

The Peace Drum Project

Elder's Stories - 2007

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Introduction

Each year we look forward to our meetings and activities with the elders who share their stories, thoughts, humor, wisdom, understanding, and encouragement with the *Peace Drum Project's* teen participants. The experience of getting to know these wonderful elders and hearing their stories has been truly rewarding. We know that we have only scratched the surface of their stories in this process, but we hope that introducing them to you will enrich your lives as it has ours. These stories are filled with wisdom and life experience that young people today can learn from and honor. In spite of the differences between eras, the teens learn that many hopes, dreams, *and* obstacles remain constant across generations. Learning first hand that others have faced similar challenges — and have overcome them — gives power to their own hopes and dreams.

We are delighted with the respectful way in which the teens conducted their interviews, and by how the elders were willing to share their very personal experiences and knowledge with our young people. This bridge across the generations reduces isolation and builds new connections between youth, families, and elders that strengthen our whole community. We look forward to continuing this process for many more years.

This year we offer special thanks to Lucia Rodriguez-Sweeney for transcribing and translating the stories of the Spanish-speaking elders. We also thank Cynthia Jimenez, Resident Services Coordinator at Julia Martin House, Nancy Escoto, Resident Services Coordinator at Nate Smith House, and Julia Martin of Bromley Heath, Community Activist and grandmother, for their help in locating elders who wanted to take part in the project this year.

We dedicate these stories to the memory of Charles M. Holley (1937-2006,) CAI co-founder, and inspiration behind The Peace Drum Project. He is greatly missed by all the teens and graduates, elders, artists, and others who knew and worked with him over the years

Susan E. Porter, Director
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Tomás Castillo (Español)

Entrevistado por Patricia Mata y Lucia Rodriguez-Sweeney

“Nací el 5 de diciembre de 1932, en Paraíso, una provincia de Barona de la República Dominicana. Ha cambiado mucho, pero era un lugar muy bueno en una zona productiva, con mucha agricultura y ganadería. Yo vivía con mis padres, en una familia grande, éramos doce hermanos-nueve hombres y tres mujeres. Criándome con una familia tan grande me aprendí de cómo amar a una familia y también de la obediencia. Yo asistía una escuela que no era pequeña ni era grande. Termine nueve años de escuela. Me crié con mis padres y tenía que hacer lo que tenía que hacer, ayudándolos. Después de llegar de la escuela hacia trabajo duro, tenía que ir a bregar con vacas y cosas así en el campo. Mi vida era muy recorrida absolutamente con poca libertad de hacer nada.

Tenía un par de buenos amigos de toda la vida y después de la escuela no reuníamos y jugábamos beisbol. Mis padres tenían reglas fijas y nunca salíamos a noche, regresábamos a las ocho, éramos muy obedientes. Después de la secundaria me quedaba trabajando. Me sentía bien, como que ya que me hice hombre, entonces yo me case y por mi propia cuenta decidí salir adelante. No dependía de los padres. Soñé en estudiar más. El mejor trabajo que tuve después de ser hombre fue ser juez de paz. Me encantaba porque participe en la política y de ahí, después de ganar unas elecciones, tuve la oportunidad de coger un cargo político y eso fue que hice.

Nunca tuve miedos pero si tuve ciertos problemas. Después, la política estaba peligrosa, sin darse cuenta, uno podría ser su enemigo. Encontré un Señor en la política que no quiso perder y me persiguió para matarme porque no quiso aceptar la culpabilidad de un fallo.

En los 1950's ya estaba casado y todo estaba bien. Ya tenía mis cosas, mis hijos que eran pequeños y todo iba bien. Todos en mi familia nos llevábamos bien. Tenía muchas amistades y nos divertíamos mucho. En aquella década también sufrimos mucho cuando mataron a un hermano mío en Nueva York. Por los 1960's termino la dictadura en mi país y volverá a tener libertad y ahí termino con la muerte del dictador. Entonces teníamos mas libertad y vivíamos mejor.

La persona que he admirado mas en mi vida es mi madre porque una madre es madre y el cariño de la madre es esencial- después de Dios es la madre. Mi favorita clase de música es la música Cristiana y dominicana. Me gusta oír las noticias porque me gusta enterrarme de los asuntos del mundo, de las situaciones y saber como van. El deporte que mas me gusta es el béisbol. Antes yo jugaba pero ahora me gusta verlo y oírlo. Mi temporada favorita es la navidad pero no me gusta la temperatura.

Me quede en el hospital con un par de operaciones que me afectaron mucho. Fueron golpes difíciles. Hice un viaje por América Central y me gustaba mucho Costa Rica y Panamá. Había muchas cosas que quise hacer en mi juventud pero no pude. No había esa libertad que tiene la juventud hoy. Veíamos las muchachas pero no podíamos decirles nada. Era un tiempo muy represiva y había mucha restricción. Los padres eran estrictos y los mismos padres eran de bajo de control del régimen autoritario.

Para mi es un placer tener mis hijos porque yo los quiero muchos, son muy buenos. Mi querida esposa es Isora Castillo. Tengo nueve hijos: AnnaBella, Marzon Tomas, Michael, Betzira, Juan José, Isabel, Sara Olivia, Isaac, y Bienvenido. La cosa más difícil que hay en esa vida era que cuando aunque uno quería hacer ciertas cosas y no podía porque todo estaba restringido. Había poco desarrollo. Todo era trabajar, trabajar, para asegurar el derecho de trabajar, solamente. Mis mejores amigos son Roberto Melo, Ramón y Marino.

Yo me encomiendo a Dios por la mañana y todo resultó bien. Gracias a Dios! Lo que me hace feliz ahora, a sonreír, es creer en Dios. Cuando los tiempos estén malos hay que creer mucho en Dios, obedecer a su palabra. El mejor consejo que hay es buscar a Dios, servirle a El, ser humilde con todos, con su prójimo, amar unos y los otros iguales. Yo con la humildad he podido a vencer todas las cosas. He tenido muchos triunfos por eso si hubiera sido de otra manera, no estaré ni vivo porque he tenido algunos problemas. Pero gracias a El mi vida ha sido una triunfa.”

Tomás Castillo (English)

Interviewed by Patricia Mata and Lucia Rodriguez-Sweeney

“I was born the 5th of December in 1932, in Paraiso, a province of Baraona, in the Dominican Republic. It has changed allot, but it was a very good place, a very productive zone with agriculture and stockbreeding. I lived with my parents in a large family and I learned how to love a family and also how to obey. I finished nine years of school. I was raised with my parents and I had to do what I had to do, helping them. When I came home from school I had to do hard labor, dealing with the cattle, and other things in the countryside. My life was very busy and with very little liberty to do much of anything.

I’ve had good friends all of my life and after school we would get together to play baseball. My parents had strict rules and we never went out at night, we had to be home at eight and we were very obedient. After secondary school, I kept on working. I felt good, I felt as if I had become a man, so then I was married and decided to get ahead on my own, without depending on my parents. I dreamed of

studying more. The best job I had afterwards was as a justice of the peace. I loved participating in politics, and I won elections, and from there I had the opportunity to take charge of a political post and that is what I did.

I never was in fear, but I did have certain problems. After some time, politics was very dangerous, without even knowing who your enemy was. I came across a man in my political career that did not want to lose, and he pursued me to kill me because he did not want to accept culpability for a death.

In the 1950's I was married and everything was going well. I had many friendships and I had a good time with my companions. In that decade my family and I also suffered because one of my brothers was murdered in New York City. In the 1960's the dictatorship was over and my country regained its liberty. And we lived better.

The person who I most admire is my mother, because a mother is a mother, and her love is essential- after God, there is mother. My favorite kinds of music are Christian and Dominican music. I like to listen to the news because I like to know what is going on in the world and how things are going. My favorite sport is baseball. I used to play, but now I like to watch or listen. My favorite time of year is Christmas, but I don't like the temperatures.

I was in the hospital because I had to have a couple of operations. These were difficult blows.

I took a trip to Central America and I liked Costa Rica and Panama very much. There were many things I wanted to do in my youth, but I couldn't. There wasn't the kind of liberty that young people have today. We could watch the girls, but never say anything to them. It was a repressive time and there were many restrictions. Parents were strict and the same parents were under the control of the dictatorial regime. The most difficult thing there is in this life is to want to do so many things, but not be able to because there are so many restrictions. Life was all about working just to work. There was very little development.

For me, it is a pleasure to have my children. I am grateful for my wife Isora Castillo. I have nine children: AnnaBella, Marzon Tomas, Michael, Betzira, Juan José, Isabel, Sara Olivia, Isaac, and Bienvenido.

I entrust myself to God every morning and give thanks to Him that everything has turned out well. Now what makes me happy, what makes me smile, is my belief in God. When times are tough, you must believe in God, serve Him, and be humble, to all fellow men. With humility I have been able to defeat many difficulties. I have had many triumphs, and had I been another kind of man, I believe I might not be alive today because I have had many challenges. But thanks to God, I have triumphed.”