten some nice impact in this area, how they teach and how they view world language. A couple of summers, I worked also in the admission office, for graduate and undergraduate. I don't remember the buildings, but I worked in admissions as well. [Editor's Note: MAT is Master of Arts in Teaching.]

SI: Okay.

DC: Just for the summer.

SI: You said initially, you also worked at Saint Peter's School.

DC: Yes.

SI: How long were you there?

DC: I was at Saint Peter's for fourteen years. I taught high school. In fact, a lot of my present Facebook friends and LinkedIn contacts are all from that time, my old high school. Also, a lot of the policemen and the firemen knew me, the people in the New Brunswick Fire Department, along with detectives, a sheriff--I think I had even a sheriff there who was my student--a lot of them were my students, yes. In fourteen years, you build a terrific network of amazing people. Some of them are retired now, it has been so long ago.

SI: Then, I guess after that, you worked in the middle school in West Windsor-Plainsboro.

DC: Yes, because that is the thing, the Catholic school didn't really afford me with the possibility of a decent retirement. I would have stayed at Saint Peter's forever, well, it closed later, but for as long as I could have. I didn't leave Saint Peter's because I didn't like it there, I loved it there, but I had to think about I was already in my forties and I figured, "If I retire from here, I won't get anything, no pension." So, I did the alternate route. I got New Jersey certified, and I went to work for the West Windsor-Plainsboro School District. I stayed there twenty years.

SI: Was that all language classes, or was it a mixture of subjects you were teaching?

DC: No, it was sixth through eighth, sixth graders to eighth graders, only middle schoolers. I had only Spanish, but it was different levels. I had sixth grade level, seventh and eighth grade and a special class. I ended up becoming a specialist, and that was a very challenging class because they brought in kids that have never had any exposure to the language. So, I had a real mixed bag in that class. That was rough, but it was worth it.

SI: During these years, your husband was also getting more involved in politics. Would you play a role in the campaigns? Would you go out and knock on doors, that sort of thing?

[Editor's Note: Upendra Chivukula is a Democratic politician who has served as the Commissioner of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities since 2014. He served as a member of the New Jersey General Assembly from the 17th District from 2002 to 2014. He also served as a member of the Franklin Township Council from the Fifth Ward and as deputy mayor and mayor of Franklin.]

DC: Yes. You see, I was never the silent Chivukula. I was always the very vocal Chivukula. I believe in what he had to do. We had no financial ambition at that point. We had no credit ambition. We only wanted to serve. When I say we, and I include myself, because he was the one running, but I was never behind. You know how they say, "Behind every man there is a woman"? No, I was side by side to him every step of the way. I consider in my life that being one of my biggest achievements. Through my experience in education, I was able to really, really give him a lot of my input, my expertise in how the kids learn, the needs for education, and I think that was very valuable for him. He brought in the technical aspect, because he, of course, is all about energy. But I was all about educating the kids, and that resulted in him putting the bill for the Early Intervention Program. I don't know, are you familiar with the Early Intervention Program?

SI: Yes.

DC: The Early Intervention Program was one of the bills, but it was my husband's initiative. Of course, he got supporters, and that bill has been so influential, not only New Jersey, but now, because based on that and what New Jersey has done, then other states like New York and others, they have been inspired to offer pre-K for free to the students. I am happy to say that New Jersey [has that program] and through my husband was that.

I remember the first year that he was elected, it was my first year in the school. That was my first year in West Windsor. I came to know about a girl who was brilliant, but she was very depressed because she didn't know that her parents could pay for her education. I told my husband, "What good is it for you to be a politician if you cannot help people like that?" My husband did a bill, and it never got passed, it never did that, but it influenced a lot of what people know, like DACA today, because tuition was just too [high] for the students. In-state tuition, not out of state tuition, was important, so that way everybody could afford college. So, I had a role in that. [Editor's Note: DACA refers to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, a U.S. immigration policy that allows some undocumented individuals, after being brought to the country as children, to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and become eligible for a work permit in the U.S. The New Jersey Tuition Equality Act, the DREAM Act, of 2013 allows undocumented students who meet certain criteria to qualify for in-state tuition rates at all of New Jersey's public higher education institutions.]

Every time when he was running for Congress, that was very rough. That was very difficult. I was with him, very involved in the campaign from the beginning. Even in the Democratic National Convention, I stole the mic, and I could tell you, I stole the mic. It was about a thousand people; that was probably the boldest thing I have ever done. Loretta Weinberg, she was giving this big pow wow, and I took the mic to ask for support for my husband who was running and I didn't feel that he was getting the proper backup from the party itself. I got a couple of leader kudos for that from Senator Cory Booker and other people who were there because I said, "This is not right. He needs more support. He needs your support." So, I have done naughty things, very naughty things. [Editor's Note: Loretta Weinberg is a New Jersey politician who has represented New Jersey's 37th District in the New Jersey Senate since 2005. Prior to her position in the Senate, she served in the New Jersey Assembly from 1992 to 2005. Cory Booker has served in the U.S. Senate from New Jersey since 2013. Previously, he was the Mayor of Newark from 2006 to 2013.]

SI: It sounds like you never considered going into politics yourself.

DC: No. One crazy guy in the family a hundred percent is plenty. I like community involvement. I like that. I like to do things in the background because I really believe that in life you could achieve everything as long as you don't care who gets the credit. I'm always involved with something. Even right now, I'm retired, I am very involved with the Middlesex Arts Commission. I participate in this program that is called Share Your Foodways. That is a wonderful, wonderful program. I like to do things that will be community involved. But directly politician, no. I like to contribute my time to advocate for the rights of children with disabilities and for victims of domestic violence.

SI: I know you and your husband have been involved in some of the Indian-American cultural institutions and clubs. Have you also been involved in Cuban-American or, more generally, Hispanic heritage groups?

DC: In a very low-key way. In a very, very low-key way. I am a close friend of Evelyn Rosa, who happened to be the person in charge--I don't know if you know her--she is in charge of the Middlesex County College branch right here in New Brunswick. She, a couple of years ago, invited me to assist in one of her Hispanic motivational meetings. I went to the event. I have participated in historical Spanish--like when they have discussed the experience in a roundtable, again through Middlesex County.

What else I have done? Oh, I was a keynote speaker for Douglass College for the Latinx community. I stay in touch with Carlos Fernandez. He is a good friend. I haven't been able to really support him by going in person to his events, but I don't turn my back on the community. Whenever an issue comes, if they need me or my husband, I always go. [Editor's Note: Carlos Fernandez is the Director of the Center for Latino Arts and Culture (CLAC) at Rutgers University.]

I am still very much involved with my Spanish teachers in West Windsor. Yesterday, I visited the classes and I offered whatever teaching aids or resources, whatever they needed. So, I continue. It's not like, okay, I'm only for the Indian community. Now, actually, there is an initiative for diabetes prevention through a clinic right here in New Brunswick, Saint Peter's Care Clinic. It's right now for South Asians, but they do some work with the Hispanic communities. Whenever I find somebody who is doing a service to the Hispanic community, I give them my phone number and I say, "If you're ever in a case where language will be a barrier for you, give me a call and I will translate. I will interpret immediately, so that way that person can get the service." So, I have done that for a couple of attorneys, so that they know that they are never going to get stuck because of lack of language.

SI: Have you maintained any ties with family or others in Cuba over the years?

DC: Yes, yes, I have. See, it's a very interesting situation there, because everybody is in such need of everything that you cannot really help out every single person who needs and that is very disheartening. But I was very close to my grandmother, remember I told you, and my grandmother, when she died, she was very worried about her older grandson. He is about my age, who is still in Cuba with his family. She sent money regularly to him. When she was going, she was devastated, like she wouldn't be able to help him anymore. So, I gave her my word that I would never abandon him, and she didn't believe me. She said, "Oh yes, sure. Once I'm gone, that's it." But she has been gone over, right now, I would say twelve years. Throughout those twelve years, I have been taking care of him in any form that I can. I send him money, before the United States stopped all the money going there. I used to send money through Western Union. Now, I'm waiting because Cuba is putting all sort of restrictions now and they only want Euros, but I manage to send him dollars and he can internally do something. He's the only one, he and his family. I would have to be a multimillionaire to really take care

financially of everybody there, and the moment that they know that you are there, they start talking to you about all their needs. I can't do it. I just can't do it.

SI: How do you feel today about Cuba and what is happening there and its relationship?

DC: Look, not only in Cuba, in Latin America, there is the trend, like they're calling socialism, communism, just to put a brand name. What is going on in Cuba right now is not very different [than] what went on in Cuba a while back. It's a group of people controlling the money. It's a group of people controlling the production and whatever. Castro and his family completely bankrupt the island, and they have full pockets. Castro's grandson drives, I think, a Mercedes, and the last model. They have so much money that you wouldn't believe. The inequality that they said that they would put an end to has only magnified with the people at the bottom having even less. The [uprisings] are coming often. This is not going to stop. People are going to continue rebelling, because when you're hungry, you want to say something. However, still there are too many brainwashed people in Cuba because they don't know any better. They don't bring the possibilities and they are afraid, what will happen if they also rebel. That is why even the last riots that have come haven't been successful because they have been [put] down by Cubans themselves. Before all of this is all done, Cuba might probably have one of the bloodiest civil wars ever in the world.

The Cuban situation, I wish there was another way to solve it, but it's going to be fought right now mostly Cubans against Cubans. You have the Cubans who know better because they have family here or they understand the main reasons why they don't have what they need, but you have other Cubans who are so deep into it that they cannot see beyond. How do you quantify that? How do you figure out what they will do? I don't really know because there is not a real equation. When people go too far to the left, you have to be very careful because too far to the left and giving too many things for free may confuse people that they don't have to do anything to deserve, that they are entitled to it. That will bring the people who are trying to get to the top can be brought down, because people are going to say, "Well, I'm not going to work hard and I'm not going to do this for you, to benefit without doing anything." Who will really put an end to that? It's one of the problems without a solution in my opinion--excuse me, not no solution, but I don't see the solution any time soon. I have been asked a few times, should the United States stop the ...

SI: The embargo? [Editor's Note: In place since 1962, the U.S. embargo against Cuba prevents American businesses from conducting trade with Cuban interests.]

DC: Yes, stop the blockade. Let me tell you this, if you do certain things for a number of years and it doesn't give you the result that you expect, wouldn't you stop it? How many years has the blockade [been] in place? Many, many years, at least fifty-something, sixty years. Has it brought in anything different? No. What is happening now? Cuba is a mess because [of] the Russians; it's no longer the Soviet Union. Cuba would turn to China. China is prosperous, but China doesn't need Cuba. Cuba is just a little speck. Is China going to back up Cuba after Cuba went so far out in favor of Russia? I don't know, but I can tell you, I don't know about the future and I am happy I am not there and I don't intend to be there. People are saying, "Okay, if Cuba gets better, oh, this is a good time to invest. Let's put money into that. Tourism in Cuba is really

cheap, go there." I haven't even set a foot in Cuba since I left, because the tourists, the people who are paying in dollars there, are allowed [in] certain areas where the people who live on the island cannot even dream to go. Why would I support that kind of thing? Why? Out of principles, I wouldn't travel to Cuba. I understand it's inexpensive, and people want to go. Buying properties, I would never own anything in Cuba, because under Cuban constitution, no foreigner can own anything in the island. That is in the constitution now. I don't know if that was changed since I left, maybe, I don't know. If at this particular time, you build a beautiful hotel in Cuba and things turn around and you leave, they will tell you, "You've got to leave." "Why?" "Your hotel is on Cuban land." Okay, will you get any money? "No, you should have never built it." Then, you lose your shirt. [Editor's Note: Foreigners cannot legally purchase real estate in Cuba, but many circumvent restrictions through third parties.]

My sister has property in Cuba. She lives in Florida, but at the time when she left, she was allowed to [keep] her house, provided she went every year and spend money in Cuba. My sister does it, that is how she feels, but I won't set foot in Cuba.

SI: I also want to ask, since the '90s really, but increasingly over the last twenty years, there's been a lot of increased rhetoric and laws passed against immigrant communities. Has it affected the communities that you're involved with? Has it affected you personally? I know you are very passionate about the Dreamers, the DACA-affected folks. How have you seen all of that unfold over the last thirty or so years?

DC: Let me tell you something. Anything that is out of control has to be controlled. The immigration situation has gone out of control. It's not a cause, it's actually an effect. It's an effect of poorly managed countries around the United States of America. Whenever you have that situation, whenever those countries don't take care of their own, whenever they are allowing gangs to get the control of the country to the point where people have to flee the country for their own safety and come here, I have a hard time seeing that as a valid--not as a valid reason, you're afraid for your life, but the cause is in the countries of origin, because it's not the United States refusing to receive the people. So, there is a need for reforms. I don't think that the answer is to open everything. Sure, we are the United States; we want everybody unconditionally in. That is not a solution. It's not a solution for this country, for America. It's a safety issue.

It's the left wing moving very rapidly and trying to get to here, and if I fled communism, you have to know that I am not for it. [laughter] That is there. You don't immigrate to a country where you have certain issues and you bring your ideology, you cannot expect that you can enforce a democracy like the United States to follow the guidelines of a socialist country. Anybody who really feels so strongly about socialism should stay in the country and try to develop socialism in the country. Why come to the United States and be a proponent of socialism or communism? Socialism is a utopia. That is all my opinion. I'm not giving you facts. I'm telling you, brainstorming, this is how I feel. It's a utopia because it sounds great on paper as a theory. It doesn't deal with human nature. It doesn't deal with human greed, with human interest, with human internal desire of possession. Communism is an effort to equalize or to bring a little balance into a world that was so much leaning towards wealth and toward the accumulation of wealth.



I think that the key of immigration is that the United States, as a country, needs to really weigh what is convenient, not only to the people around, but what is convenient to the economy, to the safety of the United States. I'll tell you, I'm a proponent of legal immigration. I am a proponent of getting the time, and you have to see, it took me how long? It took me twelve years, but not just any twelve years. It took my entire childhood and part of my adolescence to come from Cuba to here. I felt that I was extremely lucky, but it took me twelve years. Could I have come here illegally? Well, I don't know. I was afraid because a lot of Cubans came by boat. A lot of them made it. A lot of them died, eaten by the sharks, but it was a chance. It was a risk that other people took. I am thankful that my family members never thought about that way. But now, all the marches of all the people and all the pressure that people are putting on the borders, I think that they have not worked and it's unfortunate. But the United States needs to get a real clear-cut policy, based on the needs of the receiving country, rather than the needs of the people who leave the countries. That is as simple as that, in my opinion.

There is a need for immigrants. I mean, there is no question about it. This is a country built by immigrants, whether they were the settlers, they were the first immigrants that built this country. You also have the immigrants that are the ones who are in the fields working and making sure that the vegetables get to our tables. People not only in the fields, but people whose children also have achieved different professions that are helping other immigrants. There is an attorney now, she is of Mexican origin, who actually helps a lot of immigrants. That is what you need. But you don't need to just open the gates and say, "Everybody welcome." That doesn't work. Would you open the doors of your house like that? Everybody from the street who doesn't have a place to sleep coming in my house, we wouldn't do that. But they need to be consistent with a study, human inspired, because I don't know the degree of desperation.

Actually, I cry when I see a lot of these minors, children, crossing the border by themselves. We saw the parents, a father with a little baby, like months-old baby, forget about that. A months-old baby could die because of lack of food, because the heat, because of that. So, it has to be more humane, this approach, where these people could get, okay, you express, let's see how much it can get job contracts, temporary job contracts, where they normally come here, they make their money, and they can build the houses in the country of origin. So many immigrants, when they come here, they come, they make the money, and they build their houses back in their countries. They go back and they retire. There are many of them. You don't hear much about them. But if you think [about] the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, almost for every country, they go, and they have families living in those houses. Whenever something like that happened, a family, they open a little business in their country, not only are they helping themselves here, but they are helping relatives to build something, but they wouldn't feel the need to come here because they will be happy in their country. It does make sense to me. Almost every place, especially now with the pandemic, every place you go, they want to hire people. We need people badly. There are some places that are even giving bonuses. Nobody is applying. How come?

I am a proponent, and I feel like the Dreamers, the people who have been here, they were minors. They didn't have a say whether they came to the United States or not. The United States educated them to a certain point as a child; why would they kick them out when they have had all their life here? That doesn't make any sense to me. They got in as a child. You knew exactly

that they were undocumented; now it's a hypocrisy if you say, "Well, that's it. Go on, be a farmer, or go on, work on the landscape with your father, with your mother." No, they have a dream and they are bright, some of them really bright minds, that the United States and the society would definitely lose. That's my point.

SI: We are also interested in learning how the pandemic is affecting folks around the state and different communities. How has it impacted your life and your community?

DC: Well, my mother is ninety years old, she lives in New York. My stepfather is ninety-one. As you could see, their health was declining. I was worried sick about their safety. I used to bring them to my house regularly for all the special time. Now, I'm very afraid. I go and visit them, but we all wear masks. The physical contact is very limited, because I'm always afraid because of course the children go to school now. My son had been teaching. I'm concerned about food and how they are going to get their food, the basics, so I ordered stuff through Amazon, which I didn't do much before, to get it delivered to their house. I am not traveling at all. My husband and I used to travel quite a bit, and I'm not traveling. The celebrations have been almost nonexistent since COVID began. Socially, it's been a tremendous impact.

It impacted my son also. My son is an attorney. He does trademark, intellectual property. He's in IP. So, he had his own firm. But his firm got a big, big setback with COVID, because not many people were excited about starting a new business and getting trademarks. All the copyrights, all this stuff, it was almost not there, which forced him to actually secure a basic source of income. He's an engineer also. He's a mechanical engineer, and he was concerned. He bought a house in Georgia, in Duluth, Georgia, and had many financial responsibilities. He found himself moving back to Jersey. That was a tremendous change for him and for us. He came back, looking for something to generate at least a main income. He went into teaching engineering in the district where I retired from. He taught in West Windsor-Plainsboro High School North and South. He had to take an unbelievable cut, even from what he was making in his very first job as an engineer. The benefits are not really getting there, but they said that they would be cutting some benefits. Now, as a result of the pandemic, he went into teaching. He left teaching, and he is now working as an engineer for a pharmaceutical company.

My grandchildren also, they are more at home and more in the video games and more in the iPad and I wish they were not so much. But then, looking really sympathetically, what else are they going to do? It's getting cold now. During the summer, they went swimming. They were getting swimming classes. They were out. But now in winter, what can I do? If there were not a pandemic, I would find something indoors or something more. Even when they get the shot, I'm going to still be very careful, because nobody knows what the variants are.

SI: Well, is there anything else that you would like to add or that we skipped over that you would like to discuss?

DC: Actually one more thing. I would like to acknowledge the great support I have always had from my mother, my stepfather and my brother. I wish that New Jersey taxes were lower [laughter] because I am getting older and the money starts going down because we are retired people. There are so many states out there that offer more incentive to retired people that I am

afraid that eventually, I will have to leave this state that I love so much, that has been so good for me, so good for my children, but I don't think I will be able to afford anything. I am concerned about my two grandchildren. This world is changing so much so rapidly. I hope they work hard to achieve their dreams and that I am around to see them having a happy and productive life.

SI: All right, well thank you very much. I really appreciate you answering all my questions and all your time. It has really been fascinating. Later on, when you see the transcript, you can add things or take things out. If any memories come up, you can include them that way, or we can do a follow up, whatever you would like. Thank you very much.

DC: Shaun, thank you for your questions. They were very appropriate, very insightful. I felt very comfortable with your questioning style.

SI: Thank you.

DC: They were things that really were important to me and to my life and really relevant. I felt that they were right on cue with what my life experience had been like, so thank you for that.

SI: Good. Well, in addition to the benefit to historians and students, hopefully it also can be something that you pass down through your family and they will know more about you in future generations.

DC: Thank you, that is a good gift.

SI: I will be in touch later on, a few months down the road, when we have the transcripts, probably not until early 2022. For now, enjoy your holidays, and thank you again.

DC: Thank you, thank you. Now, I can say I also know you. Before, my husband say, "Oh, that is Shaun." Now, I can say, "Oh, yes, that is Shaun."

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

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