

AN INTERVIEW WITH EMILIA MARQUEZ

An Oral History Conducted by Maribel Estrada Calderón

Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada*.

Claytee D. White
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PREFACE



Emilia Marquez (left) with oral historian Maribel Estrada Calderón.

In 1971, Emilia Marquez was born in Virginia to her Uruguayan immigrant parents, Alicia and Carlos. She shares her memories and difficulties of living as an invisible in a brown skin surrounded with white and Blacks in the 1970s. When the family returned to Uruguay in 1982, she experienced being an outsider in her parents' home country.

As she describes it: when in Uruguay she is Uruguayan; when in the U.S., she is an American citizen. Over the course of her life, she has proven to be an adept navigator of language and cultures.

In 1990, she and Juan Carlos Mussio married. They have three daughters, Ashley, Emily and Jessica, who joins the oral history session midway through with her remembrances of the family move to Las Vegas in 2001.

Emilia's parents, especially her mother, strongly encouraged the young family to move to Las Vegas. Emily is an American citizen and both she and Juan had solid work experience in the casino gaming business. The city was booming. Surely their work experiences in Uruguayan casinos would be valued. Emilia charts the ups and downs of their careers, hers as a slot floor worker and his as a dealer over the past twenty years.

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July 5, 2019
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Maribel Estrada Calderón

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Nombre del Entrevistador: Maribel Estrada Calderón

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Firma del Entrevistador Fecha

Hello. My name is Maribel Estrada Calderon. Today is July 5th, 2019, and I am with...

Claytee White.

And Emily Lucile.

And...

Emilia Marquez.

Emilia Marquez, can you please spell out your name for us?

E-M-I-L-I-A. Marquez, M-A-R-Q-U-E-Z.

We are at Emilia's home. I always like to ask narrators how they identify themselves. How do you identify yourself?

I identify definitely in the Latino community. I feel very...just with one with everybody that speaks Spanish. But, honestly, I have a lot of coworkers from different parts of the world, so we share a lot of different cultures. One of the greatest things about working in casinos is that you get to meet so many people. But, yes, I feel more at home with that.

Let's begin with the history of your childhood.

I was born here in the States. My parents were immigrants from Uruguay. I was born because my mother, which was very, very poor in Uruguay, decided she was very lonely and she was like, hmm, I need some entertainment, so here I am.

I grew up in Virginia, which is a hard place to be in the 1970s because the majority of people surrounding me were definitely not a lot of Latinos in that area, and so I was always seen as an outsider. I was never truly belonging to what was the most common. I was the brownest girl, but without being African American. I was always in this outlying position. I had a hard time sometimes finding my place in school and friends and always sort of—even though I understood Spanish completely, between the Latinos I would speak in English, but understood

everything they said. It was this weird little position where I never exactly could feel where my chips would fall exactly.

What brought your parents to the United States?

My parents were in such a hard situation. My father was a bricklayer. He would go out every day to bring the daily food. One of his friends that was also a bricklayer, his wife had been hired to work with a lady here in the United States, so he called up my dad and said, “Come. I want you here. You’re going to be my coworker.” It was a big decision. My brother was around, I’d say, seventeen years old, and he [my dad] just left on this gigantic adventure. Then my mom and my brother followed a little bit later. It was really hard because my father was thirty-nine and absolutely not a word in English. Just to leave up and up, he had the luck of having his friend—it was like, “Come here. Come to my home”—to feel the little bit under the wing of a certain protection, but it required a lot of, let’s say, push. It’s kind of like you leave everything that you ever knew.

Do you know what year they came to the United States?

Yes, 1963. It was kind of a difficult time here, also, a lot of issues with immigration. My father did suffer his good part of being pushed aside. Even though he had a lot of knowledge because he had worked from a very young age in Uruguay and knew his trade by heart, he had to literally show. The immigrant has to work really hard. He had to work really hard to show, look, I know what I’m doing; let me perform my duties properly.

What was he working on here?

They call them bricklayer, but in *Español*, it’s *albañil*. He would be organizing where they have construction. Now they have machines to build these gigantic walls that they put up in a day, but in that time it was brick by brick, block by block. There was no machinery. Everything was with

a *pala*, a shovel, and other people bringing in the materials and one person shoveling while others are bringing the buckets and there are a couple of people putting the walls up. It was a different time, a different era to work in, and very little value to all the personal effort that was put into it and the organization.

As you were growing up, you told us that you were in this in-between because you weren't black, but you weren't white.

Exactly.

Tell me about your growing up experience.

Alexandria, Virginia is known to be not the most progressive, maybe, in the accepting, so it was always like *sweetie*, *dearie*, just sort of like this kid I have to put up with. It taught me to be invisible, if that's sort of a way to put it. I brought actually—it's here. You can see here is my classmates. This is when I was a little kid. My teachers. That's me. It was sort of difficult because it was hard to find the acceptance amongst people because people just isolate you. They go into their own cliques and their own comfort. I actually found myself doing a little type of a different group. There were some kids that were bullied and they were kind of like me and we bonded.

Tell me about kindergarten and going to Cameron Elementary School.

Well, kindergarten is especially here. That's actually one of the years I remember most in my forty-eight years of life because I...Sorry, it makes me emotional. I'm sorry. I was always surrounded by older adults. I go to school. Beautiful lady, she's my kindergarten teacher. I was just like almost like a crush. I would follow her and do everything she would say. I remember the last day of kindergarten I said, "I hope you're my teacher next year." And she said to me, "I hope you're not." That really crushed me. It was a turning point for me for studies. It made me feel

sort of unwanted and it made my school years kind of difficult. I kind of became, like I told you, I changed; I was hiding and I would read a lot. It was the way I got through. With my little group of friends, we bonded together. Still, many of them are my friends today, through Facebook by the way because I lost a lot of them, too.

Were you at Cameron Elementary School until the fifth grade?

I graduated in sixth grade. They graduated me. I guess they just didn't want me anymore. I was a terrible student. But my parents had me older, so by the time I was about twelve and was going to go into middle school, my father was already looking into retiring. Just with a measly little retirement here, you can't make it and so they were looking to go back. They kind of told me I was going on a trip because I was twelve and everybody knows how twelve-year-olds are. I was supposed to be coming back. We went to Uruguay, me and my mom, and she put me in school over there. It was the middle of the year, so they just kind of slapped me into end of sixth grade. Talk about being an outsider, let me tell you. Here I am reverse now. I'm a total *Gringa*, and that was my nickname. I speak with a terrible accent because I had grown up with Spanish as listening, but I would have this mix of Spanish and English, Spanglish going. Here I am launched in the middle of this total different culture with people that don't know me, cousins that I was just like a neighbor that had moved in, cousins and grandma that had dementia. All these different elements were just like hitting me. Again, I'm in the middle of absolutely no allies. I had to adapt again and that was really hard.

Now, when I left here—and like I told you, I was not a great student and I was sort of rebellious—I saw it almost like a new beginning. I said, “Nobody knows me here. I can try to be a good student. Let's start brand-new.” I really applied myself and I had a tutor during the summer in Spanish, which I just saw. I just came back from Uruguay. She was amazing. She

really taught me history of Uruguay and she was a teacher that just wants you to learn. I was just like this: *Teach me, teach me, please*. I was absorbing at a crazy rate. I actually came out being a great student. They made me repeat sixth grade, by the way, so that made me be a little bit older than everybody in my class. I looked really young in that era and I sort of blended in. Nobody thought that I was much older. I kind of changed my whole persona again and I wasn't so invisible, actually. I was sort of a character. Everybody wanted to see my ID. They were like, "You're lying. You're not from there." They always wanted to see where I was from. Now people wanted to hear my stories and they wanted me to translate because there was no Shazam. They wanted me to write down the lyrics of Wham and all these different American groups. I would sit there and write lyrics; that was my homework, too. It was a total shift in my life. I had a time where—well, Uruguay felt like home, actually, after I adapted. Just because I was young, I was able to adapt quickly.

What were your favorite subjects in school? ‘

I was great in English, let me tell you. No, I absolutely adored philosophy and literature. I was a big reader because I had become a big reader in my invisible time. I just loved it. I was lost in...Uruguay has very, very detailed studies of histories of the world. It's almost like here in the States you're so blinded and you study your little square, just what you have around you. But in Uruguay you would study about Africa, Europe and Asia and all these different places in the world that make your mind just expand. I loved reading. I was fascinated with Egypt and Greece and just eating it up, a lot of fantasy, too, fantasy stories like Iliad. Everybody was so bored and I was so interested. I was a super dork.

I ended up traveling. I was living in a couple of different places in Uruguay, always in the same area, literally like half of the city here, but a couple of different cities.

What was your neighborhood like?

My neighborhood, well, of course, everybody knows each other. If you go out—it's very different than here—you buy your daily bread, your daily meat; whatever you need that day you go out and you buy it. It's like you know everyone and they're like, "Oh, how are you today? How is your sister? Is she better? You know she had a cold yesterday." Every time you go out you know you're going to be out for a little bit. We would walk everywhere because we didn't have any transport.

In that era my grandma was actually very sick, so we would literally walk about fifteen blocks to my grandma's home. My mom would make her food, do her laundry. I considered it a boring time in the era, but now I look back and I'm like, how dumb was I? Because I had so much fun. My uncle had built me stilts. It was such a great time. There was this little pond in my grandma's land because it was agriculture, how they kept their family. They had this land and it had a little pond in it because that's how they would water their vegetables. Just seeing the little frogs, just all those little fun things when you throw a rock and the frogs would freak out and everybody would jump in the pool, like, oh my gosh; things like that that you take for granted in that time.

But, yes, really it was a great time. I really enjoyed being in Uruguay. Of course, as a teenager, let me tell you, eyes were looking. I got married young; I was nineteen. I met my kids' dad. He was working in a bank and I would pass by every day. We started just checking each other out. One day he ended up leaving his job and coming to talk to me to see if we could see each other for a coffee. It's that different way of life; you have a job, but you can go out and do something like that. You just tell your boss, "I'm going to go check out this chic." Here you can't even imagine that. It's a different culture. He had to ask my dad to visit me.

What's his name?

Juan Carlos. He was twenty-four when I was seventeen—wait—he was twenty-three. It was like visitation; we had days and times. My mom and dad always were chaperoning us, literally until the day we got married. It is such a different thing. Now Uruguay is not like that. Social media has made the whole world the same. But in that era you still had chaperones in the kitchen, but they were listening. If you got quiet, then somebody would come over and look. Suddenly somebody had to be walking around for some reason.

By this time I had fully integrated into my family. It was a few years in. My high school was great. I have some pictures of that era, too, that I can show you.

Yes, show us (the photos).

Let me see. My high school friends, I don't have it here, but I have that era when we just got married. This is Brazil. We went there with my husband. We had just gotten married. There is Mom. She went on that trip with us. She was (chaperoning) even though we were married.

Here is my brother. This is his home. This is my sister-in-law and the girls. His daughters are like my sisters. I didn't really mention my brother too much, but he was twenty when I was born. His children were sort of my sisters. We were always very, very close. This is my niece with her ex-husband now.

This is a little bit forward in time. This is Little Emily right here. This was actually her baptism day in church. I don't have the pictures very organized. I apologize for that. I have to organize that because I literally have... There is Emily. This is pretty much a family era because our situation economically, my husband was having issues job-wise over there. The economy had become very difficult. That was the same era that all the economy of South America had really taken a hit. Out of an era of bonanza that we had had a few years before, I'd say around

1995, '96 was a time where our marriage had become—not our marriage, but the economic situation that we were in had become difficult, and so we started looking at alternatives. My husband had studied being a dealer in Uruguay in this casino, Conrad. I have a magazine. See, this is *Academia de Slots: Conrad Resort and Casino*. This is what they gave us when we were training. I trained for slots, but he was training for dealers. It was a new casino that was opening there. We had been given that opportunity. We decided that he had to go off for about six months on a cruise ship to get experience and everything. Emily was a baby. That picture where she's sitting on the cart; that was the era that happened. He was gone for about six months. Maybe ten or twelve people in the area that were his coworkers had done that. We were a young couple and we just didn't feel like that was the greatest way to raise a family. When he came back Emily didn't even know him. She would cry when he would hold her because we had been apart for six years (sic) in a time where she had grown aware of the people around us. I'm like, "This is just not a good way to form a family." I don't know if you guys can see, but we were always very tight with my family; my mom and dad, they accompanied me in every single second of my life, literally.

We started looking to other alternatives and that's when it came to mind to come here, which was a really heavy decision for me because finally my life was integrated and to my whole family and now I had these two children and my mom and my dad. I hurried up to have children because my mom and dad were older, so I definitely wanted them to have a grandma and a grandpa because I had never had one because when I arrived both by grandmas were very elderly, in their eighties, and they were very sick. I didn't have that bond that I wanted them to have because I feel like that's such an important part in your life.

I was resistant. My husband was like, “Let’s go to the States. Let’s be together and let’s do something. We have to give them a future.” That was so hard for me, I have to say. But my dad was the biggest pusher for that. He was like, “Look at me. I left when I was old. You have to do it now. You have to do it for them.” He pushed me. It was hard.

I left with so much fear. I left them behind, and my mom accompanied me, with only a few dollars in my pocket, let me tell you. We sold the little, tiny truck that we had. We got to McCarran and I didn’t even know where to stay. I asked the taxicab driver, “Take me to—” it’s me and my mom—“a hotel you can find that is not expensive.” He took us to the Maxim, which is now the Westin. Do you remember the Maxim right there on Koval and Flamingo? I remember looking out the window and going, who is going to want me? I’m thirty. I have nothing. I have no history here. I left being a child. I was twelve. Nobody knows if I’m even able to do a job here. I have no work history, nothing. It was scary times. I had them being little and my husband completely incapable of watching out for our kids, by the way. My dad would cook for them. I was the one that always made the food and taken care of the children while he worked. I was so scared. I was like, these children are going to be eating hotdogs every day, which they did.

Before we continue, can you tell me more about the casinos in Uruguay?

Yes, yes. The casino in Uruguay, there is a state casino and there was this Conrad Hilton that opened. This was a huge project that really, honestly altered the whole area that we lived in because one of the biggest things in our country is that you lack sometimes the place to work. Sometimes you want to, but the resources are limited. When this huge investment came in, people flocked; there were thousands of people standing in line for these jobs. Now, me and my husband, we did not get the permanent jobs. We were just trained for seasonal employment

because we lived in Punta del Este, Montevideo, but Punta del Este is like a small tourism area that that's where this casino was at. During the summer months, just like here, they would hire you, you would work a couple of months, and then, "Thanks so much for your services, but until next year we don't need you." They worked with a skeleton crew in the meantime. Everybody is vying for those jobs and we just didn't make that cut. But it was a luxury project in the area.

I just went back and it's still beautiful. They changed a lot of it from when I worked there. It really is a standout. I think I have a couple of pictures that I can pull up so you guys can see it. It's very beautiful. It looks like a big boat, actually. It's right on the beach. It's right across the street from the beach. It was opportunities that are so small in our country that you have so much. You have your family, your culture, everything, but then you've got to eat. You have to provide for your family, so that's what sort of pushed us here.

By the way, they would call—not me because slots weren't really that popular—dealers for weekends, so we would be depending on the phone. Sometimes my husband would stay home or I'd go to visit with my kids my mom and dad and he would stay home just in case they called. It was so difficult.

Once the casinos opened, the schools started popping up?

Well, the school was the casino. They would hire you basically for your customer service because nobody really knew the job and they would teach you how to do the job. There was this whole academy where they would have hundreds of people. Then you had to pass exams and they would have quizzes, sort of filtering out people.

How long was the program?

That was about three months that you would train. They would do weekly training projects. That started off season, of course, because they were building the big building and they opened right

for the prime era of tourism, so they opened December. I don't remember exactly, but August or September would have been the months of prep, which is really dead time for tourism there.

Were the majority of the tourists Latinos?

Yes. *Argentinos*, Argentinian people are the blood and bone of Uruguay. Brazilian people are also a huge influx, but they have their days off in Brazil. Mid-January to end of January you have this flocking of Brazilians and then they're gone. But the Argentinians sort of trickle in, go in and out from January all the way to, I'd say, end of February, a little bit of March, but they're the ones that keep it going because you have people coming in and out. It's closer for them and a lot of them own properties there, so to them it's not very expensive. They'll come in and share also with other family members. But I'd say Uruguay has that part where it's just common working people, but then it has this other, I'd say, class of people that come there that are extremely rich that have mansions that you can't even see in Beverly Hills. They are incredibly big. People from Europe. Two of my aunts actually worked for two people that were royalty in Europe. They would have a house in Uruguay, set up a full year, for just one week that they would come in and swoop in with dukes and princesses. Of course, this was sixties and seventies. In that era people oriented towards these party-type places in the world where they would come and have gigantic dinners where they would have tables of twenty people served, like in old eras where they would have people serving them constantly. My two aunts, my mom's two sisters that's what they actually did their whole life. They worked thirty-plus years in two of those homes. One right in Puta del Este, which is the peninsula, and one in Santa Fe, which is another area that is absolutely breathtaking, beautiful. Houses would have twenty rooms. Living rooms, maybe four or five. Kitchens that any restaurant would have a kitchen like that, incredible, bustling with

people when it was their prime time, crazy. But I would enjoy that off season. They had a lot of bikes. Let me tell you, it was fun.

You mentioned the culture of Uruguay at various times. I know it's bordered with Brazil and Argentina. How did those cultures intermix?

Argentina and Uruguay I would say are like twins, but fraternal twins. They're the same, but not. They have a lot of rivalry, mostly sports, but they have the same histories, the same sort of lifestyle. The way we speak is very similar, just a few words difference. Everything is just divided by a border. Definitely there's a lot of country identity, though. If a wine gets confused with Argentina, they're like, "No. Please." And the other way around, too. But Brazil, I have to say, mixes into whatever border it touches. The language from Brazil bleeds into Uruguayan border. My mom, her family emigrated from Portugal. They arrived in Rivera, which is a border town with Brazil. They have like this "Portuñol", it's called, because it's Portuguese in *español*, but it's like words in Spanish with a lot of Portuguese intonations and a lot of Portuguese words, so you have that area that is just totally blended sort of language, totally different. She left that when she was actually very little. I'd say they left Rivera when she was about ten and that's when they moved to the land where actually my mom still has her home there.

Can you describe that land?

Yes. My mom's home is now the only—it was quartered in four; it was about an acre, so she has a quarter acre. That was her original mom and dad's land where they planted to sell. My grandmother had this little horse and a cart and my grandpa would plant and they would load the cart every day and they would sell the wares of the food to literally—the name of the city is San Carlos. They were known as the *los portugueses* because there were not a lot of people from Portugal in that place. They had such a beautiful *tierra*. It was so cultivated and just very

organized, like cauliflower and broccoli and corn and the different lettuce. People would actually stroll along after their Sunday church moments, they would go. It was called a *paseo*. That's actually how my father noticed my mom because she was kind of famous in a certain way, apart from being cute.

I have pictures of them when they were really young, too. See, this is my dad when he was very young. This is my mom. But she was around, I'd say, twenty there. This is my grandma. This is a picture actually from Portugal.

Is this your uncle?

That is my uncle, yes, and that is my oldest aunt right there.

What is your grandma's name?

Emilia. I have her namesake, yes, a big responsibility. This right here...

CLAYTEE: *You look just like your mom.*

This is a picture of my grandfather before leaving Portugal. They left on the transatlantic.

A ship?

A ship, yes. It would take about twenty-something-plus days to make it.

To sail...

Sail from Portugal all the way to...I don't exactly know the port of entry that they took because my mom was only one, and I have sort of a lost history there with my grandma. There weren't very many records. I tried to find stuff, but when my grandma got older she started burning papers.

Why did they do that?

She burned some stuff that was really precious. It's sad. Her dementia really hit her hard.

Did your grandparents ever talk about the military dictatorship in Uruguay?

Actually military dictatorship came more in the era of my mom and dad, their youth, and that's when actually they came here to the States. It was right before it hit hard. There was a lot of guerilla sort of action. The *Tupamaros* started as a benefactor-type group with a lot of idealism and everything.

Castro.

They took a little bit of a violent turn eventually because they were being oppressed. It was like *toque de queda* [curfew], which is like you can't even get out of your home after a certain hour, so everything started getting really bad and that's when they did *el golpe del Estado* [overtook the government] because they saw that a lot of—well, because what they would do is they would steal money from the banks and richer people and they would give money to poor people. That's how the movement started.

Robin Hood.

But what happened is the people in power were like—this was starting to build a really strong people movement that they thought, *okay, this is not going to work out for us*. They had to do something and that's when they totally doubled over and that's when the violence escalated. They even sent people from the U.S. to try to stave off—

Operación Cóndor?

Yes, they did. Well, that was terrible. Your life was sort of, I would say—my family didn't get touched personally. Uruguay was almost flying under the radar in that sense, the working class people. It was sort of like the problem was the very, very poor people. Then you have this class, the dominant class. The people in the middle were trying to—like my dad had to hide to go to work. If he didn't work, he wouldn't eat. Literally they were watching for people because they wanted people to go on strikes, but he had to work. He would wear regular clothing and when he

was at work, change and work. He was almost hiding whatever he was doing. Then just walk around like he was strolling because they would—that's what I mean. The popular movement became really harsh because of the pushing of the politics were tough.

What was the political climate when you returned?

The political climate when I returned was the ending. They had already elected the next president, which was Sanguinetti. All the *Tupamaros* completely had been snuffed out, basically that whole movement, because it was about twelve years in. I'm not sure about the year, but I know it was a while into the dictatorship. I got there August of 1982 and I don't remember exactly, but a few months later was when Sanguinetti, which was the president that took over from the dictatorship. Everything was handed over in a peaceful form, but because there had been a referendum. They had convinced people, let's not condemn any of the military for the horrible things that had happened. People were killed and taken in the middle of the night, dropped in the ocean, in open waters. Ladies had had their babies taken out of them, so now grandmas were looking for their children. Their children had died, but now they had grandchildren that had disappeared into nothing. It was a really tough era. I remember when I got there everybody said, "Don't say the word *Tupamaro*; don't talk about politics because they will just put a black bag over your head and take you down. Everybody needs to be quiet about this." Everybody moved in silence. Politics was absolutely not talked about. Totally different than now. Now people can yell around. In my family you have daring, big discussions the other day when I was there. But in that era everything was totally different. It was a transformative era, let me tell you. Everybody was walking in a very straight line because nobody wanted to have any more trouble at that point.

During that time, your grandma stayed in Uruguay?

During that time. My grandma never moved. After she emigrated from Portugal, my grandfather had passed away. He passed away almost literally months after my mom had left.

That's another thing I wanted to tell you guys that her father, also, had pushed my mom to go because she was also in the same thing I was. *How can I leave? I have a young boy?* My brother had to stay behind because he was, of course, in high school. She was caught in between her husband being here and her son over there. It was really tough for her, too.

My grandpa, he actually was a very politically aware man, but he was already passed away in that era of the dictatorship and everything. My grandma was not [political]. She was a very religious woman with a very keep-to-herself. She never really learned much Spanish because she lived in such a little zone that people would understand her half-Portuguese. They would just exchange monies and it wasn't very much of a conversation. She was a very keep-to-herself woman. When I met her she would talk about her youth, which is something very typical of somebody that has dementia. She would talk about when she was a little girl.

My brother maybe was the most politically involved, but he was more of a law-and-order type person. He went to military school, so he was really into that. Me and my brother do not agree, let's put it that way. He ended up actually being a police officer when he went back to Uruguay for a little bit, but police officers get paid very, very little over there.

You talked about going on a trip to Brazil. Can you tell me a little bit about Brazil?

Brazil...Of course, I was a tourist, so obviously I'm going to be seeing the best parts of it. I have to say wonderful. I feel like every time I went to Brazil it was so wonderful. I went right before my children were born in 1994 and it was right at the World Cup. I had never witnessed anything like it. I was in Rio and me and my husband were walking around, which everybody says is so dangerous, but we walked around very well. I have to say to see a city of that proportion that to

me up to that moment in my life was the biggest city I had ever seen, and Rio de Janeiro is like the weirdest thing because, of course, it's in between mountains and it's like endless. You can never really see the end of it. You're like, *oh, there are the favelas*. It's just a mountain that goes up and you're like, *wow that's really tall*.

But I have to say, to see people so open, so willing to share and so little that they had, sometimes you could see that they had nothing at all. We had nothing almost, but we had enough for buying little tours, going on a bus. That was there, though; it was better than Uruguay. To see these people, sometimes they had beans to eat and they would share it with you like you had known them your whole life. The joy, dancing in the streets. And that's not even something that was maybe for show, no. One time we got stuck because the bus stopped because when Brazil was playing, let me tell you, there was nothing; everything shut down. They're like, "Get out, get out, let's go." TVs out, not these flat screens, of course, big TVs with the tubes. They're out in the street, main avenues. Everybody is bringing out their TV with their *alambres* [wires]. Everybody's got chairs or people sitting on the ground. Nothing is working. It's like the apocalypse had just happened. We got stuck in the middle of traffic and it was incredible. Just to get to our hotel we had to walk like two hours. I have to say, the joy, the absolutely—well, they actually won that World Cup, so joy was gigantic. To see that wonderful that a group of eleven people were playing and millions of others are with such pure joy, not worrying about maybe tomorrow there is no food on the table. But it's true. The way they would share was just incredible. It was one of those experiences in my life that you could feel the city vibrate, literally from people screaming every single goal. It was incredible. It was a highlight.

Your dad encouraged you to migrate to Las Vegas.

Yes, yes.

Why Las Vegas?

Actually my mom was the one that picked Las Vegas. I wanted to go to the East Coast, which was something I knew. I was like, “No, I’ll just go to...” My brother was coming and going, since the sixties. My brother came here, I’d say, 1966 or ’67 was when my brother arrived here. From the sixties, my brother had always been this migrant that would come and go, come and go, with family, before his family. He married; his wife is from Uruguay. He married her and it took about three years for them to see each other again, for her to come. He would come and go constantly. I was like, well, I’ll go over there, in the same area that I know and at least I know some people that I hadn’t seen for quite a few years, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years, because I had come here on a vacation with my dad before he had retired completely, when I was sixteen, so it was something. But my mom is like, “No, no, no. You’re going to work in a casino. Your husband wants to be a casino worker. You have to go where there is casinos, lots.” She had always read about Las Vegas. We were like, okay, let’s do that then. Atlantic City is sort of little and they had been there, and so she was like, “No, that’s not too much opportunity you’re going to have.” That’s why we decided Las Vegas.

Tell me about the trip; what you carried; where you boarded.

That’s funny you asked me that because today when I told my husband I was doing this, he’s like, “Did you tell them that we brought our *ollas*. *Ollas* are like pans.

Pots.

Pots. We brought pots and we brought a cutting board that was broken, okay? We brought things that maybe someone else would look at them and go, hmm. But we were carrying our little home on our backs. Everything that we brought was what we had. I did leave... These things that you see are things that I just reunited with them. That’s why it makes me really emotional. Because I

brought them now. I hadn't seen this in maybe thirty years because my dad had moved everything to Uruguay, packed in original boxes from the original move. These are a lot of things I had not seen. I was just going to show you, for example, these are little things that my mom, wherever she would travel she would pick up little matchboxes and...I don't know what year this is. Yes, here it is. Nineteen eighty-five. Just tiny little things, little matchboxes from different hotels. This is from Rio, one time that she went there. I haven't even looked through it. This is when I was a little kid, or my brother, I don't know. Little Groucho on there. You see what I mean? Like a little collector of these tiny, little things that are miniscule, but they're so important. These things have traveled thousands of miles back and forth. When I came back to the States now, I left my boots. I left my clothes. But I brought this. In a little bag that was my carry-on the majority are pictures, which are literally pictures like this. This is my mom and dad when they had my brother. This is my brother. This is 1952 in Uruguay. These are things that are, of course, unique and have absolutely zero copies. So, when the lady that I'm looking at her says to other people, "Oh, we're just going to put your carry-on in the back," I'm holding on to my bag like this, *you're not going to do that; you're going to put me in the bottom before you put my carry-on*. I swear I was ready for a fight. I was like, *I'm not getting rid of this, sorry; I'll wait for the next flight*. I was like, *they're not separating me*. I was so happy when they called up the group, which was the last one by the way, and the lady that was being about making everyone put their carry-on in the bottom, she was busy. I was like...[demonstrating] I don't think anybody ever saw me walk that fast ever. I flew by that lady. Then suddenly I see her coming and I'm like, she's coming for my bag, she's coming for my bag...I think if I was carrying cocaine I would have been less paranoid. No. But she was coming to say something to another lady. I was like...[demonstrating]. It was funny. After I was in the plane, I was laughing a little bit.

Tell me what you did after you arrived at that hotel here in Vegas.

Other than cry my way here. I think I dehydrated before I even got to Vegas. Well, my mom was here with me, which I don't think if my mom wouldn't have been here I would have made it. I think I would still be lying on the ground somewhere crying. But she was the one that would prop me up and go, "You know..." because I was so nervous about doing anything. She was like, "Okay, let's do it. What do we have to do?" She would organize me.

We started doing things...I had spoken with a person that had worked at the American embassy and they had kind of gone through a list. I said, "I want to get together with my family soon." They had given me this checklist basically, like you have to have a home; you have to have a job; you have to sign a waiver that your family is never going to depend on welfare; all these different things. You had to have a lease for a certain amount of time of an apartment. You have to have a receipt of having money in the bank. They wanted all these things that if I would have had more time, honestly I would have actually probably (indiscernible) because I have everything. I'm a hoarder. It was really nerve-racking because I had to get all these conditions and, at the same time, find a job, which was really nerve-racking for me because you know how it is; they ask for experience and I had to show my experience in Uruguay. I brought my resume and my CV, which was all typed up very neatly on the typewriter, and sort of just hope.

I looked at the Strip and I was like, well, I'm going to start at one end, and we started at the Mandalay Bay, with Mom. I spent two hours doing my hair, which was really long in that era. A really cute-looking suit, professional-looking suit. When we'd go in—nowadays I feel like it's very different, the experience that people have. But in that era you would go inside the casino; you had your hiring team there; you would have human resources. Actually there were people that would receive your application. They would have a book. They would have all the

positions that were open. You would say, “I would be interested in this one.” They would give you a piece of paper. You would have to fill it out. You speak personally with the person in charge for hiring for that department. Then they would say if they would call you back or not.

I remember when I was in Uruguay, I actually had made this little folder that I had looked up on line and I had all these different—this is printed out in Uruguay, see, because...ten-four-oh-one. I had printed out all these different numbers to get a foot in the door, the different locations, employment offices, everything to see, and so I had called around. From Uruguay it was very hard to even imagine how big this city was. When I got here it was like I had just stepped into the Twilight Zone because I remember, over there, going, “Well, I like this apartment, Dad. What do you think about it?” And he goes, “No, no, no. You have to be there because it might sound really good on paper, but you don’t know the location. It might be something that’s not practical for you to get to work.” Because, of course, I was coming here without any means of transportation. It was just what we call in Uruguay *el once*, two legs. They always call the numbers out on the buses when you’re doing public [transportation]. So *el once* is like, you’re going to walk there.

That makes sense.

He told me just basically go there and have that as a guide, but then when you’re there is when you actually start looking. I had thought about these little, tiny casinos. There’s one—what is it called?—the Wild...It’s on Trop, close to the In-N-Out. What is it called, that casino? Wild Horse? No, I don’t think so. Do you remember, Emily, that little casino? I don’t know the name, but it’s right there on Trop close to the 15 and it’s this tiny, little casino. My dad is like you have to be there to know if it’s actually something that’s going to be worthwhile. I remember when I saw it in person, I was like, *well, Dad was right*. Because one thing is the name and everything

like that. It ended up being that I sort of switched my plans for myself. Calling around, I was like, “No, we’re going to do this in person.” That’s when we started off; we picked the side of the Strip. We started at the Mandalay Bay. I got there and a gentleman told me, “Look, we don’t have any positions for slots,” which is what I had experience in. “But the Luxor has a position for a change person.” Which is really not what I was aiming for because I was aiming for floor person, which is what I had actually trained for.

But I went there. This is after a few days of being here and hitting walls. I think my desperateness was showing because I remember the gentleman, when he saw me, he had this really kind manner. I remember he said, “Look, I have this position.” And he goes, “Why don’t you get your foot in the door.” He goes, “Fill out this.” He gave me this little test and he goes—I don’t have it here—he’s like, “Fill out this little test. It’s just basic math skills.” He goes, “It’s all good. That’s fine. You’ll have a second interview with me, so you’re good.” He was like that; he was helping me and guiding me. I remember feeling like, *who is this guy? Does he know me?* Because he just helped me out so much. The time wasn’t going to start rolling for me to apply to bring the kids and the husband until I had a job and until I had all these requirements that I couldn’t do basically one without the other. It was this endless circle of conundrums. Well, he literally hired me on the spot. He literally did. I had to come in for my orientation. I remember just the joy, the pure, absolute joy. I was like, *wow, this is incredible, this opportunity.* I saw the Luxor and I was like, *this is the most beautiful casino.* Have you been in Vegas for many years?

CLAYTEE: *Yes, when it first opened. I went in like the first or second day.*

Early nineties, right?

Yes.

Perfect. Yes. It used to be so beautiful. They kind of like scrubbed its identity, but in that era it was full Egyptian and, like I told you, I was obsessed with Egyptian culture when I was a child. I just felt like it was a sign from the universe. I felt like that beam was...It was just metaphysical. The incredible thing is I had this little computer in Uruguay and it would always switch because obviously doing all this research and everything, the screen saver was Las Vegas—that you would download—and it had been left on the Luxor when I left. It was just all these different coincidences that had happened that I just felt like to me they were more than coincidences.

I have to say that going through that training period at the Luxor I was so grateful, just that they were giving me this opportunity. I worked so hard, so hard. Then when they came—let me tell you, I didn't sleep, but I continued working really, really hard. I remember those times. It was just like I couldn't even believe it. I had to take a bus. I had to leave the Luxor; I would clock out at seven minutes before nine and I had to run all the way to Tropicana from the Luxor going through the Excalibur, running through the bridge, coming down to take the bus from Trop and then taking the Maryland Parkway one that would take me to my home, which was on Desert Inn and Maryland Parkway. I just couldn't believe, all that effort that I was doing, but I felt like this was such an incredible opportunity. I feel like sometimes people take that for granted. Nowadays, not that it's harder—I mean, it can be as hard and harder, too, but in that era you felt like people would see you and nowadays they have to just meet a personality on the computer. I feel like sometimes you have to meet the person. You have to make that connection. I feel like that's one of the things that misses out in this era. That gentleman, I don't know who he is and I don't know his name and I never saw him again, but he opened an opportunity for my family, not only for me, but my children, whoever comes afterwards. I feel like sometimes a mere encounter with somebody can change somebody else's life or your own.

Was your mom working at that time, as well?

My mom actually never worked. She did before I was born. My mom was here as my post. My mom is twenty years older than me. I came here at the age of thirty. I had just become thirty years old, so my mom was fifty. She was always with my dad. My dad had always been the one, in poverty, but my mom had never really—she worked for two years when she was pregnant with me. My dad loved having Mom at home. It was enough after he came here.

When you came to Vegas, did you still remember your English?

Yes. Which was a little strange, though. Now it was an accented English, which was really funny. People were confused. They were like, “She does sort of know it, but sometimes says things that are reverse.” My mind had been completely geared in Spanish now. It happens to me still today where I’ll be speaking to somebody completely in English, but they’re like, “Uh, okay, that was reverse.” There are words that I can’t even say in English and it’s obviously a language that I speak a lot. I have problems now speaking because I speak a lot. I think that’s one of the consequences of growing up literally like an only child is then you can’t have enough chats with somebody.

What did the group of coworkers and employees at the Luxor look like?

Let me see. Not the friendliest crew, let’s put it that way. Tips were not shared in that era. I really didn’t care for the tips, I have to honestly tell you, not that I didn’t need the money, but I was so caught up with just having enough. To me that eight dollars an hour was so much. I think I actually saved more money when I made eight dollars an hour because I was very aware of how little I was making. I was used to being so limited that to me it was so much. There were people that would fight for jackpots and they would run for it. I would be like, “Oh, you need change? Here you go.” I was so happy just having a job and having everything rolling to be together that I

didn't have huge ambitions. I grew up so poor. We would share one sashay of shampoo with my mom and dad for a full week. A sashay, I don't think they even exist here, but it was like ketchup; they would put shampoo in ketchup little envelopes. You would have that for three people. I was used to having no luxury and having stuff like that that it didn't affect me to not have...I remember when we got here, Mom and me, the first thing we bought was two chairs and a tiny, little table to eat our food on, but the ones that TV dinners are served on, the folding ones. By the way, we still have them. They are the ones in Momma Lisia's room; they're in my mom's room. And a bed, which was an old casino used bed that we bought on Main Street. Everything was so enough. Sometimes people nowadays are the new cell phone every day. Gosh, when I got a cell phone, I was like, "I got...I can show you the cell phone." It literally was a big, bulky thing like this. It was like, *ah, what is this?* Just totally different eras. Nowadays kids are born with a cell phone in their hands.

CLAYTEE: *Did you join the Culinary Union?*

I did.

Tell us about it.

I was so happy to join the Culinary Union. Well, because I come from a family of workers and I always valued unions, when they asked me, do you want to be part of the Culinary Union, I was like, "Yes, yes, please." They didn't even have to sell it to me. I think midsentence they were trying to give me...I was like, "Yes, yes, put it there." The union dues in that time were forty-two dollars a month, and they would take it out of your check two times. I truly believed in it; I believed in the unions. My dad had been a union person in his era of working here in the States.

It was a little bit different when I found out how time had changed that. It was almost like I was coming to the States for the first time because I was such a child when I left. Of course I

had no real awareness of the world and I had this romanticized idea about people and being protected, and now it was me protecting others. I felt like the union ended up not protecting people. I was so surprised. I came in April of 2001 and then, of course, sadly the towers fell a few months later and the union protected no one, the people that had been working there twenty-plus years. I was one of the first people that they laid off, but I was like, “It’s okay because I’m new. But why? Why is this woman that has been paying dues so long, why didn’t you guys fight for her?” People were coming out in tears, jobs that they had held for twenty-plus, fifteen, eighteen years, and they were just losing everything. I was so disappointed. I was truly disappointed to see that the unions had lost their voice.

I ended up finding out that a lot of the unions in the eighties had literally sold out to these big corporations and lost their identities and just sort of started being a fool’s errand, like the people that would just pay their dues and sometimes they would really complicate their pensions and really not live up to what people had been expecting. I had some coworkers that had lost their jobs for little things that had no representation, not only with the big layoff, which would have been something big, but things that I considered were...Because in those eras there were no FLMA. Nowadays if your mom gets sick, you can...I myself have it, so it’s a protection to a worker. If my mom doesn’t feel good and I have to take her to the hospital or whatever, I’m there. My kids, if I needed it for them, I could take it. But in that era if you were working and you didn’t show up for work, there was no real excuse: My mom is sick; I have to take care of her. Some people lost their job because of being sick, having cancer or things like that. It was a tough time.

I grew very close to a few people because casinos, if you look around you will see people from every corner of the world, people with stories that are so diverse and different reasons to

come here, but every single one with one objective: to look for something better and something to offer their loved ones or people they left behind, send them monthly the food that they eat and everything. Today I have coworkers that have left their homeland for twenty-plus years, thirty years; they're still sending boxes full of clothing, jars of food, and things like that; sending money to their mothers that are ailing and already elder, but that's what they need to subsist basically.

When you were laid off, was your family already here?

My family was here, yes, because everything was pretty quick and this gentleman had helped me and I had had help from the people in the embassy that had literally laid out a plan for me that I followed to the tee. They were here very soon, in about forty days.

Really?

Yes. That's literally unheard of. But, like I told you, I had had personal contact with the consular, la consular, the U.S. consular in Uruguay. I'm not going to say I had any special favors, but they had literally told me that maybe sometimes you're not told these things clearly. On a desk, you go there and they just, "Eh, yeah, fill out this paper," but then you have ten more to fill out that if you knew, you would fill out everything at the same time. I did have that huge advantage that honestly I feel that it really facilitated everything.

I had been sort of a liaison because the U.S. embassy is in Montevideo, which is the capital city of Uruguay. I was living in an inner city, which had a lot of American citizens, so they would use me to communicate things to them. Email was sort of starting in that era, early nineties, so they would forward papers to me and I would type it up and then forward to these emails. It was a payback for that time, which was a voluntary job. Honestly, I hadn't even dreamed that that would ever be of use.

Since we were American citizens and my mom and dad were retired and receiving the pension, we would go there when I was really young. It was the time you had to get your check in person, so they would accumulate a few months and then go in person and get the checks. Then things started shifting to direct deposit. They would mail the checks, actually, before the direct deposit and then they went to direct deposit. They saw me literally sort of grow up, in my teen-age years. Like I told you, it was almost like a family in a certain way even though going into the American embassy is like going into...I don't know. Over there now they're actually changing things. Imagine a bunker with like windows that are probably like about this big. It's like pure, solid. I had never seen that in my life. It's crazy, but they had these pillars where if there was a car to drive—this is prior to anything that I could have been aware of that could have attacked the American embassy. I was like, *wow, this is a lot of security*. It's pretty intense. Now you can't even go in without an appointment, today. You have to have an appointment. It was interesting to see that.

Anyway, sort of for me to do that I felt so proud of being a representative and keeping a little bit of the States alive because I thought I would never come back. I never imagined. To me, coming back to the United States was never something that I had in my mind until the economic difficulties took it to that. It was something that I felt like, okay, I'm going to keep up with my English this way, and I'll be able to teach my kids to speak, and things like that.

How long did you work as a representative?

Let me think of the era. I'd say mid-1990 to '95 was when I sort of got in contact with them, and I'd say '95 to 2001 when I came was when I actually was doing that; sending out emails and stuff.

When you came to Vegas, you mentioned that you had a very nice CV and a resume was typed out.

Yes, I do, and I have it.

Can you name some of the items that were listed on there?

I'm going to show you my husband's CV. If you guys don't mind, I can go get it, actually. Give me one second.

[Pause in recording]

On the CV it said basically I had, of course, high school. I had done the course and I had worked for a few months there. It said also that I had collaborated with the U.S. embassy and I had the consulate's number, like a reference. It's like the study of agriculture and animals and divisions of lands in Uruguay, sort of like I was thinking because I never really aspired to be a big professional anything even though education is for free in Uruguay. The only thing is you have to travel and we were very poor, so I knew I wouldn't have the resources to travel. I was looking into something that I could have done locally and that was something that I could basically get the high school orientation towards it and then maybe work for... That was my primitive plan when I was in high school.

I brought my high school record, which isn't probably the best ever. Actually, when I got married I sort of quit in the sense of a course in high school. In Uruguay you have to do your obligated exams, and I failed math and physics. My graduation year would have been 1989, but I ended up doing it and finishing after I had Emily because I wanted to show that I had courses as much as I could. Even though I was twenty-eight, I actually finished. The same teachers were there that were there in '89. Of course, it hadn't been so many years, either. Everybody was crying because I had passed my exams. Emily was in a little baby cart and Jessica, which is my

oldest, was about three. It was a really emotional moment because I had come back to school to finish up and I had done it because I wanted to say, I want you guys to study and to do your max effort.

Anyway, I'm going to forward that CV. But I've gone through so much paperwork lately that I have a little bit of a mix-up and there is a couple of different things, but I don't want for you to wait too long.

After your husband came here, where did he start working?

Interesting, too. Now my husband, same as me, but he had a lot more experience because he had actually worked many, many seasons in Uruguay, at least two. Here we go.

And he could do Excel, word processing, yes.

And speak three languages.

Yes, both of us. We both speak three.

Here comes my oldest (daughter).

Jennifer: Nice to meet you. Sorry to interrupt.

Actually she remembers Uruguay. Emily doesn't remember Uruguay, but she does.

Very much.

Maybe you could say just briefly when you came with Dad.

In terms of the story of the trip?

Yes, yes, yes.

Okay, cool. What I mostly remember is the last time we were in our house. My grandfather was there and my dad had packed as much as we could into the suitcases. I had to say goodbye to all of my toys. I remember I was like, boohoo. The trip itself, it was a lot of responsibility for Dad. He had to take care of the little ones and all the bags.

There were two luggage each. It was my husband for two kids and six big luggage filled with, like I told you, wares of the home, nothing really of true value, but for us it was everything we owned. A few things were left behind in my mom and dad's home because we had sold where we were living and we were living in a little rental that had literally no sun, literally. We were like living in a cave.

I loved it. It had a beautiful garden, so we would mostly spend time outside. That's what I remember the most.

The trip itself, I remember it being really long. This was during the time that someone who was picking you up could go into the airport area. I remember seeing Mom and finally being reunited. It had been, what, two months?

It was about forty days.

There we go, yes.

You guys got here the fourth of June of 2001.

We celebrated every little anniversary. We're like, "Oh, we've been here eighteen years now."

How did you save so fast?

You mean save for...?

Forty days, though, you already had an apartment. How did you find the apartment?

I had brought a little bit of cash with me. Literally I had left my husband very poor, let's put it that way. What did you eat when you were there?

Hotdog. I couldn't stand hotdogs. Oh my god.

That's literally what my husband would prepare. She sees a hotdog and she's like, "Huh." You have to cut them up in different forms so she won't even tell.

Yes.

How old were you?

I was almost six. Five and a half-ish?

Yes.

Around there.

I had brought some of the cash from our home. Our home was literally the big debt. A truck that we had...I think I have a picture of it at the end.

The red truck?

The red truck, yes.

I can definitely find one.

Here it is. We had sold this truck and this truck was eight thousand dollars. That was the money. I had left nothing for my husband. He had to work weekends to have the food for the week, literally, and that's the only times they would call him. My dad would take care of them while my husband was working. I had left them super poor, so I had all the resources here. That's why I had the cash to be able to get the apartment. It was nerve-racking to walk around with that money because I didn't even know where to put it. I didn't even know where to go with it. I had it in a little pouch and it was sewn into my clothes. It was like a T-shirt and I had folded it and made a little pouch and I had sewn it into the pouch because I was so scared that somebody...I was walking around with the money sewn into my clothes.

You were telling me about your husband.

When he came here, now I have a job but he's desperate for a job. But he has more to show for it because he also had worked on the cruise ship. They were doing what they call auditions. It was a little bit different than my position because my position, you walk around and if somebody needs change you give change and everything like that. It's difficult to show what you know, but

they mostly take you in for customer service. For him, he would just dress in a white shirt, black pants, and you would walk up—different era totally—just walk up to the pit manager, which is the pit boss, and say, “Are you needing anybody?” If they’re like, “Well, we might audition,” you would relieve immediately the dealer that was there, and right there, with the dealer standing next to you and the pit boss, you would deal directly to customers.

Well, my husband has a tremendous gift with math, too, not that you can show it too, too much on playing blackjack. But in that era it was a different sort of blackjack. What was it called? Anyway, you would toss the card. It was a different ability that now they don’t do that. Anyway, he had spent hours and hours practicing this different type of shuffle that was very used here in the States.

He went to a few auditions. I wouldn’t be able to tell you exactly where he started because we already had children. I would stay home with them and I was working already. He would go out and spend the whole day just looking for a job, walking around different casinos. But the one that gave him the opportunity was the Barbary Coast. Do you remember that?

Oh yes, right on the corner that is now the Cromwell.

Now it’s the Cromwell, exactly. Completely different. Used to have this cool parking lot that was like a little spiral. Do you remember the parking lot? Yes, it’s like the airport one. It’s like a cute little spiral.

Yes, that’s where he got his first job. It was terrible pay, but for us, like I told you, it was so much. Today if you make eight dollars an hour and maybe five dollars in a tip, you’d be, “Oh my gosh.” But in that era we felt like we had reached summit. It was incredible for us. We felt like all the stars were shining on us.

What about trying to get on busses?

Oh yes, oh, that was so hard. Nobody would give you insurance. As soon as my husband got here, and I had saved up money, we bought a car off Craig's List. By the way, it wasn't Craig's List. It was off the newspaper, but a personal transaction like that. It had no title because we didn't know anything. The car wasn't bad or anything, but then we had to go on a search to find the actual person that was on the paper that wasn't the person that had actually sold us the car.

Was it stolen?

Wow, that was a story. You guys were in school when we'd do that; we got in a taxicab and we were sort of tracing where this person lived. It ended up the guy took pity on us because, like I told you, I think our crying literally... We were like, "We paid for this car, but we can't even drive it. We can't register it. They won't give us insurance, either." It was literally parked at the Boulevard Park Apartments; that's where we lived. I didn't tell you about the Boulevard Park Apartments, which was to me the most luxurious apartments I had ever seen in my life.

Was this the first apartment?

That was my first apartment there. Another taxicab driver had taken me there. We were like, "Could you tell us a good place that you would recommend to live?" He took us there and that's where we rented.

Where is it located?

It's right on the corner of Maryland Parkway and Desert Inn. They're like little fourplexes right behind Sunrise. If you follow Desert Inn down, you'll see them. There are these huge trees and they're kind of hidden now because those trees are so big now. They were big then, but now they're gigantic.

Me and Emily were just little kids running around, driving our downstairs neighbor crazy.

Which he was actually on house arrest, so he was there all the time. He would knock on my door and go, “They’re running again.” I’m like, “Oh my gosh, stop running.”

Did you have any Latino neighbors?

Yes, everybody was Latino. The downstairs neighbor, he was probably the naughtiest neighbor around. He was a nice guy. He would just get really annoyed because obviously we were interrupting his sleep cycle, which was a daytime sleep cycle. Who knows? I didn’t know much about him. But in front of us, because the fourplex was the naughty neighbor, us, and then right in front of us a Cuban family, which was really, really nice. I have to be honest. On the bottom of them, I really didn’t know those neighbors. It was almost like phantoms going in and out. We didn’t have a lot of contact. The Cuban neighbors, the sweetest people. It was a son and his wife was also in the transition like we were, coming over to the States, and then his mom and his dad. Just nice people. It was a great interaction, always sweet.

Supportive.

Supportive, yes. When it came time to actually do a driver’s test, they loaned us his truck, which was something almost unheard of. They wouldn’t allow you to do the driver’s test in your own car; you had to have a registered car in that era and the person that was the driver of that car had to sign a liability paper at the DMV so they would allow you to do the driver’s test. Even though I was a driver in Uruguay and I brought my driver’s license, it was not valid. We couldn’t have insurance, either. It was a terrible conundrum where if you didn’t have insurance, you couldn’t drive, but you couldn’t drive if you didn’t have insurance. It was like, how do we do this?

It was tough times. I remember walking to the market. How many blocks? Vegas blocks, which are long. The girls, I would have them hook their little thumbs in my back pockets

because I would have all the groceries. I would feel like a burro because, obviously, I didn't think of buying a little cart of something to roll around. I don't know what was wrong with me.

You went shopping at Flamingo and Maryland Parkway?

Yes, yes. Well, let me see. Trop and Maryland Parkway; that's the Vons, right? Or is it Albertson's?

It's Vons.

Okay. Then there is the Flamingo; that's the one I would go to, yes, which is the Albertson's. That was our market. From there, just remember the Boulevard Mall is gigantic, but to walk with these girls and they were little, oh, so much responsibility. It was tough times. Many a time at this point when I was working and I was exhausted, first, they wouldn't even get out of their shorts; they would run around in their underwear all day. I was like, *go ahead*. I remember falling asleep on the bus and getting off on the wrong stop, crying because now I had to walk back because you couldn't take the bus going the same way, so now I had to walk back. If I got off on Eastern, I would be a little bit sad. But when I got off on Pecos and had to walk back after working a whole night, oh my gosh, it was so hard. It was so hard. I have to say the sidewalk is splattered with my tears in that area.

After you worked at the Luxor, did you work at another casino?

No. I worked at the Luxor and they laid me off. Literally I was very happy to be working at the Luxor, but I had been very lucky to have applied at the Palms, which was opening. It was a chance that I took because I wanted to be a floor person, which is what I do today, is take care of the machines, pay jackpots and do that. They had that position so I applied for it. I might have bluffed my way a little bit in there. I might have said I was working as a floor person more than I was actually because I would cover vacations. I might have...I have to say I remember sitting

down on my application for the Palms and it feels like today to me because also with the same joy, I was like, “I really want to open a property.” I felt like, wow, I want to get off graveyard. I want to do this job that I have always aspired to do. I remember the lady asked me, and this is when machines had coins, she asked me a code and I knew it like this, [snapping]. It was one of those things. Even though I was working doing change, I would be such an observer it was almost like I could do it without having the key because I had that hunger. I just was aspiring so hard.

There was this guy, total weirdo, though, I have to say—he ended up getting fired because he said he was going to bring a shotgun to work, I don’t know. That’s what I found out years later. To me in that era he was so nice. He would teach me things without even me touching the machine. He goes, “Okay, what does this mean?” And he would say, “This is code...” Blah, blah. I don’t even remember his name. This was another guy that totally reached out, sort of saw that hunger, saw that I was very willing and wanted something bad. He didn’t feel threatened, either. He was so weird that I treated him so well that he felt a connection, too, because he was sort of an outlier, too. Like I told you, I had this thing where it was easy to connect with people that weren’t the most popular. I felt like he was a total help for me. He taught me things that I had no idea.

When I told that lady on the spot, she said that and I just went like, *bam*, and she was like, “You’re hired. What hours do you want?” It was a great year, a great year of opportunities for me. Honestly I couldn’t have asked for more. When I was actually working still at the Luxor, I had already been processed to work at the Palms when it opened. I lost a job and 9/11 happened, which by the way I was actually working that night, I actually felt tremendously bad for the people, like I told you, the union people because I knew that I couldn’t be protected, but

these people...I felt like why? Why aren't they being protected? Please protect them. Help them. Because they were older. Nowadays there exists protections for people that are older and you can get a job. But in that era if you were over forty-five it was really hard to get a job. They were looking for youth, somebody that was easy to teach and things like that. It's just less politically correct, maybe also. It had its good stuff. It had its bad stuff, too. There is more protections nowadays.

When did you move into this home?

That was a long time later. That's fast forwarding a bit. I'm going to tell you a little bit...I spent the first year, first lease, at the Boulevard Park Apartments. Then when I got the job at the Palms, of course we were making more money. My husband had already been looking into working two jobs. At the Barbary Coast he was working and then in that era when I started working at the Palms, a little bit later, he started working at the Flamingo. He would get out of the Barbary and go to the Flamingo, so he was working sixteen hours a day. Now we were making more influx of money and so things started to look a little bit better and we started looking for an apartment that would be closer to where my work was because I was the one taking care of the kids for transport and everything. We ended up renting at Polo Club, which is right on Decatur. That is literally a minute away from the Palms. Oh, I remember going in there, and if I felt like Boulevard Park Apartments were luxury, when I went into the Polo Club and it had a pool, let me tell you something, now that's like we entered into some sort of resort-style lifestyle. We couldn't even believe it. There we were with our futon and everything, but we were living in this gorgeous apartment, and this time it was a lower-level apartment because the running around children would not be waking up this gentleman that we drove nuts. Now we were the ones that were getting all the movement from above, but it was okay. I didn't mind that.

It was a great era. My husband still has friends from the Polo Club. They started playing racquetball. There was a racquetball court there. We felt so privileged. Like I told you, we were so grateful. We knew a lot of it is just working your tailbone off, but the truth is luck lies. You've got to have that little spark of luck and we felt so privileged that we took it in with such joy. I remember we didn't spend a dime. We were putting little cents away, *tic, tic, tic, tic, tic*, because our original plan was to leave in ten years. We were like, okay, in 2010 we're going back home. We started speaking English at home. We wanted the girls to know a lot of English. We're going back home because we want to be with our families and we had left land behind and a project, which I have a plan here to show you about it. We had bought a little land in Uruguay, which to us was very expensive and it was the chance that we had to go from being poor to having a little bit of a chance. It was something we had and that's why we were putting away the money to be able to go back and do something with it.

The girls were speaking English now. We were trying to get everything back together. Plans changed a little bit, I've got to be honest, because here we are nineteen years later, or eighteen years later. At the end of 2002 we bought our first home with a five-thousand-dollar deposit. It was good-faith money and an FHA loan. Wow, that was...My father was here and he moved us into that home. It was incredible. I still have that home, actually.

Where was that home?

That was home was on Tropicana, close to where I was, Tropicana, Hacienda and Jones. It's Souvenir Homes. We lived there until we moved here.

What year did you move?

Here, we moved in 2010. This house was an incredible opportunity. It was when the housing market was really down and when things had already made a big change in Uruguay. We had

sold that land. I'm going to show you the plan. This is the original plan made before we even left Uruguay. By the way, I hadn't even seen this, but here it is, in 1996. This is drawn by me because we didn't have money to pay an architect to do this on a little high school thing. This was the land that we had. We were going to make a little home on it. There it is, June 1996. When we sold this land, which was incredibly lucky, a lucky strike. By the way, when I went back there was nothing constructed on it. It was really curious to me. Obviously, some money laundering went on. That's when we had the opportunity, the extra funds to get this home and, also, at that time my mom was living with us and my sister-in-law, too. We were a lot of people living together.

Now, how many buildings were you going to put on the property?

No, it's the same building.

Different exposures.

Exactly, different exposures. This is if you would cut this house and look at it from the top. This is if you cut it in half, you would see the kitchen. This is if you would do another transfer to see the bathroom. It would have different cuts like that. That's what was required; you needed to get a signature. Now, you could get an architect to draw this in Uruguay or you could draw it yourself with all the requirements and get an approval from an architect for the amount of seal that you would need and materials and all that.

Who taught you how to draw like this?

Nothing really, honestly. Looking at the requirements, looking at how other people did theirs.

When you're poor you learn to adapt.

Yes, self-sufficient.

It was always like that for me. Today I still have that. That was YouTube is such a friend; I learn how to do so much on YouTube. It's like you have that hunger to do something and you don't rely on, oh, I'm going to pay for doing this. No. You just do it yourself. I probably made a lot of mistakes and that's maybe copy one hundred and fifty. When you finally finish, you're like, *my gosh*. It probably has errors, too.

Things changed quite a bit. This house was literally a strike. It's way above our pay grade still.

We were really outgrowing the other house, the first house, definitely.

Yes, with the girls. I think a community of Latinos, and other people, too, but I'm just saying that's the one I know intimately, you don't make plans to become a smaller family; you make plans to become a bigger family. When your parents become older, you think about them moving in with you. You think about your children not leaving when they're eighteen. You think, please don't leave when you're eighteen. You think about, what can I offer you? What can I give you so you'll stay? I'm still negotiating with them. You don't know how hard it was for me for her to go one week to Los Angeles. I was like, *ugh, ugh*. When she talks about plans of moving out and doing college somewhere, I was like, "What?" It's just like you feel like you need to offer a bigger home, a bigger place so they'll have their space. They were three little kids sleeping in one bedroom, smaller than the kitchen now. This house is extremely big for us, I have to say, and we're two months away from being homeless if we don't have a job. It was a way to... The time that they're growing up is so essential, too, that I felt like I want them to have fun; I want them to be carefree and to have a good memory of being young. After you grow up and you have to pay your own bills, it's hard. That's how we came about to live here.

One of the events that we like to talk about here in Las Vegas is the recession and how it affected families and community. Can you talk about that?

I was laid off. We were talking about the Palms era. I worked there. I loved, by the way, working at the Palms. It was like a family business. It was the ideal years of work for me.

Then Wynn happened. Here comes 2004 around the corner. I'm pregnant with my little one now. We were making good money at the Palms, but we had heard so many things about the Wynn, about the aspirations of the customer service there. Anyway, I got caught up with it. I should have stayed at the Palms. I applied for the Wynn and I actually was picked. Here I was transitioning again into a new casino. Now, this one, I was still adapting because I'm sort of a rebel. I maybe like to do things my way and I was used to it because at the Palms it was a manager and then it was us floor people, and so I was used to working and I don't like to be stuffy when I meet people, and at the Wynn they want to be super above-the-crowd or whatever and it's not really my cut. I like to be like, "Hey, guys, how are you doing? Are you having a good time?" And it's over there like, "We hope you have a great visit," a little stuffier on the collar for me. But I have to say that money-wise it was a good decision, but personal it's been rough. I butt heads there.

Anyway, it came around the corner that layoff times were coming and I was definitely on that cut list, so we got hit hard. We had just purchased this home, too. Wow, it was just... When they laid me off at the Wynn, we were counting on that income and the biggest recession since the Great Depression. I was like, "Well, it looks like we're going to Uruguay." But we were very lucky, too, because at the same time my husband, even though he was part-time he kept working. They were giving him full-time hours. We were able to limp along and we limped for a very, very long time until very recently, actually. It really took a hit. We had two mortgages because

we had left the other home and it was really hard. It was a hard era. I actually got rehired at the Wynn again because when things picked up I was rehired. Money, I'd say, until recently things got where we could sustain again without getting into debt, but we did get into a lot of debt for a very, very long time. We paid it off, though. We didn't go into bankruptcy, which to me feels good, even though maybe economically it would have been wiser to just go toss everything in the air. I feel like it's not the way—we never had had that mentality. When we buy something we pay for it, so I grew up being taught that way and I just couldn't see it as an alternative to just throw things up in the air. I felt like it was my responsibility. I felt like I needed to represent also for my family and show my kids that you're accountable for your decisions and you just keep rocking and doing what you can.

Is there any community of people from Uruguay here in Las Vegas?

There is, I think, three people where I work and we definitely know each other. We're home bodies. We're home a lot. I don't go and do, say, meetings a lot with people, but definitely there is that feeling of community when you meet somebody that's from that area, people that are tourists. There is a lot of bonding immediately. They kiss me and I kiss them and we hug. Uruguay is different. Argentina and Uruguay have *mate*. I don't know if you've ever seen *mate* because it's not really that popular coming towards the north. This is a custom that we have over there. It's sort of like a tea that you drink. Here I'll show you the teas. They're usually planted in Brazil. Here we go. This is my favorite one. This one I just brought back, by the way. Canarias is really strong for me. But you would fill this up until three-quarters of the cup and then—I like it with sugar, but a lot of people drink it too straight. To me it's too strong. Anyway, you pour your water in there and it's just a regular tea. You drink it with this because you see how it's very finely cut so it's almost like dust. This one may be chopped up too much, but a little bit thicker

than that. You drink it with this. It's called *bombilla*. This is what I brought from my trip, very identity from Uruguay.

You see people with it under their arms.

Yes. Everywhere in Uruguay you go this is what you're going to see, people walking around with their *Mate*, drinking constantly, sharing amongst friends. You know how a typical tea in England is—here you go.

Is that like a straw?

It's like a straw, yes. It's a metal straw.

Oh, you drink through that.

You drink through it. You put the *Mate*, the leaves, in here. Then you put the water. You just make a little corner; you just wet one area. Then you just tip this forward with the leaves. You wet that one area and then you drink. Sometimes you have to move it around because it will get stuffed up, so you just sip on it.

It's room temperature water, not hot.

No, this is hot water.

That's why you have it in that container.

Exactly. It's like a Thermos. There are words like *por ejemplo matera* would be something that you would carry your *mate* and your Thermos and your *yerba nueva* so when it gets older it's already washed out the taste. *Ensillar*, which is just when you put a little bit of new *yerba* so you continue drinking. It's more a Uruguayan custom, South Brazil, too, but Uruguayans carry this everywhere, if they go to the beach, if they go to your home, in the morning, in the night, in the middle of the day. It is just the staple of the home.

Does it have calming properties or...?

Well, yes. It's like any tea, so it's calming. Some are made for the stomach. This one right here is one of the most natural ones. It doesn't have a lot of caffeine. Some have caffeine. I consider this one to have a little more caffeine. It's sort of like any tea, any coffee you would drink. In Uruguay there are some special for stomach, some that have flavors of orange. They started incorporating different flavors into it, too.

We also like to talk about food.

Oh, perfect. Let's talk about food. Sorry, I've made the story...I've been lengthening this too much.

We want everything.

Okay, perfect. Foods in Uruguay are Mediterranean oriented. I'll give you a little bit of history. Uruguayans are mostly European descent in the era of the eighteen hundreds and a little bit before that, the seventeen hundreds. Uruguay and Argentina, *el Río de la Plata* is a natural entry point where a lot of Conquistadors or people were entering into South America would pass through. To the detriment of that it became a port that many people came in, many with very little good intentions, let's put it that way.

Was there slavery?

Slavery, slave ships from Africa would go in. Also, the natives were completely obliterated, the Charrúa, which is the native from that era. There might be a few thousand people that have maybe a little bit left of that era, but I have to say it was a complete murder. You think of Wounded Knee and this was even worse, when somebody is wiped off the Earth. The wanted completely to have that at free range and completely controlled. The warring of Spain and Portugal for the conquest of the Americas was an absolute war zone basically. Many, many victims fell to the wayside of there. In Uruguay I'd say there is not a lot of ethnic diversity.

People there are mostly Italian. There is German, also, but that's from the era of the Second World War where many fled to the southern part of South America. It's not so much like Northern Europe, but Greeks, Italians, people from Spain, and there is some Polish. I'd say mostly actually white. If you look at a Uruguayan population you're going to see people that look white-ish, like my husband; his descent is Italian. Then on my father's side is Spaniards. Then you have three, four, five generations later that mostly you will find people from there. There are descendants from slavery and there is just a few natives. But people from Portugal, you're going to find almost no one because Portuguese fled to Brazil. They fled to places—well, they're most for fish and for land coastal to the sea. Places that are inland, you're not going to see mostly Portuguese; you're going to see them coastal. Uruguay is a tough place to go. I mean, it's a great place if you're there and, like I told you, you feel like you're in. But they look at you like *sapo de otro poso*. That means you're a frog from another pond. Until they kind of test you out, it's sort of tough to get in. They are a teasing group. It's a tough crowd. It's not an easy crowd to go in. Definitely when you live there it's a slower pace, your life. You have more get-together time. There is more of a family feel. You're not left alone in your tough times.

What are some of your favorite dishes?

Okay, favorite dishes. Let's go to food. Since it's Mediterranean you have a lot of pasta, you have a lot of *comida de olla*, which is like pot food, pot roast, *caldos que se llaman pucheros* which is big vegetables that are cooked all together with, say, *ossobuco* and a lot of flavorings from meat. A lot of times because it is a poorer population, sometimes with bones making a broth and then a lot of vegetables. I'd say if you go to Uruguay and you're like, I want to eat a typical food, it's going to be *asado*, which is like ribs straight on the grill. You're going to have *morsillas*. Have you ever had *morsillas*? It's like pork meat, but when they bleed the pig they

mix it in with the blood of the pig. It's like a blood sausage. Then you're going to have *las achuras*, which is the innards of the animals. There is a lot of agriculture there, so you're going to have all sorts of food that's animal based. End of the year over there is summertime. The sheep are tiny, poor little babies; that's the end-of-the-year food. When people get together that's what they're going to have; they're going to have lamb. Turkeys are not a food that people eat over there. Chicken is not really a popular food. Beef, lamb and pig, those are the three that are main staple food over there.

There is almost no condiment. Condiments in Uruguay are going to be very light. It's like pepper, black pepper, white pepper, but very little. You can't even feel the taste of it in the food. When I came here and I tasted all this spicy food, I was like, "Eh, eh, eh." I just gained a little resistance. The foods are very bland. I tried some Indian food the other day and I was like, *how can eat this?* I was sweating. I was authentic. I was like, *this isn't possible to eat*. I ate a samosa and I thought it was an empanada. I was like, "Oh my God, I need water."

Are there any restaurants?

Yes, there are restaurants, yes. Uruguay has become very modern now, so you can find food from many different places. American food is kind of seen as—okay. Americans in general are not looked upon with too much kindness, I have to say, because Uruguayans and Argentinians and I'd say Brazilians, too, felt a heavy hand of the United States influencing the economics, hitting them with—the dictatorships were literally like puppets of the U.S. The Uruguayans, Argentinians, and Brazilians, I don't even know too much about, but I'm sure, yes, but they got in tremendous debt with the United States and the world banks in that era of the dictatorships because the U.S. wanted to get a hold of the power that those regions had. There is a lot of

resentment and it's sort of like they look at American food with a side eye. It's like, *ugh*. Like hamburgers, *ugh*.

And you eat hotdogs only when you don't have anything else.

Well, hotdogs are like the last thing you're going to eat, see, when you're super poor. But, yes, it's not looked upon with a lot of kindness. They call them *Imperialistas*. There is a lot of love for Cuba. Uruguay is socialist currently, right now. Broad Front is actually sort of when it resurged. *Tupamoros* and another bunch of different groups got together and were able to defeat politically the *Partido Blanco* and *Partido Colorado*, which had been the ones ever since the eighteen hundreds that had been in power. In early two thousand, they were able to *frente amplio* for this coalition of socialist groups. Some are actually communist. But in that coalition the majority are socialist. But they were able to get into power and they've been in power ever since. Now actually the elections are coming up in November, the primaries—no, the primaries just were; they happened last Sunday. Now the general election is November.

Are you a citizen of Uruguay?

No, I am not. I am not a citizen over there. I wanted to, but, like I told you, American citizenship is seen almost as a negative. It's like, *eh*. They were like, "You have to renounce to being an American," and my mom and dad were like, "No, you can't do that." That's why. I became a legal resident over there. I was like, *how dare you reject your mom and dad's...* I wish I could have been a part of it because I was never able to vote and I love to be politically involved.

And you couldn't do dual?

I couldn't do dual. Nowadays it's become a little bit different and I'm wanting my children to have that dual citizenship, so eventually it's something we're looking into.

When your children moved here, they had to renounce their Uruguayan citizenship?

Basically, but not really. Legally they are Americans, but in Uruguay they're Uruguayans.

Porque nacieron allí.

Porque their father is Uruguayan. *Porque nacieron allí.* Like my two older ones, they're never going to consider another citizenship over there.

Can you tell me about your Uruguayan desserts?

Duce de leche, which I have some, brought from Uruguay by the way. But this is like the epitome of what Uruguayans—they love this. Do you want to try it? It's actually like caramel, but not really.

We call it *cajeta*.

Cajeta, yes, yes, yes. A little bit different. Uruguayans have—I want you to taste it and you tell me if you think you can taste a difference, if you would like to. This one was just brought back. Here we go. You just spoon a little bit in there and tell us if you like it. That's our typical dessert.

Is this like peanut butter?

It isn't. It's like milk with sugar that's been cooked.

It's thicker.

It's thicker, right? It's a little bit different.

It's like caramel. It's delicious.

Yes, it's so good. See, it depends on...Uruguayan cows are literally pastured because it's a good climate for agriculture. You're going to taste the really natural. There is really nothing...These cows are living the life in the pastures without any feed, without any antibiotics.

Yes, no GMOs.

No GMOs. These animals are literally brought in, they're milked, back out to the pasture.

Milhoja, which would be, for example, layers and layers of butter, and that would be a really

popular dessert and what people eat at birthday parties. *El arrollado con dulce de leche*. *Dulce de leche* has a lot to do with it. *Chajá* is actually a dessert that is original from Uruguay and it's got *bizcochuelo*, merengue. We can look it up online so you can see it. It's different layers of *dulce de leche* and it's wet with *duraznos*. What is it called?

Peaches?

Peach, yes. It has the syrup from the peach to make it really nice and wet, the little *bizcochuelo*. Empanada is something very popular in Uruguay.

What do you usually fill it with?

We fill it normally with beef and chicken filling. But it literally can be *jamón y queso*, which is ham and cheese. It's just like a really big staple there. Also, *medialunas*, a lot of it because you drink *mate*, it appeals to have a lot of dessert-like things, so you have *biscochos*, which is something very, very popular, which is like little biscuits, but they're made with the fat from the animals. It's all folded in, in layers, sort of like the croissant but with the fat of the animal.

Then you have sort of like a beignets; it's called *bolas de fraile* they're fried and you eat it with [indiscernable] and then the outside has got sugar. *Medialunas* are like the croissant, but the sweet version of it. It has honey and vanilla extract and it's made with milk and then you fold it. It takes a prep of two or three different days. It's basically a croissant, but sweet, lots of sugar in it. See, that's what I mean: People drink their *mate*, which is *amargo*, no sugar, so they compensate it with tons of sugar on the other side. Let's put it this way: There is a lot of diabetes. It's pretty bad. It's a bad problem over there.

I'm trying to think of anything more representative. There was a really important person that lived in Uruguay that I don't think a lot of people know about. His name was Artigas, José Gervasio Artigas. He was, I'd say, ahead of his time. He was a man that saw the potential of

when Uruguay became independent. He was one of the ones that procured that. He saw Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay as... He wanted to have it almost as a United States type of ideal. He said, "Alone we have no power, but together in negotiations we could do something better." There were a lot of power play in the time, so even though he was the author of the independence basically and inspired only thirty-three people crossing this little, tiny river where he was one of them, were the ones that kind of initiated the spur of the independence of Uruguay. It's almost a symbolic thing because Uruguay was used as almost like this little playing ground for Portugal and Spain. They were like, okay, stop playing around with us; let's draw a line here. He actually ended up getting very frustrated and leaving Uruguay. They wanted him to be the first president and he said no and he ended up dying in Paraguay. They actually—how do you say it?—brought back his remains.

He died over there, but they exhumed—there we go; that's the word—they exhumed him and brought him back with full glory. Actually I toured that tomb when I was in school and it's one of the center plazas in Montevideo, which is absolutely beautiful and he's on his horse, which was famous, too.

Is that the statue on one of the pictures?

It could be, yes. I think my mom is standing...

Yes, maybe in this one.

Check it because it could be. I'm not sure.

Where is this building?

Actually that's in Brazil. That's Blumenau, which would be literally like going to Germany in the middle of Brazil. That is totally different than the rest of Brazil.

That migration.

Yes. See, totally German there. See that little house, you see those plans for? This is when we constructed my mom and dad's home. That's my dad. See, this is something typical you do over there: You cook a little steak right there in the fire. You killed two birds with the one stone. You have your warmth and then also...Fireplaces are big, a staple in the home because of that reason: It's a place where everybody gets together.

Can you tell us about holidays and celebrations?

Oh, celebrations, big, big. Celebrations over there are like Christmas. Christmas is in summertime, which to me was weird when I was young, but I actually really enjoy Christmas in the summer. I have to say it's great to go to the beach. Everybody gets together, like nobody is alone literally. It doesn't even matter; it could be a neighbor; it could be a friend. There is going to be a party. Fireworks are—have you ever seen whatever you scrub the *ollas* with? It's like a little sponge, but it's made out of *aluminio*? You know what I'm talking about?

Yes.

If it gets wet it gets totally plastered. Anyway, those are hooked up to little sticks and people wave those around. They set them on fire. Those are the fireworks. It's crazy the amount of fire that gives off. It's a tremendous hazard. But anyway, people are on the streets, just sitting outside, sharing with neighbors, and music blasting. Everybody has got each other's music in their head. It's a total different culture. Everybody is invited. You go to everybody's home, too. Say when you're married you're going to go to your mom's home and a while later you're going to go to your in-law family and then you're going to go to your brothers and sisters and then everybody is going to go to each other's place. Basically the food is made, but then everybody is eating each other's food or bringing a dessert or potluck-type thing. But instead of staying in one

location, you're just walking around seeing family or visiting. It's a serious offense if you don't go, serious.

They hold a grudge.

Oh, big one. You're in trouble after that. *You didn't come for Christmas. What's wrong with you?*

How have you kept those connections now that you're here in the U.S.?

Well, I have to say that—of course, the technology today helps greatly. But I have tapes from the era that my mom and dad came here when they would call once a year their family. They would spend literally the whole card like, “What? What did you say? Ah, see.” It's back and forth just for two or three minutes, but that one contact was essential. When I was young we would write to each other, letters coming and going. I have actually brought back from Uruguay—I really didn't have time to put all the stuff that I have together—honestly all these letters. You keep the envelopes. You have this collection of things. Now, of course, it's even easier with WhatsApp. It's like, “Hey...” yesterday was my niece's birthday and we sang to her and she was with everybody. She was like, “It's so noisy here I can't hear you.”

Do you have any other stories that you would like to share?

I don't know. I have random things right now in my head. I'm sorry if I left something out. if you ever have a blank spot or something or if I think of something—oh, I have a little bit to tell you about my mom and dad when they came here. My mom had always dreamed of coming to the United States. When she came here she remembers even what she was wearing when she came to the United States. She was wearing this pink little...It's like a sweater that actually I took to Uruguay when I went in April and I wore it when I was coming back. It was hot when I

got here and I took it off, but I wore it in the airplane ride, just a homage to her. All those things, all those dreams.

I remember she would tell her sisters, “People have cars here. They don’t walk everywhere.” And her sister would be, “You’re lying. You’re not saying the truth.” That’s one of the things when I came here, because I had left being a child, too, I would be like, “Everybody is in a car.” We were one of the few people walking around, me and Mom. It’s like a different point of view when you come from another place where customs are so different.

Do you have a message for future immigrants?

I do. I think that you should never be comfortable. You should always strive for something and never give up on your dreams even though sometimes everything feels like it’s against you. You should never let especially obtuse people get in the way thinking that you don’t belong because you belong everywhere, you belong anywhere in the world. Humans have put tremendous amounts of blockades and blocks, but the truth is that we’re all human. After so many years of meeting people from every corner of the world, I can say that everybody has the same aspirations and love. They want to give to their families and they want to be able to dream.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you so much for sharing your story and that beautiful message with us.

Thank you. Thank you, ladies.

[End of recorded interview]