

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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Gertrudys Recarey (Español) ***Entrevistada por Bielka Liriano***

“Nací en un pueblecito pobrecito, una aldea aislada, en el campo de la República Dominicana, en el año de 1949. A pesar de la vida dura que nos enfrentaba en el campo, uno tenía cierto grado de libertad, de comunión con la naturaleza que era limpia y bella. Uno podía montar caballos, bañarse en el río, escalar un árbol para recoger fruta que hoy día uno tiene que comprar en un mercado. Antes no había luz, no había agua pero la civilización era unida y tranquila. Uno hacía para el bien del otro. Los niños jugaban donde querían y la gente no estaba trancada, estábamos libres como las brizas de la tarde.

Tuve muchos hermanos: Florinda, Bernardo, Gerundia, Carmen, Pedro y Ana... Me crié en un grupo familiar de nueve hermanos y compartíamos bien, siempre respetando los lazos de sangre que nos unían. Conocí el fantasma de la muerte cuando mi abuelo se murió en mi juventud, Gracias a Dios hoy día hay mucha medicina, mucha sabiduría que nos puede ayudar contra el machete de la muerte.

En mi juventud no tuve muchos juguetes ni ropa y tampoco había tiempo para jugar tanto. Como era la mayor de todos, me tocaba a mí a ayudar a mi mamá con la crianza de mis hermanos. Yo era como la segunda madre, yo jugaba el papel de madre a mis hermanitos más chiquitos. Hasta hoy sigo siendo como una mamá para ellos: les doy consejos, me obedecen y siempre cuentan conmigo. Vivíamos bien unidos.

Para llegar a la escuela temprano tuve que irme como a las cinco de la mañana a pies. Soñaba de ser maestra o pelotera. Siempre me he gustado la escuela y mi materia favorita era la historia pero solamente asistí a la escuela hasta el quinto grado y nada más. La otra escuela se quedaba en el pueblo tan lejos del campo que necesitaba un “ride” y por eso no podía más. Entonces cumplí el quinto y tuve que dejar la otra escuela que tenía hasta el octavo grado, que fue el último que hacían en aquellos tiempos, entonces era muy lejos para mí. Pero aprendí muchas cosas de agricultura y de la cosecha. Recuerdo mi primera maestra muy bien y yo la quería y ella me quería a mí como si yo fuese su propia hija. Toda mi vida la visitaba hasta que se murió el año pasado.

Casi toda mi vida, también en mi juventud, siempre era lo mismo. Tuve que recoger la cosecha y ocuparme de los oficios de la casa, como lavar, planchar... No tuve muchos amigos. Nunca he tenido problemas con nadie. Siempre estaba con mis hermanos, o compartía con mis vecinos. En el tiempo que me crié yo, no había tantas diversiones como hoy. En el campo no había tiempo de reposo porque era una rutina fija: hay que lavar, planchar, cuidar mi familia... Solamente cantábamos y

jugábamos pelota. Mis hermanos y yo siempre estábamos cantando y gozando. Los papas no aprobaban que saliéramos con nadie. A veces nos reuníamos en la casa de una amiga y nos sentábamos en la sala pero siempre debajo de la supervisión de un familiar. Nunca salíamos de noche ni nada de eso. En este tiempo me quede cuidando la casa y nada más. Los sábados y domingos salíamos de la casa, andábamos con la familia, pero regresábamos a la casa al anochecer porque no había luz. Hacíamos unos palitos con un tipo de madera especial que se prendía y eso alumbraba nuestro camino.

Como adulta siguió siendo igual. Cuando uno se crece ayudando, y trabajando uno se queda igual. Allá cuando vivía en el campo trabajaba en el campo y recogía la cosecha de café, de cacao, sembraba y después cuando vine a Puerto Rico trabajaba en casa de familia. Siempre no me daba miedo a nada, a la noche dormía sin miedo. Cuando llegue a Puerto Rico no sabía ni como pronunciar muchas palabras, por ejemplo no podía pronunciar comidas como el “hamburger.” Admiro a mis hermanos y a mis hijos, como siempre he dicho a mi familia, para mis todos son iguales. Siempre he querido la música como el merengue, y la música típica. Pero las canciones de mi juventud ya son olvidadas y ahora que soy mayorcita me encanta cantar las canciones de la iglesia. Paso mi tiempo con mis programas de televisión como mi favorito, *Don Francisco Presenta*, también me gusta cosas que son educativas, *Primer Impacto* o las noticias, no me gustan las novelas. Prefiero los veranos porque en el verano hay más vida, en el invierno no puedo pasar afuera o nada.

Si pudiera ir para atrás a cambiar algo de mi vida, haría todo lo mismo. Ahora mi meta sería aprender inglés. Yo siempre he sido una persona alegre, siempre me he gustado pasar tiempo con mi familia, haciendo chistes y riéndonos juntos. La vida como así la pasamos. El consejo más bonito que tengo, que he aprendido de la lectura y de la vida, es que uno tenga temor de Dios y ama a los demás. Cuando uno ama y tiene temor de Dios pues la vida no se complica tanto.

Pasamos la vida trabajando, para tener muchas cosas y a veces perdemos el enfoque- nuestros hijos. Los papas siempre estamos trabajando para darlo mejor a nuestros hijos sin darnos cuenta de que el tiempo repleto de amor vale mucho más que cualquier cantidad de dinero. Pero también hay que pagar para cuidar. Cada segundo es un regalo y tenemos que valorar cada instante que nos da. Ahora quiero y tengo el básico del necesario. Cuando uno se involucre tanto en la adquisición de lo material, que no se necesita, es como se hubiera convertido en un drogadicto, todo en moderado.

Uno debe tratar de superarse y vivir la vida con dignidad, siempre he dicho que lo único que supera la vida es el amor. Cuando amamos podemos vivir sanamente.

Siempre cuando creamos que Dios nos ha dejado nos quedamos en brazos de El. Entonces mientras tenemos confianza en ese amor podemos superar todo.”

Gertrudys Recarey (English)
Interviewed by Bielka Liriano

“I was born in 1949 in a poor village, isolated in the country of the Dominican Republic. Apart from the difficult life we faced in the country we had a measure of liberty, of communion with a clean and beautiful Mother Nature. You could ride horses; bathe in the rivers, climb trees to find the finest fruits that today you must buy in the market. Before there was no electricity, no running water, but the civilization was tranquil and united. One did good things for the other, without asking anything in return. Children played where they wanted and the people were not barred in their homes, we were as free as the afternoon breezes.

I had many brothers and sisters: Florinda, Bernardo, Gerundia, Carmen, Pedro y Ana. I was raised within a family of nine siblings and we always shared and respected the familial ties that unite us. I first knew the specter of death when my grandfather died in my youth. Thank God there is much more medicine and knowledge today that can help us survive death’s machete.

In my youth, I didn’t have many toys or clothes, nor was there time to play very much. Because I was the oldest, I was the one to help my mother with raising my siblings. I am like a second mother; I played the role of mother. Today, I continue to be like a mother for my brothers and sisters: I give them advice, they obey me, and they know they can always count on me. We lived in unity.

To arrive to school early I had to leave at five in the morning on foot. I dreamed of being a teacher or better yet a baseball player. I always liked school and my favorite subject was history, but I only went to the fifth grade, no more. The other school was very far away in the village, and I lived in the country, and I needed a ride to cross the mountain to get there. So, I completed fifth grade and I had to leave the other school which educated up until the eighth grade, which in those times was the last grade. It was too far for me to go. But I learned many things about agriculture and harvesting. I remember my first teacher very well. I loved her and she loved me as if I were her own daughter. All of my life I have visited her until her death last year.

In my youth, as in the rest of my life, it was always the same. I had to plant and harvest in the fields and busy myself with the household work such as washing, ironing... I did not have many friends and I have never had difficulties with anyone. I was always with my brothers and sisters or my neighbors. In the time in which I

was raised there were not so many distractions and diversions like there are today. In the country there was no time to rest, there was a fixed routine: you have to wash, take care of the family... We only sang and played baseball. My siblings and I were always singing, having fun or playing baseball. Sometimes we would get together at a friend's house, in the living room, but always under supervision. We never went out at night or anything like that. In those times I had to stay inside, taking care of the household. Saturdays and Sundays we would leave the house with family, but we would return at sundown because there was no light. We used to make sticks, with a special kind of wood that would ignite, and that is how we would light our way home.

As an adult I stayed the same. When one is raised working and helping then one remains a worker and a helper. Back then when I lived in the country, I worked in the country, and I would plant and then pick coffee, cacao... Later, when I arrived in Puerto Rico I worked in the homes of families. . Nothing has ever made me fearful, I always slept without fear. When I came to Puerto Rico I did not know and could not pronounce many words, especially of foods like "hamburger."

I admire my siblings and my children. Like I have always said, for me everyone is the same. I have always loved music like *meringue* and the typical music of our country. But now the songs of my youth are forgotten and now that I am older I love to sing church hymns. I pass the time watching television programs like *Don Francisco Presenta* and I also like educational programming like *Primer Impacto* or the nightly news. I don't like soap operas. I prefer the summers because in the summer there is more life, and in the winter one can not even go outside.

If I could go back in time and change something about my life I would do everything the same. I have always been a happy person, I have always enjoyed being with my family, making jokes, laughing together. That is how life passes. The most important advice I have to give is to fear God and love all. When one loves and has fear of God, then life doesn't become so complicated.

We spend our lives working, to have many things and sometimes we lose focus- our children. Parents are always working to provide the best for our children without considering that time filled with love is more valuable than whatever amount of money. But, we also have to pay in order to take care. Each second is a gift and we have to value each instant we are given. Now, I need and have only the basics. When one becomes too involved in the acquisition of material things that are not needed, it is as if one has become a drug addict- everything in moderation.

When must strive to supersede and live life with dignity. As I have always said, the only thing that supersedes life is love. When we love we can live freely, healthily.

Whenever we feel that God has abandoned us, we are in His arms. And as long as we have faith we can overcome anything.”