

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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Gina Mateo (Español)

Entrevistada por Patricia Mata y Karina Rosario

“Nací el 9 de septiembre 1933 en un pueblo de Santo Domingo llamado Meva en la República Dominicana. Voy a cumplir setenta-cuatro años, me dicen que soy muy joven todavía! Me crié en un pueblecito pequeño, bonito, somos una gente bien unida, compartía mucho con mis amistades cuando era niña. Como éramos un pueblo pequeño, obligado éramos muy unidos, dábamos a quien lo necesitaba. Celebramos las fiestas patronales en el Agosto 24. Entonces nos levantábamos bien temprano para ver toda a la gente que venía de otros pueblos en caballo, bien vestidos, a ver todo lo que pasaba. Los festivales son muy bien bonitos. Compartíamos todos los pasos de vida y juntos celebramos las bodas, los festivales, cumpleaños, quinceañeras y bautismos.

Me crié con mi mamá, mi papá y mis hermanos- tres hembras y tres varones. El mayor de mis hermanos se llamaba Manuel, el segundo José, el tercero llamaba Tulio, la cuarta era Violeta y de cariño nos decíamos Prenda, la otra se llamaba Alminda, y después yo, la más chiquita. Mi mamá se quedaba en la casa mientras mi papá salía a trabajar. Mi papá era agricultor en el campo. Él sembraba y cosechaba: plátanos, arroz, y habichuelas. De mis hermanos, el primero y el segundo se murieron entonces cuatros se quedan vivos, y somos muy unidos aunque se quedaron en el país. Pero voy a visitarlos todos los años. El primero se murió de un dolor y el otro se murió de un úlcere del estómago. De mis hermanos aprendí la importancia de ser muy unidos, de compartir mucho con ellos, cualquier cosa que necesitaba uno del otro, siempre estaré presente. Yo estoy aquí pero siempre vivo llamándolos. Gracias a la tecnología siempre estamos en contacto, hablando por teléfono, preguntando de los demás.

Iba poquito a la escuela, no tuve mucha escuela, hice como el cuarto grado. Pero de lo poco que hice, le saqué mucho provecho. Me gustaban las matemáticas mucho. La situación fue que nosotros éramos demasiado pobres para ir a la escuela, no teníamos dinero y uno tiene que tener ciertas cosas para asistir a la escuela. Empecé a trabajar desde chiquita como a los doce o trece años. Yo ayudaba a la gente en la casa.

Cuando era chiquita me gustaba mucho la costura, revisar las revistas, jugar pelota, y montar bicicleta. A mí me encantaba mucho jugar con mis compañeritas, mis amiguitas. Ayudaba a mi mamá en la casa a limpiar. Por las mañanas ayudaba en las casas y por la tarde salía a jugar. Tenía unas amigas que se llamaban Norma, Nina y mi mejor amiga Cuca. Cuando voy a mi pueblo sigo viéndola todavía. Eran muy buenas nos compartíamos, jugábamos con muñecas, salíamos a los parques juntas, donde todos los chicos y chicas salieron y ahí podíamos hablar de los enamorados. Muchos amores empezaron en los parques. Con las mismas compañeras salía a las fiestas. Cuando reuníamos todos juntos en las tardes, chicos y chicas, jugábamos

pelotas juntas, un juego sano.

A los dieciséis años salí de Meva a trabajar en la capital de Santo Domingo donde yo trabajaba para mi padrino y su familia, una gente bien conocida por mi propia familia. Yo atendí a su niña en su casa, una niña cuidando a otra niña. De ahí me trasladé a otro pueblo, Perenales, y después regrese a la capital de nuevo. Y ahí me case y me quede estable. Conocí a mi marido, Isacc Mercedes, en mi pueblo y el me siguió. Nos enamoramos desde chiquitos y el me busco en Pernaes y hasta la capital. Cuando estaba en el pueblo el me llamo y me dijo “yo estoy aquí” y yo me fui a verme con el. Me acuerdo muy bien porque el es con quien comparto mi vida. Tuve mi primer hijo con mi esposo en Pernaes. Ahí, como mi cuñado era medico, comencé a trabajar enfermería. Aprendí mucho: sabía como poner una inyección, sacar sangre, tomar la presión, las cosas básicas, y he sacado mucho provecho de este aprendizaje. Después de varios años yo tuve los demás de mis hijos. Tengo cuatro hijos. Llevamos como cincuenta dos años de matrimonio.

Después de grande, cuando ya tenía mis hijos, me gustaban los negocios. Yo compraba y vendía ropa y si yo tenía pesos y tú lo necesitabas pues yo le prestaba y tú me dabas los beneficios. Me convertí en una mujer de negocios: vendía ropa, prestaba, viajaba, salía de mi país a otros países, a Curasao, Cuba, Haití y otros lugares, regresaba a mi país, vendía el comercio que compraba. Iba y regresaba a mi país de nuevo y así hice mi cantidad de dinero y me compre mi casa porque antes no la tenía. Después me mude y me quede en Puerto Rico por siete años, en San Juan, y de ahí iba para acá. Primero yo me fui a Puerto Rico sola y mi esposo se quedo en nuestro país. Después el se fue porque su mama y su papa hicieron su residencia. Después el fue a Nueva York donde estaba su hermana. Yo me quedaba en Puerto Rico con mi hija y el se reunió con nosotras. Mi marido trabajaba como un ingeniero de topografía, diseñando tierra. En Puerto Rico yo trabaje muchísimo y gané muy bien. Yo trabajaba en la casa de un abogado y su esposa haciendo lo que hay que hacer de la casa y cuidándolas tres niñas de el. Deje mis negocios y me dedique al cuido de la casa y de las hijas.

En el año 1969, cuando vine por acá de PR tuve un incidente espantoso en el avión. Nunca he olvidado eso. Cuanto miedo me dio esta vez, bendito Dios! Yo venia con mi nieto y el era pequeñito como de cuatro años, estuvimos en el aire y el avión temblaba violentamente tenia tanto miedo que nos estrellemos.

Ahora paso mi jubilación con mi esposo, escuchando mi música favorita de mi país: la rumba, la salsa, la bachata y también la música Mexicana como Cristian Castro. Me encanta el verde de cotorras, de la vegetación, y el color que devuelve esperanza. A mi me gusta ver los programas de televisión como *Cristina* y *Don Francisco Presenta*, no me gusta las novelas pero las veo en vez en cuando.

También me gusta ver los deportes con mi esposo, especialmente la pelota, me emociono con la pelota.

Admiro y quiero mucho a mi familia: mi mama, mi papa, mis hijos, mis hermanos. Todos mis hijos están aquí y mis nietos nacieron aquí. Aunque mis nietos han nacido aquí, no pueden perder su lengua, tienen que estar a tanto de su cultura y su lengua, no se puede perder.

Yo cumplí con todos mis deseos. Venir a este país fue un deseo que quise mucho y lo cumplí. El día mas feliz que me acuerdo es cuando por fin conseguí la visa. Yo lo había intentado muchas veces y yo decía ‘tengo que conseguirla porque yo quiero ir a los Estados Unidos, yo quiero pasar por esa puerta grande, legalmente. Cada día le doy gracias a Dios por toda la fortuna que he tenido, por haber podido cumplir con mis deseos con mi propio esfuerzo y sudor y tener un matrimonio tan fuerte y feliz.’”

Gina Mateo (English)

Interviewed by Patricia Mata and Karina Rosario

“I was born the 9th of September in 1933 in a village close to Santo Domingo called Meva in the Dominican Republic. I will be seventy-four years old, and they tell me I am still very young! I was raised in a beautiful and tiny village, we were a very united people, and I shared a great deal with my childhood friendships. Since we were a small village, we were very united; we gave to whoever was in need. We celebrated the festivals of the Patron Saints together. We would get up early in the morning to see all of the people who would come from far-away towns on horses, well dressed, and I would watch all that occurred. The festivals were very beautiful times. We celebrated all of life’s rites of passage together: weddings, festivals, birthdays, quinceñeras, and baptisms.

I was raised with my mother and father, and brothers and sisters- three brothers and three sisters. My mother worked in the home while my father worked in agriculture in the fields. He planted and harvested crops like platanos, rice, and beans. The oldest of my brothers was called Manuel, the second Jose, the third Tulio, the fourth was Violeta, we gave her the nickname Prenda, the other was named Alminda, and then I was the youngest. The first and the second died and we are four now. The first died of pain and the second of a stomach ulcer. We are very close still even though they live in the Dominican Republic. I go to visit every year. From my brothers and sisters I learned the importance of being united, about sharing with each other, whatever one needed of the other, we were always there for one another. Though I’m living here I live my life calling them. Thanks to technology we are always in contact, talking on the phone, asking them about everything that is going on.

I went to school very little; I finished up to the fourth grade. I liked math very much. The situation was that we were very poor to go to school, we didn't have enough resources to go to school, and we didn't have enough money for school supplies. I began to work when I was very young, at twelve or thirteen years old. I helped people in their homes with house work.

When I was little I liked to sew, flip through magazines, play baseball and ride bicycles. I loved to play with my companions. I would help my mother clean. In the mornings I would help around the house and in the afternoons I would go out to play. My best girlfriends were Norma, Nina, and my best friend Cuca. When I am in my village I spend time with her still. They were very good people and we shared allot. We would play with dolls, go to the parks together where we could go and talk about boys and love. Many great loves began in the parks. With the same girlfriends I would go to parties. When we would all meet up in the afternoons, girls and boys, we would play baseball together, a healthy game.

When I was sixteen years old I left Meva to work in the capital of Santo Domingo where I was employed by my Godfather and his family taking care of his daughter. I was a little girl taking care of a little girl. From there I moved to another town called Pinales, and later I would return to the capital once more. There I was married and led a stable life. I knew my husband from my village, there we fell in love. When I left he followed me and one day he called and said "I am here" and I went straight away to see him. I remember very well because he is who I share my life with today. I had my first child in Pinales. There my brother-in-law was a doctor and there I began to work in nursing. I learned a great deal. I knew how to inject, take blood pressure and blood, basic things, but I have taken advantage of all of my learning there throughout my life. Over the course of several years I had my other children. I have four children all together and I have been married for fifty-two years.

When I was grown, and I already had my children, I fell in love with business. I bought and sold clothes, and if I had money, and you needed it, I would lend it, and be paid back with interest. I transformed myself into a business woman: selling clothes, lending, traveling from one country to the other— to Curacao, Haiti, Cuba and other places— to buy my merchandise, return to my country and sell my wares. I would go and come back and that is how I made a good quantity of money in order to buy the home I did not have before. Later I moved and stayed in Puerto Rico for seven years, in San Juan, and then from there I would come here, to Boston. First I went to Puerto Rico alone while my husband stayed in my country. Then he left once his father and mother gained their residency. Then he went to New York where his sister was living. Afterwards he reunited with us in Puerto Rico where my daughter and I were living. My husband works as a landscape

architect, designing and shaping the earth. In Puerto Rico I worked a great deal and earned good money. I left my businesses and went to work in the home of a lawyer with his wife and three daughters, doing all of the things that need to be done in the home and caring for the children.

En 1969 when I came here from Puerto Rico, I had a scary incident on a plane. I will never forget it. Dear God how fearful was I! I was coming with my grandson, he was tiny, about four years old, and we were in the air when the plane began to tremble and shake violently. I was so scared we would crash!

Now I spend my time with my husband, enjoying our retirement and our family life. My favorite music is the music of my country: *rumba*, *bachata*, *salsa* and also Mexican music, like Christian Castro. I love the parrot green, the color of the vegetation and the color of hope returned. I pass the time watching some television, like *Cristina* and *Don Francisco Presenta*. I don't much like soap operas but I watch them once in a while. I love to watch sports with my husband, especially baseball; I get so excited when it is baseball season.

I love and admire my family very much: my mother, my father, my children and my grand children. All of my grandchildren were born here. Though they were all born here, they shouldn't lose their language or their culture, one should never lose those things.

I have always accomplished whatever I wanted. To come here was the desire I most wanted to fulfill and I accomplished it! The happiest day I can remember was the day I finally obtained my visa. I had tried to get it many times and I would say "I have to get it because I want to go to the United States; I want to pass through that Great Door, legally." Each day I give thanks to God for all of the good fortune I have had, for having been able to accomplish my dreams with own effort, sweat and hard-work. I thank God for the strong and happy marriage I have enjoyed all of these years."