

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
Cooperative Artists Institute
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Isora Sanchez de Castillo (Español)
Entrevistada por Karina Rosario y Patricia Mata

“Mi tía es quien me llamo Isora porque le gustaba mucho ese nombre, aunque mi padre quiso llamarme Monica, pero a mi me gusta Isora, es mas raro. Naci el día 4 de mayo en la República Dominicana en el pueblo Baraona en la provincia de Requillo. Era una ciudad muy grande, lejos del campo, bien buena y bien bonita. La gente se llevaba muy bien. Teníamos una familia grande con muchos hermanos, primos, sobrinas. Mis padres tuvieron nueve hijos. Mi papa tenía una finca de café y trabajaba sembrando y cosechando café. Fui a la escuela pública para pocos años, como siete años y no llegue a graduar. Aprendí el oficio domestico: cocinar, lavar, planchar. Me gusta tener todo bien organizado y brillante- todo bonito.

Me recuerdo que en aquellos días antiguos celebrábamos y compartíamos todo junto, especialmente los días especiales, como el día de Santa Ana. En la juventud tenia una mejor amiga, una vecinita, y otros amiguitos también pero no muchos. Pasábamos los días gozando y jugando. Nos brincábamos, corríamos, bailábamos, y bañábamos en el rio y en el mar para divertirnos. Salíamos en giras, especialmente a un sitio precioso que se llama San Rafael en mi país. Ahí nos bañábamos en las aguas de las cascadas mas lindas. Mis padres eran estrictos y buenos. Siempre nos daban permiso para salir a divertirnos.

Las cosas no eran fáciles. A los nueve años mi padre cayo enfermo y una hermana de mi papa vino allá, y entonces yo me fui para su casa, y desde ahí y adelante yo me crie con ella. Después volví a los quince o dieciséis años, pero ya no era mi casa. Mi papa se quedo internado en una cama para cuarenta años. El trabajaba, un trabajo duro y difícil, en la finca de café. No sabíamos la causa de su enfermedad, pensábamos al principio que era el reumatismo, pero era un misterio, el cuidio medico no era que es hoy. Buscábamos una cura o terapia y gastábamos mucho pero no había nada. No había ningún tratamiento y casi vendíamos todo que teníamos, la finca de café, hasta la casa, buscándole un tratamiento. Algunos hermanos se quedaron en la casa, pero no todos, porque cuando estaba enfermo no podía sostener a todos. Entonces a las tías de nos otros nos llevaron a sus casas. En un lado teníamos cuatro tías y en el otro lado había tres. De eso se murió a los ochenta unos años. Mi mama se dedico a su cuidio. Mi papa murió primero y entre cinco años murió mi mama. Enfrentaba tantas cosas en la vida, y de que yo recuerdo, nada me he dado miedo.

Yo no tenía sueños magníficos... antes no era como ahora. Como yo era pobre, y como me crie, lo que pensé solamente quería que Dios me pusiera adelante un hombre para compartir mi vida. A los veinte años conseguí mi primero trabajo afuera de la casa era como profesora de adultos. Un primo mío, que era el director de una escuela, me llamo y me ofreció el puesto enseñando y dando clase a analfabetos en el campo. Trabajé poco tiempo, di clase para siete o ocho meses.

Eso hice antes de casarme. Mi esposo y yo nos conocíamos ahí cuando llegue a ese pueblo donde yo daba clase. Vivíamos ahí frente a frente, mi primo era el vecino de mi futuro esposo. Me case a los veintiún años. Nos comprometimos, me casé y me fui con mi esposo a un campo para trabajar la agricultura.

Mi esposo y yo cumplimos sesenta años de matrimonio, allá en el país de nosotros, y eso fue precioso, lindo. Nuestras vidas giraban al rededor de nuestros seres querido- la familia, los hijos, las amistades, los vecinos, los sobrinos, los nietos, los amigos, ellos son lo mas bonito que he tenido en mi vida. Yo y mi esposo tuvimos diez hijos, ahora tenemos nueve porque uno murió cuando era chiquito. Teníamos una familia grande y unida. Tengo veintinueve nietos y diecinueve bisnietos. La vida me ha enseñado mucho pero más que todo, aprendí de la unidad del ser humano, del cariño y del amor.

Todos mis hermanos se quedaron en la República Dominicana. Cuando llegue aquí trabajé cuidando niños. Mi mejor hecho era tener mis niños, adoro los niños. Me encantan los niños- la manera de ser y la inocencia de los pequeños. Admiro mucho a mi familia y especialmente al esposo de la hija mía porque es un hombre honesto, muy bueno, muy querido del pueblo. Vive en Santo Domingo. No he conocido tantos hombres tan honestos como el. Ahora encuentro refugio con mi familia y mis seres queridos y en el ritmo de mi música favorita, la música Cristiana. Me encanta la primavera, cuando se levanta el mundo y brilla con sus colores. Mi color favorito es el verde, un color humilde, y también el color rosado que llevan las flores.”

Isora Sanchez de Castillo (English)

Interviewed by Karina Rosario and Patricia Mata

“My aunt named me Isora because she liked the name, but my father wanted to call me Monica, but I prefer Isora, it is rare and lovely. I was born the 4th of May in the Dominican Republic in the town of Baraona in the province of Requillo. It was big, like a city— far from the countryside, and very beautiful. The people got along very well. We had a large family with many brothers and sisters, cousins, and nephews. My parents had nine children. My father had a coffee plantation and he worked planting and harvesting coffee. I went to public school for a few years, like six or seven years, but I never graduated. I learned how to administer the home- cooking, cleaning ironing...I like everything well organized, clean and shiny.

I remember those days long ago when we shared and celebrated everything together, especially holidays, like St. Anna’s. In my youth I had a best friend, a neighbor, and other friends as well, but not many. We would pass the days having fun and playing. We would run and jump, dance and swim in the river and in the sea. We would take trips especially to this wondrous place called San Rafael in my country. There we would swim in the most beautiful cascading waters. My parents

were strict and very good people. But they always gave us permission to go out and have fun.

Things were never easy. When I was nine years-old my father fell ill and one of my father's sisters came and I went to her home, and she raised me. My father was interned in a bed for forty years. He did difficult work on the coffee plantation. We did not know the cause of his illness. At first we thought it was rheumatism, but it was a mystery. Health care was not what it is today. We looked for a cure or a therapy and we almost had to sell everything we had, including the house and the farm. There was no treatment to be found. Some of my brothers and sisters stayed in the home, but because our father was sick he could not support all of us. So, our aunts took some of us to live with them in their homes. On one side of the family we had four aunts and three aunts on the other side. My mother dedicated herself to caring for our sick father. He finally died at eighty-one years old and, within five years, my mother died too. I've confronted so many things in my life that I can not recall anything that made me fearful.

I did not have great dreams...in those days it was not like that. I was poor and given my upbringing all I wanted is for God to put a partner in my path with whom to share my life. At twenty years old I found my first job outside of the house. A cousin of mine called, he was the director of a school, and he offered me the position of teaching and giving classes to illiterate countrymen. I only worked a short time, like seven or eight months. That is what I did before I was married. My husband and I met when I moved to the village where I taught. He was my cousin's neighbor. I was married at twenty-one. We got engaged, married and I moved with my husband to another village where he worked in agriculture.

My husband and I celebrated fifty years of matrimony. Our life in our country was precious, even beautiful. Our world revolved around our loved ones- the family, our children, our friends, our neighbors, our grandchildren, and they are the most beautiful things I have had in my life. My husband and I had ten children, but one died very young. We had a very large and united family. I have twenty-nine grandchildren and nineteen great-grandchildren. Life has taught me a great deal, but above all I learned about unity and love.

All of my brothers and sisters stayed in the Dominican Republic. When I arrived here I worked taking care of children. My greatest accomplishment is having had my children- I love children and their innocence. I admire my family very much, especially my daughter's husband, because he is a good and honest man, very much loved in Santo Domingo. I have not known too many men like him. I find refuge with my family and loved ones and in the rhythms of my favorite music, Christian music. I love the spring, when the world awakens and shines with its colors. My favorite color is green, a humble color, and also the pink of flowers.”