

AN INTERVIEW WITH SONIA RIVELLI JIAVIS

An Oral History Conducted by Nathalie Martinez

Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada
Oral History Project

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PREFACE

Born in Sao Paolo in 1931, Sonia Rivelli passed away in January 2021. She was the youngest of nine children. Her parents chose to migrate to Brazil post-World War I. Perhaps there was pressure due to the fact that they were a mixed marriage. Her father was of Jewish ancestry and her mother was a practicing Catholic.

Sonia touches upon many careers. First in Brazil she was a journalist and a teacher. Upon coming to the United States she learned to be a beautician, was in real estate, and became a dealer of antiquities. At the time of this interview in 2019, she speaks of a family water treatment business.

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March 6, 2019

in Las Vegas, Nevada

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Good morning. Today is March sixth, 2019. We are here in the home of Sonia Rivelli. My name is Nathalie Martinez and today we are here with...

Barbara Tabach.

And...

Sonia Rivelli.

Sonia, can you please spell your name for me?

S-O-N-I-A. Rivelli, R-I-V-E-L-L-I. You better copy from the card.

Thank you. Can we go ahead and start and you tell me how do you identify yourself?

A lady who is having best of my life to try to make my life and the other people a little more comfortable on the face of everything else.

Culturally how do you identify?

I'm semi very educated. I finished college at a very young age and I used my time studying and not making a very big deal about degrees, but learning. Fortunately, I was brought up from people were very highly educated and move from Europe to Brazil and kept us in very close reach and educated us for the world, not only for Brazil, for Italy or France or Portugal. They educated us for the globe, yes.

What country in Europe did you move from to Brazil?

My folks moved from Italy, but my mother is a mix between French and Portuguese, and my father is a full-blooded Italian.

Where in Italy was he born?

From the north of Italy --

They have to change the name when they get out from the boat, adopt a Brazilian name. He is born Giovanni Baptiste Tigani, but he went his life by Joel because he learned this in Brazil, Baptiste Tigani.

What was your mom's name?

Anna.

What did your father do? What was his work?

My father was a doctor, a medical doctor, and agriculture engineer or technician. I don't know the name from that time.

What did he do in agriculture? What did he do exactly?

Everything from cow to café.

What about your mom? What did she do?

My momma was mother.

What was life like for them when they arrived in Brazil?

Well, they have to like (it there). There was no choice. They enjoyed it. Grow his family and educate us for the universe.

Why did they emigrate from Italy?

For the war, the second big war. They immigrated before the war come to (Brazil)... Yes.

Because they were children when the first big war happened in '14, and then they get out.

Why did they choose Brazil?

Because United States was limited for those disembark. In those days you get in a boat and pay your ticket and go. That's how bad it was, the situation in Europe.

What year did they arrive in Brazil?

I don't remember that well because it's so many years ago, but I think it was around '14, '15, or 1914, I think.

What was it like growing up in Brazil?

Well, I didn't know other places because we are babies or we're not born yet. I was the first one who was born in Brazil.

Where in Brazil were you born?

São Paulo.

How many siblings do you have?

Eight.

Where are you?

I am the last one.

You're the last one? You're the youngest one?

The baby. Imagine how long ago.

What was it like growing up there?

I grew up on my father because he was the only one who can have the patience for me because my siblings were all older than me. Between my father and my mom and my nanny, I practically grew up alone. I had those three people because my siblings and the neighbors—because I have rheumatic when I was a baby, rheumatic fever. I come out a few years later from the disease, but I was crippled. I walked very bad. I used to have a boot. And they don't like to play with me because I was trouble for them. This is why I got very involved in science, because of my father. He step out; I step in, because he has patience with me.

What was school like?

I make part of my school home school before home school exists, and this is why I worked very hard in California to make sure the home school was official because home school is very important. I was home schooled for years. Then I went to high school, but I have to take a test and I was ready for college because I have a private tutor for home schooling. My father and mother didn't supervise him and he kept teaching me and teaching me.

Then you went to the university in Brazil?

I went to high school only to get my diploma. Then I went to the teaching school. My first job was as a teacher, but I was not even seventeen years old in age.

What did you teach?

I was supposed to be teach elementary school, but then I went to journalism school instead and become a journalist in Brazil.

What did you do as a journalist?

I used to have a page called "For Women Only" on the big newspaper. I was very successful. But then when the revolution break out, they want to take the government and I decided to move away and I come to America.

What year was that, the revolution?

It was in the sixties.

You came to America what year?

I think '63. [Note: in 1964, there was the Brazilian coup d'etat from March 31 to April 1]

Where did you go to first?

I went to New York, and I have an allergy situation for the chemicals they use on the heat. I come to California.

Where did you go to university?

In Brazil I went to the _____, University _____ Brazil.

With your family did you regularly go to church?

We are Catholics. We used to be very religious. My mother was very religious. My father was _____ because he comes from Jewish descendants. In Brazil Jewish people were not accepted.

That explains the leaving of Europe, is because he was Jewish.

Yes.

That's important to know. I work on a Jewish project, too. My family is Jewish, so I get that.

Yes, because people don't teach Jewish in Italy. The north of Italy is solid with Jewish people.

But we are growing up Catholics because my mother was Catholic. In those days Jewish men cannot dare marry Catholic women.

Why?

We cannot; they are not to go together.

That went on for generations.

Yes, for thousands of years, not for hundreds. They are supposed to marry only Jewish women.

_____ is be born with the man. If you look everybody has some line of prejudice, prejudgment of other people. That is a fact of life. _____ the Jewish people be against the other people.

What was it like celebrating religious holidays? Did you celebrate religious holidays?

We always celebrate the Catholic holidays without knowing my father was Jewish. Saturday, the Sabbath, I still not like to do anything on Saturdays because of my father even in touch his pocket to pick up the money. He used to give us money for the movies or for the ice cream on Sunday. He used to give us on a Friday for us to learn how to hold money because on Saturday he cannot pick up money. But we didn't know that.

Saturday you can't pick up money?

They would be more Orthodox Jewish in that era, so the rules are long established. Liberal Judaism is newer, far newer.

What was Christmas like?

It was beautiful. We all looked for our box with our presents, like a normal Catholic family.

What did you eat?

We ate turkey. We ate ham. We ate lots of good stuff. We have a good chef in the house.

You had a chef in the home?

Yes.

What traditional Brazilian foods were made in the house?

The Brazilian food ___ forever, but I like the peasants' food. I like what they call *sopadres*; it's mixed with the vegetables. They do a fantastic job on that. Peasant food is much better than the elegant cuisine in Brazil.

What is the peasant food? What kind of food?

It's like, for instance, here in America it is a hamburger and cheeseburger. In Brazil it is rice, beans and sapota, or rice and beans, a little steak and _____. That is the food from the peasants and it's delicious.

Do you still eat like that here?

No. I'm a very intercontinental eater. I like any food that tastes good. I'm not a big eater, but I enjoy _____ cuisine.

Can you tell me more about your work as a journalist? You said it was a women's only page that you did.

Yes. I last very little time because the sixties were misery like we are here now. Then I move to this country. I have to abandon journalism because my English was not good enough to become

a journalist. It was before the TV; I get here in this country and we have five or six channels only. There was time in local newspapers they didn't hire you. If they hire you, they give you seventy dollars a week and with seventy dollars you cannot live here. Then I went to the beauty school and I become a beautician.

What did you do? Did you do hair, nails or everything?

Hair. But I did only because I loved the school because I was learning things I never knew existed. I think the head was shampoo and set and go. Then I learned the mechanics of the hair, everything. I'm learning because I'm very hungry for learning; it doesn't matter what I like to learn. Then what I did when I started to work, I hate it.

Why?

It was the seventies. You understand? I felt like we treat our housekeeper much better than a hairdresser is looking and appreciate less because they say, "Oh, you did a wonderful job, but..." Then I didn't like it and I want to a business and management school and kept working in the daytime and going to school at night.

How old were you when you moved here?

When I come here I was in my twenties.

By the time you were in business and management, about how old were you?

I was close to my thirties.

What was your first impression of the U.S. when you got to New York?

I love the U.S. I love it before because once in a while we used to come to New York.

You would come with your whole family to New York?

Yes, we come in pieces; a group will go this year, another group will go this year. My father made us travel to understand that life is not one place or one person.

Where else did you go?

I went to Europe several times. I went to South America and other countries to see. My father taught us to learn about other people, too, and respect each culture as they are.

What did you do in business and management?

When I went from the hairdresser to the business school, I didn't let anybody know I was doing school at night. One day my boss wanted me to go and make one of the old ladies up for a party and it was a Thursday night and it was my last exam for the business school. The school I attended, I never got the name. It was a private school, business, but it was good ___ business school. It was my last test. I couldn't miss my test; otherwise, I have to wait for another year. I choose to go.

Then when he gave me the name of the client that called for me to go, I call her and I say, "Ms. Eleanor, I can't go because I'm busy tonight." She said, "Sonia, but I don't want nobody to touch me." I say, "Ms. Eleanor, then I'm going to tell you if you promise to me you're not going to disclose what I'm doing tonight." She wanted me to postpone my engagement. I said, "It is my last test in the business school." She said, "Forget it. I'm going to get anybody they can send. Go and finish your school."

She was so impressed that she make her husband give me a job in his company. Then from the hairdresser, I become big with a real estate company and savings and loan. That is when I, here, learn about how business is handled.

This is all still in New York?

In California; Beverly Hills, California.

Did you prefer California over New York?

Because of the weather. California is exactly like Brazil or like Tuscany. It is weather for all seasons. It is beautiful. California is beautiful.

Did you ever go back to Brazil?

Yes, visiting. But after my folks died, I never went back.

When was the last time you went?

In the eighties.

You told us a little bit before we started the recording about the nature of the government and the country of Brazil. Can you describe what was going on in the country like sixty years ago?

It was little revolutions. The people were so discontented with the stage of economics because of the indiscipline, exactly what is happening here. You're a liar; you lied first; you lie more; you lie better. This is like I'm living in the sixties, here in America. This is when dictatorship took over for many, many years, and then we went back to democracy, and then we put Lula in.

Dilma and Lula destroyed the country. Now we're in a worse situation than the sixties. It is a shame it's happened to America, the same thing—one party wants to be absolute the owner for the country; it is the Democrats.

How was your daily life affected by the political problems going on?

Then or here?

Then.

Then, I have to get out.

Why? Were you being pushed?

Because I was against this takeover of Brazil from the one party. We didn't get elected and they tried to impeach. The same thing is happening here because our president resigned, Jânio Quadros resigned and then João Goulart was his vice president and was in China doing PR to

help the relationship between Brazil and China. Then they military don't want João Goulart to land in Brazil. The president resigned because he give the medal to Che Guevara; the highest type of medal that you give to foreign people he pins on Che's lapel. Then the military says, "Either you die or you move out," because they want to shoot him, and then he resigned. But then the military didn't want João Goulart to learn; the vice president to assume.

Our group, we got together, the young journalists—we were babies—and tried to help the landing of João Goulart and he land in Mexico. Then from Mexico he comes to Brazil unknowing by the people. He was able to land in an airport nearby to Brazil and make his entry to the country and assume the government. Then after journalists did this, help on this, a group nobody takes credit for it, but we are the mass of journalists. What's happened, we are all on the list, the opposition list, and we all have to get out of there.

When you came here were you relieved to be here?

I used to have a visa; as a journalist we can go anywhere; all the friendly countries, we have a visa. Then I come on my visa and stay.

When did you get your citizenship? Do you have your citizenship?

I have the papers. I get my green card right away in less than six months because it was no problem there. We never had a problem with immigration here. I get a letter from the guy who is owner of a little restaurant who was giving me a job as a hostess. I went to the immigration and I get my papers in less than six months. As long as you had a job, you could get your papers, and we should go back to that.

Did you ever feel discriminated against?

If I didn't open my mouth, no. The moment I opened my mouth, "Oh, you're not American," or, "You're not English." I say, "I'm Brazilian." "But you are white." To me this is discrimination,

but it was a compliment to them. But I didn't have no hard feelings. I was treated very well. American people said to me—the same way I accept the move to America, I landed here with my card to be one person who is a person from this country. I love my Brazil, but I wouldn't get out from America if you paid me a million dollars a year. I hope my America goes back to being the America I love.

What is your America?

It is an America where people are accepted because they are good people. American people are good people. We all have a defect. We all have a closet. Leave the door closed and be yourself. Be good to others. What is so hard to accept the other person? For me it's not black, it's not white, it's not brown. For me people is people. Display what you are. Come.

That's beautiful.

We all want to die the same way, *bonito*. Be good when you're here. In Portuguese you ask your son-in-law, (Portuguese/30:34); make faces. No, no make faces. If you don't like it, leave. Somebody else like.

How long did you stay in California?

Forty-five years or longer.

Did you stay in Beverly Hills?

Yes. My father taught us to buy the worst house on the best neighborhood.

That's good real estate advice.

Don't buy the best house in a bad neighborhood. The house you can fix; the neighborhood you cannot and other people's life. It's my old man's philosophy.

Tell me more about the real estate company you worked with.

They are a savings and loan, which were the only people allowed to loan money for real estate then. They're not banking. They are a loaning company. They have an inventory of a minimum four hundred buildings daily that they bought themselves. I get there to be a decoration piece on the law, 1964, when they passed the Equal Rights Amendment. They needed a black person and a female because they are all suit and tie. But I succeeded a lot because of my hard work. I let them know I was not there to have a desk and face to see. I'm a female and I am white and I am a foreigner. I was there to learn what they have to offer and I learned lots of real estate, lots of sales and all, and I spent fifteen years with them. But my dream is antiques and design.

Tell us about that business. We're sitting in your home, which is just fabulous with all of these special pieces of art and antiquity. Talk about that business.

Then I was a company called Pierre Deux, two Pierres. They wanted to open a store in Beverly Hills and they needed people and they make me a good offer because I knew them. They gave me the opportunity to become what I like, as an antique dealer and design. I work with them fifteen years and then one of them died and then they have to sell the store. I wanted to buy it, but the Bank of France bought it. Because then we spread in United States to have twenty-six stores, Pierre Deux, and I was the backbone with the two Pierres, and my husband, Stephen.

Your husband?

Yes, I was married all this time. But we don't have to talk. He is dead for more than twenty years.

Was he American?

He was an American, Greek American, yes.

Did you meet him in New York or in California?

I met him on the one little vacation I took to go and see my folks in Brazil. He worked in a bank in Brazil for American Motion Picture, working to try to get some money out from Brazil. The movie industry, the Brazilian government held the money, and he was there trying to do this for this company. I met him at a party during the few days I was there. By my contacts in Brazil, I helped him talk to bigshots in Brazil and he managed to get the money he needs. Then from that we knew each other and a few months later we decided to get married. That's how I met my husband.

What else did you do in antiques after that?

From Columbia Realty, I gave notice to them and I train a guy to be in my place and I went to Pierre Deux from the beginning and I helped them open a little store. I helped them and then I become the only designer for them, create massive business with them.

Who was your customer for antiques?

Every time you do a grandiose job, you sign a nondisclosure agreement. But we helped from Elizabeth Taylor to Gregory Peck. We have all the big guys.

I see. A lot of celebrities liked the antiques.

Yes, it was celebrities at that point only on the antique sales and house design.

Who did you meet?

Well, I met from James Cahn to everybody else.

Who do you remember most? What interaction do you remember most?

Lynn Marvin. Linda Evans. The client was very dependent on us for stuff because they have good taste, but not the experience, and we gave them the experience, even to go with us and parties to shop for themselves. We used to be the (38:04).

Where did you find the antiques that you sold?

They have the antique business club. It's very Mafia-like. If you are in a good place, you can get in with the antique collectors, the sellers in France, in Holland and Italy. If not, you depend on the free market and the advertised people. But they are a very closed society. You go in those barns on those farms and you die; you couldn't believe the treasures they still have. But it's a very closed society. Here, antique wear is not (39:12).

Did you stay in antiques? Is that what brought you to Las Vegas?

No. Then what happened, my son had a very strange marriage. He has one daughter. He ends up in divorce court. It was a bad thing. I felt like I should raise that little girl. My son had shared custody with the mother. I accepted the girl in my life because my son traveled for his engineering business. I was, here, the past guardian of Magdalena and she was only two years old. I grew up with a nanny. I told you before that I was with my father, my nanny and my mom, and I didn't want Magdalena to be raised by a nanny.

He was living here in Las Vegas?

Yes. Then I sold my business in California. I have intention when I come to open a store over here. But when I remember all the big buyers used to come to us in Beverly Hills, I say no. I love Las Vegas, anyway. It was my best choice. Then when I see what they call antiques over here, see, I can't deal with. Then I get tired. I have invested very well in real estate.

You told us you moved to Las Vegas somewhere between 1999 and 2004; you finally settled here.

Yes, I bought the house in '99 and I move in 2004.

What was Las Vegas like when you got here?

Well, it was much smaller and great. Now it's big and great, but it's too many people. I moved here to be away from people and be in the center of easy to go anywhere. Las Vegas today beats me up; it's too big for me.

Wherever you've lived have you looked for Brazilian communities?

I always work with the Brazilian community versus the Brazilian cause. If they need something, the boss comes to me and I help them. When I move here I see a bunch of losers and very undercharged, like the people didn't like the Brazilians over here, and I say I have to find a way to make the people like the Brazilians because we're not bad people. We're just people. Like I say in the beginning, I'm a people person. We have to enjoy each other. It doesn't matter what race you are because we are the only living animal who God made us with the means of communication and making decisions. The other animals still are slaves. Then if you're prejudiced, you are a slave driver; you are a slave. Forget about it. Let's be free. That is my philosophy and I practice it. I don't let anybody around me talk about the other person. I say, "I can't hear you say that." That is my way to believe and I conduct my life like that.

This is why I opened the foundation. I opened the communication, opened the door for the Brazilian people to come and the right to be people because they fell underground. The Chamber of Commerce invited me to go there and speak for them. I got there and there was not one Brazilian plaque or nothing. When they say, "A Brazilian lady is going to talk about..." one of the guys made a comment, "Ooh, ooh-la-la." I say, "Out. You can't hear what I say." I said, "We are not that. We are scientists. We're doctors. We're philosophers. We are teachers. We are nurses. And you don't deserve us."

Bravo. Yes.

When did they invite you?

This was shortly after I move here, in the first year or second year.

What about the general Latino population, Spanish speakers?

Well, I love the Latino population because we get along very well, very well. Latin people are totally misunderstood in this country or everywhere else because even Brazilians will say, “I don’t like the Argentinians; they are too cocky; I don’t like the Italians because they come here and never go back.” Who can say those things? Let people move around. I care for the Argentinians, I care for the Colombians the same way I care for the Brazilians; I love them.

You said you have a Brazilian foundation?

Yes.

How did that get started? How did you reach out?

I started it because of this situation. The position of the Brazilians here was below (46:57).

How did you find other Brazilians?

Well, they found me.

They found you, okay. I love it.

Because they knew I can help them. I can redirect them, help them get a job and get them to think (47:16), accept life on the country you are, because they used to be in little clusters here and there. I guess (47:33) because this is doing better in this little group, little Mafias, little group, one against the other one. I put them all together. Today Brazilians are in much better shape, yes, much more respected.

What did you do in the organization? What kind of activities?

We did the getting together, parties, conversation, make the enemy go dead and ask for the guy to forgive me. I was wrong. They say if you don’t have anything good to say, don’t say anything. But I make the communication happen between the Brazilians.

Does that organization still exist?

It still exists, but today I'm more connected with the American travel organizations. The Brazilian people don't need me anymore. If they come to me, I do anything for them. But they now have their own little pedestal, little above the ground.

How many Brazilians are there here?

When I come here we are less than one thousand. Today we are a couple of million, I think, two or three million Brazilians are here in Las Vegas. I don't know.

Not millions.

Millions. Maybe we have seven hundred or...But they are here, flocking everywhere, bunch of Brazilians.

What can you tell me about Miss Brazil Las Vegas?

I used to do the Miss Brazil for the guy in New York. He is the one who owned the pageant. But I got tired of doing it because I went down very bad. My granddaughter didn't want to take over and I stopped doing it. But it's a nice pageant. It is beautiful. I did it for about ten years or eleven years.

Can you tell me more about it? Exactly what is it? Is it just a pageant? What is it?

It's just a pageant. The owner of the pageant was not me. I was one of the franchises. Then things happened. I didn't like it because I like more to be a coach and I couldn't change their minds and I cannot change mine. I'm protective. I stopped doing it two years ago.

Where would that happen?

In different hotels. We did the Neonopolis one year and the Bootlegger the other year. On my yard, I have a big yard that we used to do a big Brazilian party here.

How did you get involved with Lynette Sawyer?

She came to me. She was trying to open a museum and I backed her up one hundred percent because that is my thing. I got very disappointed from my people from Brazil because they did not cooperate with that. They used to roll their eyes at (51:47), that and go, “No way.” To me that was something she...And the project was all her. I used to put my effort to helping her, but I get no credit for that because it’s her project. She worked so hard for that.

Did you give any artifacts from Brazil?

Yes, I gave the (52:23) of Carmen Miranda, some paintings from good painters in Brazil. One of the paintings I gave to them was from a student from Portinari. Portinari was a big Brazilian painter. The “War and Peace” is from Portinari. I loved it there. I was very sad when she had to close.

What are your favorite other artifacts that you have, other antiques?

I love general culture and I’m not a collectible person. I like my antiques. It doesn’t matter where it comes from. But I’m not a modern days’ collector. I like modern pieces, but I don’t bother to collect them because they’re not good enough (54:00).

Going back to Las Vegas, did you ever go to the casinos when you first came here?

I used to love the casinos when I was a resident in California. The day I moved to Las Vegas, I say, casinos only for me to go to Armani or to Chanel, big show. I used to go there and throw my eight hundred, couple of thousand dollars. I say, if you are moving here, you will not pass (54:50). When I enter Las Vegas, I say, Las Vegas is over for you. That’s what I had to say.

Did you keep the antique business going on when you came here, or what did you do when you first came here?

No, I sold. I didn’t sold the name, my name and my husband’s name, but I sold my inventory to a guy who bought the store, but not the name because I was afraid because antique is something

you have to be very careful. If you make one mistake, you're doomed and I didn't want my name or my husband's name to go kaput.

Can you tell me more about how you got involved with the water purification?

Tell us the Aqua Diva story.

Aqua Diva was born on my father's mind almost a hundred years ago. My father was a fanatic for water. He used to think that man was destroying the most powerful element of life because it's not just the man who needs water, but everything that lives needs the water; without the water it's going to be lifeless. He planted this on us. The (56:46), the few years ___ knew my father, his grandfather, it was enough for my son to inherit. In my family of eight, I am the only one who is careful. The water is due to go up. That is clean. Men has done this for thousands of years.

What is the mission of Aqua Diva; what is the business mission?

The mission of Aqua Diva is to end the sewage impacts on the water. We make sewage (57:40) back important to water. You can do it. We have all the scientists ___ on us right now.

How did it start—

We started when I forced myself to start it. ___ I'm Italian mother. She knows about the Italian mother. We work on this together. _____. Each test we make in the hundreds and thousands dollars.

How did you come up with the name Agua Diva?

Because my father used to tell us, and, like I say, I was with him 99 percent of my free time to play because they don't want to play with me because I was trouble for them. They have to watch me. Whose kid wants to watch another kid? No one. My father used to call that *agua* is a

blessing to the earth; it's holy. The Agua Diva; *diva* is blessing, aqua is water; it is the blessing of water.

What was the process of getting the company started? This was all in California, correct?

In California we did the (59:33) grapes and we have the ranch and we are in a cesspool. We used to do it there because it was independent. We didn't attend to the sewage. (59:59) Department allow us to take the water and clean. We did it and clean the water perfect, potable water with the ozone and UV and some chemicals, but the ozone will kill the chemical because it is small. My son can talk to you about it because I don't want to put my foot in my mouth. He is an engineer and a water guru.

When you came here to Las Vegas, was it primarily to keep working for the business?

Yes, but we put the business dormant for a few years. When we got the ____, we let the ____ to be bought by unknowing people, which is the military. They have the water project and the platform with the ozone and the UV. But our middle man was Pete Wilson, who was the mayor of Lancaster, who let them have it because we're not ready for development. I was busy with my business and my son was busy with his engineering because my son is in the petroleum industry.

Did you keep with any of the Brazilian traditions when you came here to the U.S.?

Yes. I am an international person. You understand? I am a Brazilian. I am Italian. But I am an international person. It's very hard for me to say about this country because I think we are all equal. We may speak different languages. We may eat different foods. We read different books. But we are all the same person. We are human beings and we should not criticize creations. Instead of saying, *oh, here's one*, let's see what we can do together. If I cannot embark on your thought, I will leave you alone. Because I have to learn from you, as well you have to learn from me because we were born the same way. We're made by the same God in the same way, the men

and the women, to create us. Who is their son? Who is their father? We, the people, is the mother and the father for all us from God. Let us be His family. It doesn't matter what religion you practice and it doesn't matter what you eat and how you speak. Look at us. We have five fingers, two legs, two arms, the same hair to cover our head. Maybe we look different. You guys are tall; I'm short. I'm supposed to hate you right then and there, but I don't.

When you came here to Las Vegas, the association that you created for Brazilians, essentially that was just an organic creation. It just all came together. Where did you meet?

I have a very good experience because I achieved what I did want, the Brazilian people to learn how to respect each other and to be respected by their others. I think I have done very good. Like I say, when I stopped going to them, they come to me as they need. If they get here and they get lost, they say, "Go to Sonia. She will help you." And I will, yes.

When it came to helping them—I don't want to use the word *assimilation*—but how did you help them when it came to learning the language?

I managed to get them to go to school, learn English, learn how to be a little more social against what they think is impossible to deal with, an American job. I say do what they want because your boss knows what has to be done. Then when you satisfy them you're going to work and look for a better job. But if you're not trained—I say Brazil is Brazil and America is America; people do things differently and you have to accept it. You cannot come here and clean a house, because, in general, men and women, their first job is going cleaning because they are uneducated in their own language. They practice school less. They hardly have four years of school or five. I hate the word, but it is the correct word. They are (1:07:05) the other continents, the other people, the other countries, because they didn't have the background I have. My father raised us to be intercontinental. They say, "Oh, you're Brazilian. You are the biggest country in

America.” No, we are (1:07:36). But it is what country your brain has been educated. First _____ yourself and then go and face the universe. When you get in at the airport and you’re no longer there, you’re going to face other people, other traditions, other morals. When I come here I was very (1:08:15) of morals. Then I learn Brazilians and Italians are educated this way, but Americans are educated this way. Let’s see what you can learn from here to mix with what you already know.

How did language—Portuguese being spoken and being your first language—

My first language, yes.

You come here and you learn English. You know some Spanish.

I learned English in Brazil when I went to school. My school mandates French, Spanish and English. When you are educated in Brazil, you speak those three languages if you go to college. It’s when you know the person, *oh, I’m a college graduate*, and he doesn’t speak those three languages, he never went to college. I taught there. I say the way you compose yourself, people know you have an education or not. Then learn the language and everything will be good.

Your son and granddaughter, were they able to learn all those languages?

My son speaks and works in eight languages, eight. He speaks Arabic, German, Italian, French, Portuguese, *Español*, and a little Indonesian. He is an engineer in eight languages.

How did he learn those? All through school?

He’s a genius. My son reads a book and he doesn’t forget the number of the pages and the content on that page.

Where has he traveled?

All over the world.

Doing work for Aqua Diva?

No. He works for an oil company. Now he is retiring and (1:10:52) to Aqua Diva.

Can you tell me more about your view of today's America versus your America?

It is scary.

Why?

Because of the political situation, the Democrats versus Republicans. They don't care about we the people anymore, each one of those parties. The Democrats created that loophole (1:11:35) family because they ___ Spanish. The Republicans, I don't know where we are going because I'm a Republican. I feel scared. I feel the situation here today is the situation in Brazil, is doing the same thing. It is like I'm living there in the sixties. It is disappointing to me. The organization, the mechanics we have here—I'm not talk about segregation and desegregation. I'm talking about the government.

What about the politics when you came here to the U.S.?

My first few years before I got my citizenship, I put none of my nose in politics. I here started to get involved with the Reagan because then I was stable, very stable economically and very stable socially. That is when I started to get involved. I've been very involved since that. I am a huge Republican because I believe in all the good things from this country, the end of the slavery. Who paid with his life for doing it? Lincoln. Who Lincoln was? Republican. I'm a fanatic for Lincoln. I love him. I love what he did.

I wrote to the Republican Party here in Las Vegas much more than they expected and I did a lot. Today I am very disappointed with my party and the Democrats between Hillary, Obama, and Nancy Pelosi. I'm supposed to be very proud because she's third in line in the country to become a president if they destroy Trump because the Speaker of the House will be sitting if this president can't sit, and she is one of us, Italian. But we good Italians pretend to talk

about Al Capone and then Nancy Pelosi. We hate her. Al Capone is better than Nancy Pelosi to us. She is embarrassing for all of us.

In California, what was the Brazilian population like when you got there?

It was big. When I come to California, I come in the same year they open the consulate in California and I help them very much. I was (1:15:36) liaison for many, many years because I helped them understand. I used to live better than them. I have a better relation. I managed to put them on the map and it was very interesting. But there were a lot of Brazilians because the climate of California is very much like Brazil, very cold in the winter and very hot in the summer. It's very tropical. People don't understand that California is tropical.

The Brazilian population there, did they live in a specific area of California?

They live a lot in Silicon Valley because lots of Brazilians are very into the computer industry. They live a lot in San Francisco. Our gay community from Brazil used to flock to San Francisco because they were more accepted over there. A lot are in Hollywood. They love Orange County and there are lots of Brazilians there. They love San Diego. They like California more than they like here.

Can you tell me about Carnival and what that was like?

To us Catholics it's pagan fiesta. We grow up and _____ away from the Carnival. We are not attached to Carnival. I respect and I accept. But here I see it as a pagan feast after this day today because it's _____. The consequences to Carnival in Brazil was nine months late, was a _____sex with no permission.

Now I understand, okay.

If I say this, Brazilians maybe come here and kill me, but it's the truth. It is very _____ to me. It is very (1:18:23)_____.

Do Brazilians here still...?

No, no. The Brazilians is not very competitive with the children. They make a little box, but they don't care about the culture. The people just landed here in Las Vegas.

It's a small population of Brazilians here, yes.

They landed here because the hotels can hire them. The cultured people don't come to Nevada. Even a schoolteacher, who is at the low-end pay and grade in Brazil, you go for three years in college after high school and you (1:19:31). They don't have the interest in general culture.

Carnival, I look as pagan because I'm Catholic and because of nine months later was a disaster. Then I look that way because I grew up of that feeling; Carnival is not good for good girls to go to. Today I accept it as part of our culture. I respect, but I do not participate. If it's a parade, I give money. I may make a (1:20:40) _ car and tow in there, part of the culture, but not part of the entertainment. The entertainment is brutal.

You supported certain parades?

I will support the parade, yes, if they want to do it, but the Brazilians are too lazy to do it. The Brazilian people are different than Latin people. They are not—hard to work because a Brazilian has _____ standoff economic for the poor. They have medical care. They have to stay in line for two days to be, but they don't have to pay nothing. In that sense, I was struck. I remember that. They have little welfare; they are called food baskets. It's a basket of food they can get and then they survive on that. It's not good enough because it brings the people down. If the government gives you the everyday bread, what is going to plant the wheat to make the flour? We have to create people who are more interested in getting a good job and supporting themselves. They have to be fed by free food and free housing. I'm not against it, but I prefer to

have (1:22:53) base and pay for the school. The government should have a voucher for the school instead to having a voucher for the food.

When you were in California—you were there in the sixties, correct?

I enter California in the sixties, yes, and I get out in the nineties. In 2000, I get out for good from California. I love California, but it became very crowded.

In the sixties that was the whole Chicano movement. Did you see that?

I was on the coast in Beverly Hills, but my mind always was the mind my parents created, which was people are people. I see lots of things I didn't like done with us, the Latin people. Like I say, if I didn't open my mouth, nobody knew I was a Latin person. They respect my Italian part, but they did not respect my Brazilian part, like they respect today my love and the respect should be natural for us. But then I see the town down and they accept us. I didn't see big problems. I see disrespect.

Thank you so much.

And I thank you, girls.

Is there anything you'd like to share with us? Any story?

If you like to hear about Aqua Diva, I have to bring my son down.

We will need to do that at a different time because we need to get back to campus now. But I really appreciate your time.

I appreciate you girls coming in. I'm sorry I am...

No, this has been great.

[End of recorded interview]