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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH CANDY TORRES

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Candy Torres, on April 3, 2020, with Kate Rizzi. Thank you so much for doing this interview.

Candy Torres: Okay, thank you.

KR: To begin, where and when were you born?

CT: I was born in Manhattan in 1953.

KR: What do you know about your family history, starting on your mother's side?

CT: That's a really broad question, but my mother was born in Santurce, Puerto Rico in 1922. She was about three and a half when her family left the island in 1926, so she had very little memory of Puerto Rico. They went to New York City. My grandfather, maternal grandfather, was a carpenter, and all the children were born in Puerto Rico, except the eldest. My uncle was born in Dominican Republic because his father had work there at that time, so he was the only one who was not born a United States citizen. [Editor's Note: Santurce is a neighborhood in San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico.]

KR: What impact did that have on the family?

CT: I couldn't get that question.

KR: The child who was born in the Dominican Republic, what impact did that have on the family in terms of getting him citizenship?

CT: He served in World War II. He filed a Petition for Naturalization in 1946.

KR: What was the impetus for your mother's family moving to America?

CT: I'm not sure. I think the economic conditions on Puerto Rico were not very good. I've tried to research that, because I have no family stories about why they left. My mother was young. She didn't ask questions. They just grew up. They were all children. But I had done research, so that may have been one of the reasons.

KR: You said they settled in New York City.

CT: I'm sorry, repeat.

KR: Your mother's family, they settled in New York City.

CT: Yes, in New York City, in Harlem, in 1926.

KR: Why Harlem?

CT: Well, I've done some research. A lot of Puerto Ricans went to the Northeast because that's where the jobs were. Florida didn't have jobs. My mother described, later on in the '40s, it was a swamp. I've done research; most Puerto Ricans were in the Northeast because of the manufacturing jobs.

KR: What about on your father's side of the family? What do you know about the family history?

CT: My father was born in Old San Juan in 1923. His father supposedly was a Protestant preacher, but I have not been able to confirm that in any way. I was to the island, couldn't find any information. I've looked online. The Census has him listed as a businessman in a furniture store. Again, all the children on my father's side were born in Puerto Rico, and their family left in 1930. [Editor's Note: Old San Juan is a historic district of San Juan.]

Now, again, it is really hard to find my paternal grandfather. Supposedly, he was an English professor at a college in New York. I can't find out. I have nothing that proves that. I was told he was an educated person and my father was guaranteed a free four-year college education because his father was at the university, but once his father died in the 1930s, my father had to drop out of school to help support the family. My father didn't get to graduate high school and didn't get a college education, and that had a major impact on him because then he was never able to get the jobs he wanted. He was not able to get his GED [high school graduate equivalency degree]. In the '50s, I have some reports that he was going to some kind of school maybe to get his GED but never completed, and that made his life very unhappy. He liked to read a lot. We did a lot of history when we went on vacation. History was very important to him.

KR: What were your parents' lives like in New York City during the depression years?

CT: For my mother's side, they struggled because not long after they arrived in New York, my maternal grandfather left the family on their own. He left for another woman. My grandmother had to raise her five children on her own, and she had support from an African American family. They helped a lot financially and helped take care of the youngest. My mother--well, four of the five children had to go to boarding schools. I know in 1929 my Aunt Margie and my mother were at St. Benedict's Home for Destitute Colored Children, and that was in Rye, New York. The two boys, Joey and Tommy, were sent to Staten Island to two different boarding schools, not far apart, but they didn't see each other for three years. In 1933, there was an FDR program, government program, that brought all the families together, so the family was reunited. But I know my mother had to stay in foster homes for some point. I'm not clear exactly when, but it was still a struggle for my grandmother. [Editor's Note: In operation from 1891 to 1940, St. Benedict's Home for Destitute Colored Children in Rye, New York was an orphanage for children of color. During the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), New Deal programs provided relief and public works for unemployed Americans.]

She would make food at home and sell it to neighbors. My mother described that, and she also had some things they called homework that the government instituted, where you could make products at home, say, straps for cars, little strap handles. They don't have them anymore, but

they used to have them, leather. So, that was one of the things my grandmother did to bring in money. I have a lot more details on that, what it was like to live in Harlem. My mother did tell all these stories.

KR: What stories did your mother tell you?

CT: My uncle, I should say, because he was the oldest and he remembered a lot of them, how they got ice, they'd have somebody driving trucks through the streets with blocks of ice, and how you'd get coal. Sometimes, the coal would fall off the truck. Again, I have the details, but I'll just give you overall. The mattresses, to clean them of bed bugs, had to be soaked in kerosene and then aired out on the balconies. Opera singers would come through the tenements and sing for free, sort of like what's going on now, [laughter] people are trying to entertain and things like that. [Editor's Note: Ms. Torres is referring to people sheltering in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. News reports have shown people singing from balconies with their neighbors.]

My mother was always hungry. When she went to school, she and her younger brother Tommy would have to find food out of the garbage can. Sometimes, a baker would give them some food, but they usually found stuff in the garbage can. I bring this up because she found an egg salad sandwich that was rotten. She ate it because she was so hungry. For the rest of her life, she could not stand the smell of hardboiled eggs. Every Easter, we were reminded why she didn't like hardboiled eggs. [laughter]

KR: What about your father? What stories did your father tell you about his early life in New York City?

CT: Actually, I have very little. My father was not the storyteller, and it's been frustrating. I've been trying to get it from my cousins because they have some, but they haven't been forthcoming with that, so I don't know. I know my father was seven years old when his family left the island, and they left in 1930. My father remembered something about a hurricane on the island. It was a major hurricane in 1928, San Felipe II. He was about five. I have no pictures of my father as a child, and I don't know anything other than what I've already told you. [Editor's Note: In 1928, the San Felipe-Okeechobee Hurricane struck Puerto Rico.]

KR: How did your parents meet?

CT: They lived in the same neighborhood in New York, in Harlem. They just saw each other. My mother liked the way my father walked. He walked on the balls of his feet, she said. He had this jaunty kind of walk. I don't have, off the top of my head, all the details. I have some of it written down, but I know they went together--and I don't know exactly at what age--there was a party and my father was the ladies' man. I mean, he was very good looking. At the party, there was a young woman with her arm around him or on his arm, which did not please my mother. My mother made it clear, and she slapped the woman. My father went, "Whoa, hey, I've got a woman who's willing to fight for me." [laughter]

My mother was a toughie because she had to learn how to fight. You had to learn how to fight to survive. You'd be bullied in school, if you didn't know how to take care of yourself. My

mother's brother Joey taught her how to fight on one of the rooftops. One day, they were practicing, and he hit her hard in the stomach. She wasn't prepared, and she doubled over. I know the feeling because I had this happen to me in karate when I was in a college class. Anyway, she was okay, but for years, my uncle was worried that she might not be able to have children. He just knocked the air out of her, but it can be a little stunning. When that happens, for a moment, you don't know how to breathe. You're just standing there with your eyes wide open, your mouth open, you're not breathing. It's like your body has forgotten how to breathe. You just have to bend forward. So, anyway, that was one of the funny stories. We were taught how to fight when we were growing up too.

KR: What stories did your mother tell you about the World War II years?

CT: Well, she worked in the Army Corps of Engineers as a secretary. I have documentation of her working in the Brooklyn shipyards. She also wrote down the places she worked and my father worked up through the 1950s, handwritten and typewritten. So, she worked in different places, but those two during the war. I have pictures of her in her coveralls. She had to use instruments, measuring tools. So, I don't know exactly what she did, but I know it was mechanical. It wasn't quite Rosie the Riveter, but calipers and whatever things were written on this sheet of paper, what she had to learn to do. She went to Wadleigh High School. She wrote poems and articles for the school newspaper. Her dream was to be a flying reporter. She did get about a year of college too, so she got a really good education. That was before World War II. [Editor's Note: Rosie the Riveter was a character used in World War II propaganda to recruit women into war industry jobs. The Wadleigh High School for Girls was founded in 1897 in New York City. In 1956, it became coed.]

The other thing she did during World War II is the Women's Land Army, which I had never heard of. I didn't know anything about it until a few years ago, and someone told me about how it started in Britain during World War I. When the men were at war, there were not enough men on the farms, so the farmers needed help. The women would come in and help do the farm work. I have pictures of my mother, and I didn't know for decades why she was on this boat, why she was hanging out with these people. Then, it turns out they were the farmers, and that was in Newburgh, New York. I have a picture, I did some research and contacted Newburgh, I have a picture of the boat that would go from New York to Newburgh. There were two possible boats, so I went that far. I have pictures of the boat. Now, I know why she's on this boat, and I know it was August 1944. It was the summer, and that's what she was doing. She wore these little short shorts, and she's hanging out with these other people. I don't know who they are. They're not in shorts. I thought they were friends of hers, but they were the farmers. So, they're dressed in farm clothes, and then there's this young woman, she always did these sexy poses. [laughter] That was her farm clothes.

KR: What did your father do for his military service?

CT: He joined at age nineteen. He was in the U.S. Army Air Corps and he was a tail gunner and radio operator in a B-17 in the Philippines and in the South Pacific, which, actually, I found out, is rather unique. I volunteer at the Lone Star Flight Museum here in Houston, and they have a B-17. I finally got to fly in one. They said that there were actually very few B-17s in the Pacific,

so that makes his situation unique. Most of those were flown in Europe. I don't have all the details on where he was, but he did leave a leather cigarette case, in which he wrote in ink, "Australia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines and Japan." That's all I know where he was. I have some pictures of him in Papua New Guinea. I don't have all the pieces together, but they're in a historic collection at the University of Houston. I'm working on organizing all that. So, I don't have his full military service, but I know he became a sergeant. [Editor's Note: The Boeing B-17 "Flying Fortress" was a four-engine heavy-bomber first introduced in the 1930s and used during World War II by the U.S. Army Air Corps.]

KR: How much did he talk about his experiences as a tail gunner?

CT: Not much. It was only until he was in his forties that he started writing down his stories. He wrote one story, and he was trying to get it published in some informal military newsletter. It was actually three years after he died before it got published. It was just some mission, one mission, so that was as far as he got. He was just starting to open up.

KR: Are there any other stories about your family history that you would like to share?

CT: Yes, my father committed suicide when I was a freshman in college. He was never really happy with his life because he did not get to go to college. He was always studying history. He just loved reading and learning. We were always taken on vacations to historic places, and his favorites were the American Revolution and the Civil War, even though we had no family whatsoever in history in those wars. [laughter] He didn't study Puerto Rican history. He studied the U.S. history, but he loved those. He could only get jobs, such as--I know I have business cards--he sold dental equipment for a while. He also was a part of selling some kitchenware, like these heavy-duty iron pots and pans, and then he eventually became, I knew him as a truck parts salesman. He was never happy in any of those jobs. He was not treated well because he was a very intelligent person. Apparently, he was humiliated at work. Because he couldn't get his college or high school degree, he couldn't get any better jobs, and he had a family at that point.

KR: Let us talk about your early life.

CT: Okay.

KR: What are your earliest memories of living in New York City?

CT: I lived in the Bronx for the first six years of my life. Pretty much after I was born, we were in a Bronx housing project. It was brand new, and it was the Throggs Neck houses. They still exist. I had a window that looked out to the Throggs Neck Bridge and there was a marshy area there. I remember most of the apartment, not the whole apartment. I have some pictures showing the projects.

My imagination started at age four because the influence in my life was a Japanese monster film with this creature called Rodan, a flying Pteranodon. I don't know why, but I fell in love with him, literally. He was my boyfriend for years. Four years old, that got my interest, and I got interested in science fiction. I know the following year, I saw *The Fly* with Vincent Price, and I

was just hooked on science fiction after that and science and all that. So, I grew up during the years that they had all the classic movies and TV shows.

I was always thinking about the future. I knew what my parents had struggled through, and I was interested in the future. At that time, there was a lot about the future. We had Sputnik. I was too young to remember Sputnik, but I do remember a lot of the other things. I remember being in second grade when the radio was on in school, and it was something about an astronaut. I was in Newark. It was the Fifteenth Avenue School. I remember the room and the day and that's all, it was this big thing, something about an astronaut. It was years later before I figured out, it was Alan Shepard, and I can confirm that because I have a school picture, my class picture, and it has the year, 1960 to '61, and Alan Shepard flew May 5, 1961. I remember it being a sunny day, but I also know that Gus Grissom, the second American to go in space, that was August. We were not in school, and John Glenn was January '62. So, it doesn't fit. It had to be Alan Shepard. Then, later on, I actually got to meet Alan Shepard and John Glenn too. That's a different story. So, I remember that. I remember Telstar, when that came on, and we had the telecommunications. I was aware of those types of things happening. [Editor's Note: On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite. On May 5, 1961, American astronaut Alan Shepard became the first American in space, achieving suborbital flight in the Freedom 7 capsule as a part of the Mercury-Redstone 3 mission. Shepard landed on the moon in 1971 as the commander of the Apollo 14 mission. On July 21, 1961, astronaut Gus Grissom became the second American in space as a part of the Mercury-Redstone 4 mission. The hatch on the capsule Liberty Bell 7 accidentally blew open after it splash landed in the ocean, but Grissom was recovered safely. On January 27, 1967, Grissom and astronauts Roger Chaffee and Ed White were killed when the Apollo 1 command module caught fire during a launch rehearsal. On February 20, 1962, astronaut John Glenn flew in the Friendship 7 spacecraft in the Mercury-Atlas 6 mission, becoming the first American to orbit the Earth and the fifth person and third American in space. He went on to serve as a U.S. Senator from Ohio from 1974 to 1999. Telstar 1 was an American telecommunications satellite that was launched into orbit by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) on July 10, 1962. Telstar 2 was launched into orbit on May 7, 1963.]

We watched a lot of news, so we were quite aware of what was going on in the world in general. I was always watching science fiction and talking to my friends about the latest *Twilight Zone* or *Outer Limits* or different movies. Even though I lived in Newark at that point, we didn't have any park or any place to play except our cement backyard and all that, but we were having dreams of the future. The housing project in the Bronx was nice. At least there was some blue sky and greenery, but that's where my dreams started, from the Bronx and then to Newark and continued on about the future because I knew the future was going to be a better place for everybody. I knew what my parents had gone through. I had visited my relatives in Harlem, and they did not live in the best of conditions in the brownstones. So, I knew what poverty looked like and that we were moving up. I wanted the world to be a better place. The future would have to be better, where everybody would have food and housing. It was a social issue, not just the adventure and all that.

KR: Why did your family move from the Bronx to Newark?

CT: Well, I just learned this about housing projects, that my mindset has changed, because I learned that housing projects were actually started to help people move up in the world. It wasn't really just for poor people to give them housing, but it was the first step. It was a phased idea of to start in the housing project, and then, eventually, you'd be able to earn enough money and move out.

I guess after almost six years, we moved to Newark, and it was still a nice place at that point. People have all these preconceptions about Newark, but that's why we moved [to South River], because things were starting to go downhill in '63. I lived in the Bronx from 1953 to 1959. I started first grade in Newark, and I was one year at Catholic school.

There's a funny reason why I only had one year in Catholic school, and then I went to public school and I was much happier there. [laughter] The thing about Catholic school, and I was all excited--I mean, I had had kindergarten at the housing project and now I was starting school, but this is real school, first grade. I was all excited, "Oh, my gosh, I'm going to go to a school." I just knew that I was going to school, starting in first grade. So, I get there, and the nuns go through the roll call getting to know the students. They come to me, and my name is Candy. It's on the birth certificate. I'm named after a model, Candy Jones, in the 1940s and '50s, of whom I knew nothing and I was not impressed by her, but the name made me feel very unique. Nobody else had a name like that. Everybody had ordinary names. So, that was my sense of identity. They then came to me and said, "Oh, that's not a Christian name, so we'll have to call you by your middle name, Maria." It's taken a long time for me to admit my middle name Maria. They didn't ask. It wasn't in a mean way. This was just the way it was. They decided that they would not call me Candy. They would call me Maria, so the rest of the year, I had to respond to a name that I didn't connect with. Of course, being just a little kid, it's authority, I can't do anything. Every time I was called Maria, I would answer, but in my head, every single time, [I thought], "That's not my name. That's not my name."

I don't have a lot of stories in the first grade, but the other story was on the first day of school, aside from having my name changed. It's lunchtime, and for whatever reason, I was one of the last children into the lunchroom. There were no seats. I'm looking around to sit with someone. You know, that's what we want to do, we want to sit with each other. I can't find a seat. All the tables are filled. There's one table that's totally empty, but I'm standing there. The nun points to the empty table and I swear the image is just nun's habit, no face, like from Charles Dicken's *Christmas Carol* at the end, no face and this arm, "Sit there." [laughter] I sit down by myself. Okay, number one, they don't like my name. Number two, I don't even get to sit with anybody. After I finished eating my lunch and we were supposed to go outside for recess, I went outside, past the children playing, and I just kept going and I went home. So, I skipped school on my very first day. [laughter] Home wasn't very far away. I just walked home. I don't remember getting in trouble for it. Anyway, that was first grade.

I finished up the year in Catholic school, and the sole reason is--the nun was nice--I wanted my name back and the only way I was going to get my name back was if I went to public school. I asked my parents if I could go to public school. [There was] no discussion, no problem. Second grade, I started Fifteenth Avenue School. I was happy, not just because I had my name back, but I learned so much. It was such an open environment in learning. I learned about Native

Americans. They taught us about the natives that used to live there and I've had a lifelong passion for Native Americans, the Lenni Lenape. I even have the paper from second grade, I remember, that I wrote about the Indians. Of course, that's when they had the radio on with the astronaut. I had friends there. I was very happy to be in public school.

We were there until, let's see, in 1963, early 1963, in February, we moved to South River, New Jersey. Things were getting bad in Newark. That's all I know is that something had happened, so Newark was going downhill. That's when my father had enough money. We went looking around, and we found a house in a small town, South River, New Jersey, the central part of New Jersey. I think you know where that is. [laughter]

KR: Yes, I do.

CT: Yes, right. That's where we ended up, living in a house, in a very nice neighborhood, a very great school, education. It's not built up. It's a small town still, but there were still a lot of areas where there weren't houses right around us, so we could explore, climb hills and things like that. It was a great environment to grow up in.

KR: Where did your family live in Newark?

CT: 346 South 12th Street Newark, New Jersey, and it's right near West Side High School. I was recently there in the fall 2019. The time I saw you, I went over and actually got to visit. I went to the Bronx and saw my old neighborhood. I went to Newark, and it's rundown. I mean, our building doesn't even exist anymore. It was railroad style, an apartment with a series of rooms connecting to each other in a line. The name comes from the layout's similarity to that of a typical mid-20th century or earlier passenger train car. It would go straight through, front to back. It was a three-story apartment, with two apartments on each floor. There was a cemetery across the street, then West Side High School, and Fifteenth Avenue was just a few blocks away.

I meant to tell you, the Throggs Neck housing project was only three to four stories high. People think of these twenty-story buildings. My grandmother did move into one of those kind of housing projects later on in the '60s or something, but ours, what we moved into, it was only three or four stories high. It was kind of spread out. It was nice, and of course it was brand new.

KR: What was the neighborhood like in Newark?

CT: It was nice. It was fine. One side of the street had the apartments. The other side of the street had the high school grounds and then the cemetery. Then, we weren't far from the corner. We had a corner store, Mr. Rocco, and he would always give us free sweets, in a little convenience store. We would always hang out there. We really didn't go far from that. There was no park that we could go to, and the backyards that we had behind the apartment building were mostly concrete and a little area with a garden but that was not an area that you played in. There was a little fence there. What we had was just the concrete, and then the alleyway was concrete. There were no front yards. We just made things up, played games. We took big old refrigerator boxes, put them together for trains or apartments or whatever, jump rope. We pretty much stayed in the neighborhood, even though there wasn't much there. Every Friday night, my

parents would have our apartment friends over for popcorn. We'd watch TV. Friday night was TV night for the kids.

KR: Tell me about your siblings, their names, and when they were born.

CT: My oldest sister is Sandra, and she was born in 1946. So, she's seven years older than me. My younger sister was Tami and she was three years younger. We were very close. Tami no longer is alive. She died eleven years ago, that would be 2009, from ALS [amyotrophic lateral sclerosis]. She was a Douglass College student in the Class of 1978. My older sister married when she was eighteen. We were in South River when she got married, but she had known the guy since they were twelve in Newark. They were the loners and they stuck together. Her husband's name was Layton. They eventually got divorced, and she married later on. My younger sister married when she was about twenty-six. She later got divorced too. Both of them ended up in abusive marriages, unfortunately.

I decided, early on, that I was not interested in getting married. I was only just focused on the future and what I want to do. Like I said, I was watching science fiction, so I was thinking about my life even before, at eight and nine, I knew I wanted to work in the space industry. I wanted to be an astronaut. We were just still barely going to space. The idea of it was so much of a force for me. I was reading all the time and just reading all the time what the future would look like. How would I get there? I'd tell people, it was mostly women, and they'd say, "Oh, girls don't do those things." I'm thinking, "I'm a girl and I want do those things." Of course, I couldn't say it out loud. [I was told], "Girls' dreams don't come true. You'll get married and have children." They didn't seem happy. Here it is, I'm six, seven, eight, and I'm thinking, "They're not looking very happy." I thought, "Why would I do something that wouldn't make me happy?" So, I said to myself, "I'm going to do what I want to do." I had no idea how I was going to do it. I knew it would take a long time, but I had my goal and I was going to figure out how to get there. That's all the Newark part. In 1963, we moved to South River, New Jersey.

When I was fourteen, I heard about Civil Air Patrol, and I joined that. I wanted my aerospace education. It's the civilian auxiliary of the Air Force. We learned military protocol, marching, and survival training, search and rescue, and also they had an airplane. My father had always wanted to fly, but he couldn't afford to fly. Probably the reason he couldn't be a pilot in World War II, I'm guessing, is that he didn't have the education because I'm sure he would've tried for that. He was really good at taking me to the airport on the weekends to learn how to fly in a Piper Cub.

At age fifteen, I was learning how to fly an airplane. I didn't get to solo, not that I couldn't have. I kept asking adults, every week, about the program that I knew Civil Air Patrol had for cadets to at least solo. Every week, I was told, "Oh, I forgot." I think it was this mentality of I'm a girl and it wasn't important to them. I never got the information on that program. My younger sister did get to do some other flying. She didn't take flying lessons, but I think she flew in a jet later on.

The reason why I bring up this sexist thing is because when I first joined Civil Air Patrol, I'm all excited, the first day I'm there, ready to sign up, and I'm asked, "Do you know how to make

coffee?" I'm fourteen and a half, and that was not a pleasing question to me. That didn't make me happy. I said, "No." It was a truthful answer, "No." "Do you know how to do steno and typing?" "No." Why were they asking me this? I did not like that. I'm sure they didn't ask the boys those questions. I think that was part of the attitude.

There were a few girls in the program. We did well. We did, a lot of times, better than the boys. We had to march with backpacks to do some of our search and rescue training, and none of the girls had to take a ride in the car because they got hot, tired, or fainted. Some of the boys had heat stress. It was hard for them. Not a single girl would do it. What's wrong with those guys?

When there was a real search-and-rescue mission, the CAP leaders would not let the girls do it and we were all very angry because we were trained just like the guys were. They were afraid that the girls couldn't handle it. I have a picture of the three of us with the radio and the coffee. We were in the "headquarters." That's what we got to do, but we were not happy. We protested, but that did nothing. Some guy was lost in the woods somewhere, so they didn't want us to find someone who was sick or dead. We knew exactly what the issues were, but we didn't get to do it. I don't know if they ever found the guy or not.

KR: What other things did you do in the Civil Air Patrol?

CT: We'd go to summer camps at an Air Force base ever year. We'd spend a week. It's a civilian auxiliary of the Air Force, so the uniforms that we were wearing were authentic Air Force uniforms. We had to wear that, and we had to learn to make the beds and make the quarter bounce off the bed, you know, tighten everything up, get up early in the morning, be ready for inspection, and do the drills. We'd go to classes about survival training, things like that. So, it was great. I had a lot of fun.

KR: Where did you go?

CT: McGuire Air Force Base.

KR: What was it like for you flying?

CT: I loved it. I loved it, yes. The Piper Cub is very small. It turns out, I have pictures of that airplane, and when I showed it at the Lone Star Flight Museum, they said it probably flew during World War II because it had extra windows. So, this was the 1960s that I had this airplane. I'm researching it. The number's no longer valid for that plane, so that plane probably doesn't exist. The number exists for a totally different airplane. So, they recycle the numbers. But I'm trying to go through the Civil Air Patrol archives to get the history of that airplane.

The Civil Air patrol started during World War II, when we had civilian pilots that'd fly up and down the coast, looking for enemy submarines or any kind of activity. So, that's how Civil Air Patrol started was for adults, and at some point, then they made it into a youth organization. I know at the time, you had to be thirteen to join, and I didn't find out until fourteen and a half. At age eighteen, you age out, and then you can become a senior member, which is totally different.

They're more the planners and things like that. At that point, I stopped because I went to college. So, I stayed from fourteen and a half to eighteen. My younger sister joined as well.

KR: When you would fly, there would be someone else in the plane with you.

CT: Oh, yes, yes, oh, yes. The way it is too, the pilot, the instructor, is in the front, and the student's in the back with this yoke stick to fly the plane. Actually, I think when they fly by themselves, they sit in the back of the airplane for balance issues. Anyway, I'd take lessons. I didn't get to solo until years later taking private lessons, and that was when I had a job.

KR: How in control of the aircraft were you when you were flying? Were you doing takeoffs and landings?

CT: I learned to read the map and draw up the flight path. The next week, we'd fly it. I just know that I was learning everything up to the point of being able to solo. That was just a separate program, and so I didn't get to solo. Solo means I fly by myself. Other than that, you're always with an instructor. At that point, you could get your license at age sixteen. I was just taking lessons. Then, like I said, they didn't give me information for the solo program, so I couldn't go any farther, at least in the Civil Air Patrol. My family didn't have the money for private lessons. We didn't even have a discussion about getting it when I was a teenager. I was just happy to be flying, being able to fly.

KR: Are there any other stories about Civil Air Patrol that you would like to add?

CT: I can't think of anything off the top of my head. We were in a few parades. Oh, the only other thing is when my father died, even though I was no longer in Civil Air Patrol, my sister and I wore our CAP uniforms to his funeral, and that was to honor him.

KR: I would like to ask you a couple more questions about Newark.

CT: Go ahead.

KR: In your neighborhood in Newark, the other families who lived there, what was the neighborhood like in terms of race and class and nationality?

CT: It was diverse. Yes, it definitely was diverse. I guess I had Italian friends. I didn't know everybody, and even though it wasn't a long block, I didn't have friends from every single building, just a couple buildings, mostly from my building and the one next to us on the other side of the alley, and then at least one from up the street. Not all of them were in my classes at Fifteenth Avenue School. We had diversity. We had African Americans. They were in another building, one building away. So, it was all mixed in, and I would say, if I was to make a guess, there were less than ten apartment buildings on the street.

KR: Were there many other Puerto Rican families?

CT: Not that I know of, no. I had an Italian friend, and then I don't know the background, the mixture, of the others.

KR: Did you have any extended family that lived in Newark?

CT: No, we had to go to New York to visit our families. My relatives on both sides lived in Harlem. My maternal grandmother (Ramos) would sometimes live in Puerto Rico. She would also live in different places in Harlem when she was there. I don't know if she had her own apartment or she was living in someone's house. The Torres side did not. They stayed in Harlem. I did have some relatives that moved to West New York, which is part of New Jersey. It's just across the river, and that's it.

KR: What do you remember about visiting Harlem?

CT: The smell, the smell, the dirt in the streets, the worn-out steps because the buildings, I don't know how old they were, they were stone, but from the feet walking up the steps, I remember how there was a slump to it. Inside, it was kind of dark. I remember the mosaic pattern on the floor. It was black and white, an octagonal pattern. I don't remember what color the walls were, but basically everything was kind of dark. Even inside the apartment, I just remember my paternal grandmother's apartment mostly, they were kind of dark. So, I don't have any details of what they looked like. Later, my paternal grandmother moved into a twenty-story housing project. That was brand new. I remember it had more windows, so more natural light in there.

KR: When you were growing up, what cultural traditions did your parents keep going in your family?

CT: Well, they didn't grow up with any because when they lived in New York, there was no Spanish Harlem or Puerto Rican community. That did not exist until after World War II, and my parents were there earlier. So, my parents are actually considered pioneers. That's why the University of Houston has taken an interest in my family's stories, because there were very few Puerto Ricans in Harlem or even in New York. Because they grew up in that environment, of course you had to assimilate too, there were no traditions that really were passed on. My parents had no Puerto Rican traditions. My mother talked about how Christmas itself was not the most important day, it was with the kings, the arrival of the three kings, January 6th, that was the bigger holiday. [Editor's Note: The Epiphany is celebrated on January 6th and is also known as Three Kings Day or *El Día de los Tres Reyes Magos*.]

Aside from that, of course, though, we had the music and the food, whenever we'd visit. With Puerto Ricans, you're always going to have the music and the food, and of course, as a child, it was, "Whatever, yes, yes, sure," because the adults are talking. My mother was not fluent in Spanish because she did not grow up speaking it, and very early on, she said, "What do I need that language for? I'm here now." Later on, we took Spanish classes together. I could tell, she did not speak it perfectly. She didn't get the conjugations and all that. She could speak it, but it was her brothers and sisters, they kept up with the language. She was not the youngest, but she was the next to the youngest. Actually, the youngest died at age twenty. But, anyway, the others spoke Spanish fluently. My father could speak Spanish fluently, and we could have spoken at

home. My parents asked us, which I tell other parents now, from different countries, "Don't ask the kids. Just do it." [laughter] I learned it in school, and I did grow up hearing it. I'm better at it, but we didn't get fluent like we could have. At that time, we didn't see the real value of speaking another language.

KR: What do you remember about the food and the music when you would go to Spanish Harlem to visit your extended family?

CT: Well, it was usually the adults talking and playing music. The kids were like, "We don't know what they're talking about." The food, I remember more when my relatives came to visit us in South River because that was always a big deal. The *arroz con gandules*, it's rice with the pigeon peas, very Puerto Rican. *Pernil*, which is pork. *Tembleque*, which is a coconut pudding. *Carne mechada*, which is stuffed pot roast. *Budín*, which is bread pudding. Bread pudding doesn't sound right. *Budín*, and arroz con dulce, rice pudding. I'm trying to think what else.

Oh, *plátano*, of course, *plátano*, it's plantain, mature, really ripe. Plantain is a foreign word for me, okay, it's *plátano*. The skin could be black and even have mold on the outside, but you cook that thing up and it is delicious. It's sweet, and I still love it to this day. Actually, I can just go to the store, they have it frozen, and it tastes just the same. It's already sliced up. I put it in the microwave and I can have my *plátano maduro*. My mother also preferred *tostones*, which is also plantain, but it's greener and you have to mash it up. I tried cooking it once. It was a lot of work, but it doesn't have that sweetness. See, with the *plátano maduro*, you don't have to add anything. You just fry it up. There's a lot of recipes where you add things; I just like it straight.

What was the other thing I was going to say? Oh, yes, *pasteles*, which is not pie. *Pasteles* in Puerto Rican is, I hate to use the word, but the best way to describe it to other people, it's like a tamale, but it's not like it. It doesn't taste like it. It's not corn. The masa [dough] is yautía and green plantains with seasoning. Then, you put the olives and the ham, whatever, and you divide it into several rectangles to make it in these little packets. My grandmothers used rice paper. You put it in the rice paper, fold the rice paper up, and tie it with string, and then you boil it. We just loved it. My sisters and I called them bags. [laughter] We knew the proper term. We just liked calling them bags. It doesn't taste anything at all like tamales. It's just delicious.

I had to move down to Houston before I ever had *mofongo*. My mother used to talk about *mofongo*, but I never got to eat it. She didn't make it. It's plantains made into a dumpling. Now, when I understood the idea of dumpling, I'm thinking of these little balls. There's a Puerto Rican restaurant in Houston. One day, I went there and I ordered *mofongo* and then I ordered some other meal because I'm thinking *mofongo* was going to be small. The *mofongo* was at least the size of a grapefruit. I'm not kidding you, this big blob. I mean, I ate the whole thing. I don't know why I didn't take some of it home. [laughter] I ate everything, and I'm like, "Oh, my gosh, what did I do?" Dumplings doesn't necessarily mean these little, tiny meatball-sized things. That was *mofongo*. It's not sweet, but it's good.

Sometimes, actually, we have Puerto Rican festivals here in Houston that I've gone to, even in Clear Lake, because down here in Houston, a lot of Puerto Ricans work in the oil and gas or space industry. Right here, I live right near NASA. It's a mile away. There's a park nearby.

Every year, there's a Puerto Rican festival, so I can have some of this good food. I mean, I know how to make a couple of things. I've got some cookbooks, but I don't enjoy cooking, so I don't do it. I share it too. When there's a party, I go to the store, I buy the frozen *plátano*, heat it up in the microwave, and I serve it and that's my contribution. [laughter] Puerto Rican food, nobody else is going to be bringing that, and everybody loves it.

KR: When you were visiting Spanish Harlem, did you ever go to any of the festivals for patron saints?

CT: We didn't know anything about that, no. When we visited Harlem, we only visited relatives. Then, later on, as an adult, I would go to New York with friends to go to museums. But, no, I didn't know anything at all about any activities. We didn't grow up with that connection. My mother had no interest in Puerto Rican culture. She wouldn't even listen to Puerto Rican music when she remarried, and this guy was not Puerto Rican in any sense of the word. He loved music. He would play Puerto Rican music, but my mother didn't have any interest in it. She felt no connection to the island. She said, "I didn't grow up there." The generation kind of lost some of that sense, though there was some feeling for it.

It was 1970, so I was a teenager, and our family did go to Puerto Rico. My paternal grandmother (Torres) had not been back to the island since the 1930s, so here it is forty years later. She complained in Spanish all the time how it wasn't like it was before. My maternal grandmother (Ramos) was always happy and had been living on the island at that time, and I remember staying at a relative's house in Bayamón. So, my mother, my father, my younger sister, myself, and my two grandmothers went around the island. We rented a car. Word was spread that relatives from the mainland were on the island, so everyone expected us. We had to visit all these relatives we didn't know who had never left the island. Of course, my younger sister and I didn't speak Spanish. It was adults anyway, so what do we care what they're talking about? [laughter] We drove all around the island to most of the major cities, and when my father returned the car, the rental place said, "Where did you go?" We put so much mileage on it. He said, "The island's not that big." [laughter] But we got all around the whole coastal area and a little bit of the interior. We were there ten days. We got to see it. It wasn't all pretty. There were some dumpy areas, but it got cleaned later on when I went back, decades later.

KR: Was that your first time on a commercial flight?

CT: I don't remember the first time. I mean, that was the first time I went to Puerto Rico, but I don't know if I flew any place else. I know when we went to visit my oldest sister in California, we took the bus. So, I can't remember any other time I flew, so maybe it was the first time I was on a commercial flight. I had flown on a military transport through CAP before the Puerto Rico trip.

KR: Are there any other anecdotes from that trip to Puerto Rico that you would like to share?

CT: Well, what my paternal grandmother (Torres) wanted to do was locate where she had lived in Old San Juan, but she was never quite certain where it was. I've tried to research where they lived. I have some idea. I know the old sections, San Francisco, but I couldn't find the exact

street. I had an address for where my father may have been born. Decades later, a cousin told me the street, described it very well. It has a small chapel at the end. I found the street, Calle de Cristo, but I couldn't find the number. So, I just know generally in Old San Juan, somewhere around there, but no details at that time. I don't think my paternal grandmother spoke that much English, and, of course, as a kid, you're not thinking about all these things. You just go along with whatever the family does because kids don't have a real say in it. Of course, when relatives found out that they had relatives from the mainland coming down, we had to visit them. It didn't matter if you didn't know them, we had to visit them. But we did go to Las Piedras, which is a small town in southeastern Puerto Rico, and that's where my maternal great grandmother lived, Marcolina Santiago. At the time, she was ninety-eight years old and her husband was ninety-two. It was her second husband because I've done research genealogically. I have a picture of her. She lived to be 105. So, it was really good that I got to meet her. That was memorable. The other relatives, I don't remember anything about them. I remember that visit. My Aunt Margie did go to the island a couple times. That was the only time my family went, and then it was decades before I went back to the island.

KR: What was it like for you growing up in South River in the 1960s?

CT: Oh, it was great. Our house was built in 1957 on Kamm Avenue. They had painted Zeit 1957 on it. We moved there in 1963, so it wasn't an old house. It was a ranch-style house with a full basement. That whole street had been around, I guess, for several years. Right behind us, there was a little stream, an artificial stream, but, on the other side, there were no houses. The trees had already been cut down and they were starting to build houses. In the meantime, we could go over there and explore and then while they're building the houses, climb around inside. Up the street in front of our house, a block way, it was all trees and park. Half a mile down our street, there was a pond that we used to go swimming in, Bissette's Pond. It still exists. It was never a pretty place, but we could walk to it and go swimming. South River High School was a few blocks up Kamm. South River was not a big town, so we didn't even take the bus to the elementary school and junior high school on the other side of town. We could walk there. We could walk across the town, and it didn't take that long. It was several blocks, but we didn't think anything of it. It was kind of cool. It was about ten to twelve thousand people, so it was a really small town. It's not much bigger. It's currently over sixteen thousand people, since it has developed a lot more.

A friend of mine had a horse within walking distance, really not that far. One time, she let me ride her horse. It was a small town, no big tall buildings, nothing like that, so it was nice. Then, it was very easy to take buses into New York. That was when I got older. It was really a nice place to grow up and explore. You had the freedom to just take off during the day and after school or in the summers and go wherever you wanted without having to worry about adults. We'd go under two street tunnels, things kids are not supposed to do, these big tunnels under roads, because it was a small town and the road wasn't very big and the tunnel was really large. You could see the end. You'd only go about twelve, fifteen feet. Kids would do things like that, slide down a hill of dirt that, again, kids are not supposed to do. It was fun but it's dangerous, but we didn't know about the danger. Later on, people would say, "Oh, you shouldn't be doing things about that." As a kid, you're just like, "Yay." So, all sorts of places to explore.

KR: What was your schooling like in middle school and high school?

CT: It was all really good. I had excellent teachers. Their instruction has lasted a lifetime. The only thing was the bullying. I got bullied from junior high through high school, for about six years, and that made life miserable. Really, it was terrible. I dreamed about my future and focused on that, but I would feel sick before going to school and then it would be a miserable day. In crowds, in between classes, there would be somebody behind me, and suddenly someone would kick me. I'd turn around, I'd hit them if I could, but I didn't know who did it. This is the dark side of school, but this is the reality of a lot of students. I know what it feels like to want to commit suicide. I was never going to do that, but that was how miserable it was. I used to do artwork, and I didn't have art tools. The only thing I had to carve things was a single-edge razor blade, from my father's razor. I remember holding it to my wrist one day because I wasn't going to commit suicide but to show that I could never harm myself. I did not want to be part of any cliques because you'd have to humiliate yourself or allow yourself to be humiliated. I only had one friend. We stuck together. I knew some other students, but I really hated the bullying. I was really so happy to graduate.

I'll tell this story about junior high school because it's kind of funny. I really was fed up with the bullying and nothing in particular happened that day, but the pain was all bottled up inside me. I had a locker mate. We had to share lockers. It was two things, number one, she wanted the bottom part of the locker. I'm short, so it was hard for me to reach the top part. One time, there was a dead bat in the locker, and it was at the bottom. After that, she didn't want the bottom part of the locker. [laughter] So, I lucked out, thanks to the dead bat. Then, another time, I was just so fed up with the constant bullying, one day, I just punched her in the face. She hadn't done anything. She was just standing there in the hallway, and I just punched her in the face. Of course, I got called to the vice principal's office, but as we're sitting there talking, I wasn't yelled at. I knew he understood. Years later, I asked him. He said, whenever a good, quiet child acts out like that, he knows something else is going on. Although nothing else changed, the fact that I knew he understood something was going on, that helped. But the rest of the time, things would happen; there was just nothing I could do. How could I report it to a teacher? The one class where I could have, the teacher was a bully. Everybody was afraid of her. The boy behind me touched my neck. I told him to stop but my anger made him laugh. Another time, a guy in class poked me in the ribs. He thought he was going to get this girly giggle, but I whipped around and I said, "Don't you ever touch me like that again!" His eyes got so big. His jaw dropped. So, that was the one time that I got respect, and I don't know who he was. We didn't interact after that, but he never bothered me again. He wasn't trying to do anything mean. He just thought he was going get a girl giggling. [laughter] Instead, he got a girl very angry. Other than that, most of the other times, my anger meant nothing. There was nothing I could do. I had to deal with it and focus on my dream, graduation from high school, yay. I got a really excellent education.

KR: What were your favorite academic subjects?

CT: Oh, science, science, and science. I liked geography, because I like to know where places are. Unlike a lot of other Americans I run into, I knew where places were. I met foreign students. If they say where they're from, I knew exactly where it was. Also, the town I grew up

was mostly Polish. At that time, there were a lot of Polish immigrants. In the '60s, there was a lot going on in Eastern Europe. South River had a lot of Eastern Europeans. Our neighbors were descendants of Hungarian parents. We also had Portuguese. The Portuguese came in later on. In the town itself, everybody ate Polish food. It was just common to have kielbasa, pierogis. We knew how to deal with names like Trojanowski or Nowicki or whatever. When I moved to other places, like in Houston, I met some people that had trouble pronouncing foreign names. I would teasingly say, "What's wrong with you? That's an easy name to pronounce." I'd usually get it, even though I'd never seen that Polish name or whatever. I usually had a pretty good guess at it, but it was just funny. I grew up in a diverse town, small that it was. There was some listing, at some point, where they did the demographics and I know there were very few Puerto Ricans in South River. I don't remember what year that was, but it was just a handful of us. The diversity changed over time.

KR: As a woman, in school, how were you encouraged to pursue the sciences?

CT: Well, in school, I don't feel like I was treated any differently. We all had to take basic science classes. We're going to go to college, so that was quite normal. There wasn't any differentiation at the time. So, biology, physics, whatever it was, chemistry, there was no difference. However, the counselor didn't know how to counsel me in what I wanted to do in the future. [laughter] Considering I wanted to work in the space industry, nobody knew how to do that anyway. So, the counseling was pointless. [laughter] I only went once and then I said, "Okay, fine, I'll figure it out. I've already done this Civil Air Patrol. I found that." When I went to college, that's when I had more control over what I wanted to do.

KR: I want to ask you about the historical events of the 1960s. What do you remember in terms of protest movements, presidential elections, assassinations, and events such as those?

CT: Well, our family grew up on the news. We were always watching the news. I remember we watched the Nixon-Kennedy debates. I remember the living room and our whole family watching it. Of course, we were all for Kennedy. I remember people didn't trust Kennedy, a Catholic, to be president. I was seven years old and I knew people didn't like Puerto Ricans. We were members of two disliked groups. I asked my mother: "Why don't people like us?" We were glad he won. He inspired us to work for our country. I was in fifth grade when someone came in to tell us Kennedy was shot. I was stunned and don't remember class after that. I saw Lee Harvey Oswald get shot by Jack Ruby. We watched Kennedy's funeral procession. In May 1964, my family visited his picket fence grave. [Editor's Note: In the presidential election of 1960, Democratic candidate John F. Kennedy and Republican candidate Richard M. Nixon squared off in four televised presidential debates. Kennedy went on to narrowly win the election. He served as president from January 20, 1961 until November 22, 1963, when he was assassinated in Dallas, Texas.]

We knew what was going on, different racial issues, civil rights, so that was just natural for us. The news was always on. We were keeping up with all that. When I was in college, I was more focused on studies and things like that. I was aware of things, but not as much as when I was growing up, when I can think of very specific issues that I've seen a million times since then, "Yes, I've grown up with that. That's not new to me."

In fact, to talk about women's liberation, as a child, actually, I thought about issues between boys and girls. I didn't like the way the girls were treated. The boys were always bothering us, and I'd have to beat them up and get them to stop bothering the girls. But I also saw that boys got to do whatever they want. I didn't like that. So, I thought very hard about what I wanted to do and what kind of person I wanted to be. What I said is I liberated myself. I am a human being first. I happen to be female, but that's not how I think of myself. I am a human being, and throughout my life, I greet people as other human beings and forget that I'm being perceived as a female. Sometimes guys would think that I was being friendly towards them as males, whereas I was just being friendly towards people. I always have to readjust; people see things differently. They see a gender first. I see a human being first, and that hasn't changed. I still have to deal with other people's perceptions.

When women's liberation came along, I was about sixteen when I first heard about it. I was so glad that there were other girls who thought like me because I was told I was weird, there was something wrong with me, and I had enough to deal with as a kid, and so that was a liberating feeling. It's not just me. Others see it too, but I didn't connect up with any women's lib movement or anything like that. I didn't have to. I was still a teenager, and then in college, I went to a women's college. I was just aware of those things, but it wasn't something I was involved in. I'm already liberated. I'm a liberated human being.

KR: Did your parents encourage you that you could pursue anything you wanted to in your life?

CT: Yes, they didn't deter us. My parents provided us with different opportunities. I was signed up for ballet when I was six years old because our neighbor's adult daughter owned a dance studio. I took ballet for a year. I wasn't interested in ballet, but I did it for a year. At the end, we got to be in a recital. I was on stage at age six at a major theatre in Newark, the Mosque Theater. It still exists. In fact, a lot of famous people had performed there. Of course, I didn't know any of that then. We were little Eskimos. This is the thing, there were thirteen of us and I didn't have a partner. We were supposed to turn and rub noses in the air with each other at one point, but I had to turn and face off stage and rub my nose with an invisible partner. [laughter] I was kind of just left out. Anyway, I did it, and then, after that, I dropped out of ballet because I don't know if I said it to my parents, but in my mind, it was too sissy for me. I'm more into rough-and-tumble stuff. I didn't want to be a ballerina. Nothing against ballet. Unfortunately, my younger sister didn't get a chance. I don't think they signed her up for ballet. I had to put in that story about ballet.

KR: What do you remember about the Apollo 11 mission, when Neil Armstrong first stepped on the Moon?

CT: I had just probably gotten back from a week at McGuire Air Force Base, Civil Air Patrol camp, because I remember seeing a certificate that says, "July 20, 1969." I was about fifteen. So, I think I had just gotten back that afternoon, and I remember just being in the living room and seeing the landing. I was all excited about that. Then, it took a while for them to walk out on the Moon. It was getting late. My parents had to go to bed, because they had to go to work the next morning. I was confused because I'm thinking, "This is important. What should I do?"

This was a major event. I stayed up and watched it, but it was very strange. Usually, we didn't stay up late if our parents went to sleep, but they didn't stay up to watch that. [Editor's Note: On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the Moon in NASA's Apollo 11 mission. Michael Collins flew the Command Module *Columbia* in lunar orbit while they were on the Moon's surface.]

KR: How are you doing on time for today?

CT: I'm doing okay, but the computer is getting low. After a while, it's really slowing down.

KR: Okay, should we stop for today and we can meet again next week and do a second session?

CT: Yes, yes, because it's going to take a long time. I can't charge up in my car. [laughter]

KR: Sure, that is great. Do you want to set a day right now, or should I email you?

CT: Just email me. I'm open. We're all open right now. [laughter]

KR: Yes.

CT: I would like to be someplace other than sitting in my car. [laughter] That was the best I could do. There's no place else I could go.

KR: The sound quality is really good on my end.

CT: Yes.

KR: Thank you so much.

CT: Well, I'm glad.

KR: Yes, this has been great. I have enjoyed this so much, Candy. Thank you so much.

CT: All right, I enjoyed it too. It makes my day. I feel like I've accomplished something meaningful.

KR: Good.

CT: Sorry we have to cut it short. I was hoping we'd be able to go longer, but I don't want to wait until starts turning red.

KR: Sure, we will continue next week.

CT: Thank you so much. I'm glad it worked out.

KR: Me, too, I'm really happy about this.

CT: Okay, great.

KR: Okay, have a great rest of the day.

CT: You too, bye.

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

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