

# *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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## **Josepha Herrera (Español)**

### ***Entrevistada por Simara Martinez and Lucia Rodriguez-Sweeney***

Me pusieron mi nombre porque yo naci el 18 de marzo que era el día de san José, el día del esposo de la virgen. Naci en la República Dominicana en el año 1943 en la capital de Santo Domingo. Mi vecindario se llamaba San Carlos cerca de la capital y era precioso. Vivía con mi mama y papa. Había cinco hijos y con mi papa y mama, siete personas vivieron juntas. Teníamos mucha familia pero mi papa tenia un dicho ‘que la familia es mama, papa, y los hijos.’ Siempre admiraba a mi madre porque era una persona tranquila, todo el mundo era igual en sus ojos, aunque tenia muchos problemas de salud siempre era alegre. Mi mama era muy buena, muy creativa, amorosa, cariñosa y bondadosa con todos. Mis hermanas se llaman Marta María Herrera, Antonia Reina Herrera y Porfirio Herrera, el solo varón, y también había otra que se murió de recién nacida. Ella se murió cómo a los seis o siete meses, tenia un problema de que no podía beber.

En mi juventud no me desilusione con sueños de grandeza mis metas eran mas humildes. Me encantaba cantar y ayudar. Siempre jugábamos, hermanas con hermanas, en la casa con muñecas que cocemos de traje y de tela. Me gustaba ver los deportes en mi país y yo iba. No teníamos mucha libertad. No podíamos salir cuando éramos adolescentes, señoritas, ni tener amistades como hoy. Mi mama no nos permitió a salir. Yo salí del colegio joven, me quedaba en la casa, pero me seguía asistiendo las clases de las monjas donde aprendía a cocer, administrar a todos los oficios del hogar y a ayudar a las personas desafortunadas.

Yo hice la primaria y en la secundaria llegue hasta el noveno grado. Yo iba a la misión de las monjas y aprendí la economía domestica, todo del hogar y como jugar pelota también aprendí de las monjas. Recogía niños de los barrios donde vivíamos, llevábamos a la iglesia para enseñarles. En mi adolescencia me gustaba servir para ayudar, como si uno se enferme, yo iba, si hay que llevar al hospital, dar de comer, llevar un vaso de agua a cualquiera persona...así mi mama y mi papa me enseñaron, a ayudar todos sin ver clase, ni raza, ni color, ni religión. Muchas veces la gente critica pero no saben porque llegaron a ese punto. No importa quien sea, que vicio tenga o sus preferencias, es un ser humano como cualquiera. Yo no discrimino, nadie sabe porque alguien tuvo que pasar por la necesidad porque a lo mejor pidió y no le dieron. Y aquellos que no dieron son quienes critican. La mejor manera en que tu puedes vivir, a buscar su comida- búscatelo, yo no te critico. Cada cual tiene que vivir como Dios se lo destina.

Después que se paso el tiempo cuando tenía veinte y pico de años, me case. El era mi primer novio. Me case en los años 1961, con un señor que visitaba una casa a lado de la mía, pero el ya era divorciado. El trabajaba como oficial del bombero y el

era inspector publico contra el incendio para la industria privada. Yo me case, tuve mis hijos con el y duramos juntos en el matrimonio para veinte años. En mi país nunca trabajé hasta que llegue aquí. Mi esposo trabajaba, tenía mucho, y yo era la madre de la casa cuidando a mis hijos. Mi trabajo favorito es ser madre, quedarme en casa con mis hijos. A penas mi esposo era muy enamorado, con muchas mujeres, le gustaba mucho el alcohol y gastaba mucho. El se enamoro de otra y me divorcié. Mi pobre esposo se mató con la jovencita que era su pareja el era ya muy viejo y ella tan joven.

Tengo muchos años en este país, vine en 1984. De la República llegue a Puerto Rico y en PR consiguió un trabajo y logre venir para acá. Legue aquí divorciada de mi esposo para trabajar en la cadena Hilton y traje a mis hijos después de que el se murió en Santo Domingo. Se murió a casi los setenta años. Mi querida hermana, que ya estaba aquí, lo hizo todos los transmites y cuando nosotros llegamos a esa tierra, cuando nosotros íbamos comenzar a trabajar, ella no quería nada a cambio. Seguí derecho para obtener mi benefició. Cogí y pase mi examen y todas las preguntas contesté bien para asegurar mis derechos, mis beneficios y mi titulo como ciudadana. Y yo me quede aquí con mis dos hijos y los dos están aquí todavía, crecidos, con sus propias familias. Todos los años vienen a ver me. Mi hermana también vive aquí por Jamaica Plain. Gracias a Dios tengo todas mis hermanas aquí. La cosa mas importante que yo he aprendido de mi familia es la importancia de la unión, todos somos muy unidos. Y vivimos aquí así.

La cosa mas chistosa que me ha pasado, ya hace cinco o seis años de que se paso ahí in Hyde Park, a las ocho de la mañana me quede sin mi cartera y mis llaves, porque me lo quitaron, y tuve que venir a pie a mi casa. Me quitaron mi dinero, cartera, y todo que estaba por dentro hasta que me quitaron los documentos. Pero tuve que reír, a veces cuando algo malo pase, uno tiene que reír a todo lo absurdo que ocurre sin explicaciones pero nos hace pasar una experiencia distinta.

Aquí, como en cualquier país pasan sus situaciones. Recientemente me paso un incidente que me dio mucho miedo. Yo siempre andaba a pie y la hija mía me avisa que no debo andar en la calle con la cartera, pero no tengo miedo de personas. El que tiene su comida debe compartir con quien tiene hambre. Aunque no tengo mucho, cuando me lo piden yo le doy.

Y una mañana, ahí en la estación de transporte, vinieron unos muchachos de la escuela y me dieron un gran asusto. Me empujaron a la pared y querían...pero la policía vino corriendo y mandaron a los chicos, corriendo y corriendo y fueron a bajar la escalera, y la gente iba por ahí que no se quitaban le iban a tirar para abajo... Eso me dio mucho miedo pero sigo confiando en los seres humanos.

Ya necesito pocas cosas para ser feliz. Mi temporada favorita es el verano porque uno disfruta, uno sale a pasear, a caminar, ir al parque, disfrutar en un lago, a la

playa, a la finca de manzanas para cogerlas y hay muchas más diversiones. Me encanta la música Mexicana, me encanta la canción, ‘*A mi manera*’ y lo canta Vicente Fernández. Me gusta la música y las obras de los artistas. Me gusta llevar el verde como la verdura del verano.”

**Josepha Herrera** (English)

*Interviewed by Simara Martinez and Lucia Rodriguez-Sweeney*

“They gave me my name because I was born the 18th of March, Saint Joseph’s Day- the holiday of the Virgin’s husband, Joseph. I was born in the capital of the Dominican Republic in 1943. My neighborhood was called San Carlos, it was close to the capital and beautiful. I lived with my mother and father and five siblings- seven people lived together in the same house. We had lots of family, but my father had a saying, ‘the family is mother, father and their children.’ I always admired my mother because she was a serene person and before her eyes, the entire world was equal. Though she had health problems, she was always happy. My mother was very good, creative, loving, thoughtful and giving with everyone. My sisters were named Marta Maria Herrera, Antonia Reina Herrera and Porfirio Herrera, he was only one male. There was also another girl who died as a newborn. At six or seven months she passed away because she was unable to drink.

In my youth I did not disillusion myself with dreams, my goals were very humble. I loved to help people and to sing. We always played dolls in the house, sisters with sisters, playing with dolls sewn from cloths. I loved the sports of my country and I often went. We did not have much liberty and we could not go out when we were young ladies, nor maintain friendships like today. I left school young and I stayed at home, but I continued to go to classes given by the nuns where I learned how to sew, household work, and how to help the less fortunate.

I completed primary and secondary school until the ninth grade. I also went to the nuns to learn the ‘domestic economy’ and all things having to do with the home. The nuns also taught me how to play baseball. We would go to round up children from where we lived and take them to the church to teach them. In my youth, I loved to serve in order to help, if someone became ill, I would go, if someone needed to go to the hospital, I would take them, if someone needed food or a glass of water, I would bring it to whomever was in need. That is how my mother and father taught me, to help without seeing class, color, race, or religion. Many times people criticize, without knowing what happened to bring them to this point. Perhaps they asked for help, and no one gave it. And it is those who are unwilling to give who are most willing to criticize. It doesn’t matter who it is, what vices or preferences they have, we are all human beings. I don’t discriminate. The best way you can live your life is by finding your own sustenance, and whatever you do

while you look, it is not my place to criticize. Each one of us has to live what God has destined.

After a while, when I was twenty-something years old, I was married. He was my first boyfriend. I married in 1961, a man who was older, and already divorced. He worked as an official for the fire department and he was a fire inspector for private industry. I married, had my children with him and we stayed married for twenty years. I never married until I came to the United States. My husband worked and I was a housewife, at home raising my children. Unfortunately, my husband easily fell in love, he liked to drink, and he spent a great deal of money. He fell in love and I divorced. My poor husband killed himself with a much younger woman.

I have been in this country many years. I came in 1984. From the Dominican Republic I went to Puerto Rico, and there I got a job and eventually came here. I arrived here divorced and went to work for the Hilton Hotel chain and, when my husband died at almost seventy years old in Santo Domingo, I brought my children here. My beloved sister, who was already established here, did all of the paperwork and when we all arrived, ready to work and repay our debt, she refused anything in return. I went forward in order to obtain my benefits. I took and passed my citizenship exam and secured my benefits and my title as a U.S. citizen. I stayed here with my children, two are still here, they are grown now and with their own families. Every year they all come to see me. My sister also lives in Jamaica Plain. Thank God I have all of my sisters here. The most important thing I have learned from my family is about the importance of unity, and we are all very united. And that is how we lived here.

The funniest thing that happened to me, its now been six or seven years, was that I was robbed and left without my purse, keys, money, or my documentation and I had to walk home. I had to laugh because sometimes when something bad happens, you have to laugh at the absurdities that happen in life. Without provocation or explanation, we pass through a distinct experience. Here, like in any other country, situations present themselves.

I need very little now to be happy. My favorite season is the summer because one enjoys themselves going out, walking, going to the park, enjoying a lake or a beach, or picking apples in an apple farm. Here there are many distractions. I love Mexican music, like the song *A Mi Manera*, by Vincente Fernandez. I love the music and works of artists. And I love the color green, like summer vegetables.