

A TEI Project

# Interview of Cheryl Noralez

## Table of contents

1. Transcript
  - 1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE March 20, 2009
  - 1.2. TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE MARCH 28, 2009
  - 1.3. TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE JUNE 6, 2009

## 1. Transcript

### ***1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE March 20, 2009***

*GLORIA*

I would like to thank Cheryl Noralez for this interview. Hi, Cheryl, how are you?

*CHERYL*

Hi, Gloria. I'm fine, thank you.

*GLORIA*

Well, I wanted to start doing this interview by asking you a little bit about where you were born, and if you could tell me a little bit about that please, what it's like, if you could describe it.

*CHERYL*

Okay. I was born in Belize. I won't tell you what year. [Laughs]

*GLORIA*

Okay, good. I won't tell you either.

*CHERYL*

But I was born in Belize. I was in Punta Gorda, Belize. I was there until I was nine months old. My parents migrated here to the United States, and when they left I went with my maternal grandmother to Seine Bight. This is another little village in Belize, and I lived there from nine months old until four years old, you know, and what I remember about Seine Bight is the sand, the white sand and being in the sand and, you know, just playing and just having fun, you know, being a kid out there. You didn't have to worry about anything. It was real beautiful. That's what I remember, is the white

sand and going through the jungles to go fishing and go hunting with my grandmother, going to the farm and stuff. I remember that.

*GLORIA*

What are your parents' names? I don't know. Are they still alive?

*CHERYL*

My father is deceased. He passed away twelve years ago. His name was John Winston Noralez, and my mother's name is Elluteria Thomas.

*GLORIA*

And do you have siblings?

*CHERYL*

Yes, I have. My oldest sister is Claudette Noralez. I have my other sister, second to eldest, Beulah Noralez, Jessica Noralez, and I have a brother who passed away when he was 17, Claude Noralez.

*GLORIA*

Wow.

*CHERYL*

Yeah.

*GLORIA*

And where do they live? Are they here?

*CHERYL*

They live here in the United States, uh-hmm [affirmative].

*GLORIA*

So you were nine months old...

*CHERYL*

Uh-hmm, when my parents migrated.

*GLORIA*

...when your parents migrated to the United States, and subsequently...

*CHERYL*

I lived with my grandmother and my aunt from my mother's side. They raised me up and—

*GLORIA*

Here, in LA.

*CHERYL*

No, in Belize.

*GLORIA*

In Belize.

*CHERYL*

Uh-hmm [affirmative], in Belize, uh-hmm.

*GLORIA*

Okay. So you were in Belize until...?

*CHERYL*

Four years.

*GLORIA*

Four years, okay.

CHERYL

And I came here when I was four.

GLORIA

And do you remember that?

CHERYL

I do remember! I remember a lot of stuff that a lot of people wouldn't think I remember, but I do remember a lot of stuff in Belize. I remember the schoolyard that my sisters went to school. It's so amazing. When I went back to Belize in, in... we went back with my parents in '87, and then I went back as an adult in 1996, and I went to the village that I was raised up, and as soon as I went there I knew where the school was at. It was just as soon as I got there—

GLORIA

Really?

CHERYL

—I remembered where. And it was like, "that's my grandmother's house! That's— yeah, over there is where the"— I knew where everything was. You know, it was like I never left it. It was like as soon as I got there, it's just like, wow, yeah, that's where it's at. I knew, I remembered.

GLORIA

Wow, that's impressive.

CHERYL

Yeah, and I remember I would tell my mother. Growing up I was like, yeah, I remember the school when we used to go to my grandmother's house. We would go this way. I remember the cemetery. My mom's like, "How do you remember that?" But I missed it so much. I guess that's like... what I remember as a child, like the best childhood was just being back home, because when you're here, you know, of course, you can't go to the beach. The beach is not in your backyard here. Your playground is the parks that are here, but back home we had a whole beach and we had like a whole forest—

GLORIA

[inaudible] An entire playground.

CHERYL

—as our playground, you know, so yeah.

GLORIA

Can you describe a little bit? What was your grandmother's house like?

CHERYL

My grandmother's house was a little house. It's wasn't nothing big. It wasn't, you know, nothing fancy, but it was just home, a comfortable place. It was, you know, to me, you know, it was just... it had everything there. It always had the smell of fresh baked bread, you know, and just coconut milk and just all that good stuff. [Laughs] It's just... oh, my goodness! The mango, the plátanos. She used to make like a atole out of plátanos. It was

like a, like a porridge, sweet, to make the sweet plantains, smash it and nutmeg and brown sugar, and that's what we would have—

GLORIA

Oh, that sounds goods.

CHERYL

—in the morning time and I just remember just that smell of it, just --(

GLORIA

[Did you add?] canela to that?

CHERYL

[Laughs]

GLORIA

It's good.

CHERYL

That's what I remember. I remember just, just good stuff. I remember the, you know, the powdered milk. It was called Klim. You know, in, in, I know it's throughout Central America, but it was a powdered milk. You would mix it with the water, and you would drink it and they would give it to the babies, but I remember loving that—

GLORIA

Oh, yeah, me, too, [inaudible]

CHERYL

—until I was four! [Laughs] Yeah, so I remember all that stuff and I was only four when I came here, but I remember all that stuff.

GLORIA

Wow. So you grew up with your maternal grandmother.

CHERYL

Uh-hmm, uh-hmm [affirmative].

GLORIA

And do you remember what languages were spoken at home?

CHERYL

Well, when I remember my grandmother speaking, I just remember Garifuna. I don't remember her speaking English at all, you know, and I don't remember myself speaking English until coming to this country, you know, so... and then, coming here, all I recall ever speaking coming here is English, so I don't, I don't understand that portion of my life, but I do remember, you know, communicating with my grandmother it was all in Garifuna.

GLORIA

Do you remember when you first came to this country what it was like, and can you tell me a little bit more of that story, like how did you get here and what was that trip like?

CHERYL

I remember my uncle, my father's brother, played a part in bringing us over here. You know, they, they brought us here, and I don't remember the

whole journey and everything, but I remember the very first day when we came here. I think it was... it was around November or December, a holiday season or something, but I remember when we arrived, my parents had a house full of all of their friends there, you know, and they had a party welcoming me and my sisters and everything, and they had gifts for us. The first toy that I had was a telephone that had wheels on there, and it had the numbers in colors, and it squeaked when you rolled it. I remember that and it was when you dialed a number it was like a little bling, bling, like a little ring. I remember my first toy, and then I also remember that day. I guess the American thing to do was to get the girls' ears pierced, so I got my ears pierced the first day that I came here to the United States of America.

*GLORIA*

Really? Wow.

*CHERYL*

My aunt, my aunt did it and it was so... it was painful because they did it—

*GLORIA*

They did it with a needle.

*CHERYL*

—with the needle.

*GLORIA*

Oh, my god.

*CHERYL*

The old-fashioned way. They iced it. They put the, the, the... what is it? The alcohol on there and then they burnt the needle and [makes searing noise]. So I remember that! [Laughs] Our first day here, I remember that, and then they put the straw through the ear and everything like that. So I remember my very first day in the United States, you know? Joyous and painful at the same time. [Laughs]

*GLORIA*

So your parents were here already.

*CHERYL*

Uh-hmm [affirmative]. They came here to settle to, you know, prepare for us to come.

*GLORIA*

And did you... what was your trip like? Because I know for a lot of Central Americans they go through Mexico to get here [inaudible]

*CHERYL*

That portion I don't remember. I, I don't remember the trip here. I just remember getting here, you know? With that I can't even remember if we took the road or if we flew. I just remember being here.

*GLORIA*

Some people walk!

*CHERYL*

Yeah! Yeah, I don't remember. I would have to ask my mother. You know, did we get here by plane or fly or walk? Whatever, but I do remember getting here! [Laughs] It was like one day we were in Belize, in my grandmother's yard, and the next minute we were here.

*GLORIA*

So your grandmother stayed back home?

*CHERYL*

Uh-hmm, she stayed back home, and she, you know, when [we] got older, she would come and visit like once a year until she passed away. She passed away when I was about eight years old.

*GLORIA*

Do you know what made your parents take this trip? Did they know people here?

*CHERYL*

They knew people here. They had family here. My father's brother was here, and my mother's brother and other siblings were here, you know, so my, my mother tells me that they came here because they wanted something better for us. They wanted a better future for us, you know, and also my, they knew with me I was born with a hearing deficit, so that was one of the reasons that they wanted me to come here, so they could take care of my hearing impairment, you know, when I was younger.

*GLORIA*

And when did you start going to school? Do you remember that? Was it right away or...?

*CHERYL*

It was right away. I went to a nursery school. It was a Christian nursery school, and I remember that, again, with food. [Laughs] We used to have oatmeal and Graham crackers crumbled in the oatmeal, so I remember that. I remember taking naps. I remember it being a pink building, so that was really fun.

*GLORIA*

Do you remember anything about the difference between being around, like, American kids and being around kids from Belize?

*CHERYL*

When I came here there was a language barrier, and a lot of that had to do with... I had a horrible speech impediment because of my hearing, and everything like that, and I had to go through speech therapy for quite a few years, you know, to get through the whole speech impediment and everything like that, so in Belize it wasn't, I guess, because I was raised up there, people knew of my speech impediment. It wasn't a big deal with them. I wasn't made fun of that, but coming here, you know, it was like something that stood out, and there was a lot of, you know, children could be a cruel thing and they, you know, teased about the speech impediment a lot, and, you know, that kind of made me a little bit insecure about, you

know, talking, and, you know, I became, you know, really quiet and shy and everything like that because, you know, back home I thought I was normal, but here I found out that it was a disability so... [Laughs] Because I think back home they don't, you know, focus too much on people's disability like how they do here, you know, and like I said, in Belize I thought I was normal, you know, but here I was categorized as disabled, you know, and having to be fixed in some way, you know, but when I was in Belize there was, you know, nothing to be fixed. I was just who I was and people accepted me for that, you know. So that was the difference in that, growing up here.

*GLORIA*

Were you able to make friends right away and was it... you know, since there was a language barrier, how did you work that out, if you recall?

*CHERYL*

My closest association to anybody was the Hispanic culture, because a lot of the, the, the food that we ate— again, with food [Laughs]—a lot of the food...

*GLORIA*

It's a motif here.

*CHERYL*

Yes! A lot of the food that we ate was similar. A lot of the, the traditions and things like that were very similar, the way we were raised up, you know, with our grandparents, and a lot of us had the same history, where, with our parents, you know, leaving us home with our, with our aunts or whoever, other relatives, and coming here, so that was something that I was able to relate with, you know, with Hispanic culture compared to, I'd say, the African-American culture because, you know, number one, they couldn't understand that I was a black person and I wasn't from the United States, you know, or way to... have this weird accent from, you know, but compared to the Hispanic culture, we had that in common, the accent, you know, and the whole, you know, history and the background of getting to this country.

*GLORIA*

What a story

*CHERYL*

Yes! [mutual laughter]

*GLORIA*

And once you moved out of the elementary school stage, was there a shift in terms of how you related to others, to teachers? You know, you had a handle of the language. Was there a shift?

*CHERYL*

[inaudible] I mean, I've... I've always been more around people from different cultures. I mean, I find other cultures fascinating, you know, not necessarily the, you know, Western culture, American culture. You know, I find other ethnicities more interesting. I like to hear where people come

from, so I think I've been geared more to be around other people that have, like, a different language, a different culture, because I love to learn about different cultures. So that's been, you know, the association that I've been around, a multinational, multicultural surrounding.

*GLORIA*

Your parents are both from Belize?

*CHERYL*

Uh-huh [affirmative]. My, my parents are both from Belize. My father, his... his mother is from Guatemala, so we have some other roots in Guatemala, and my mother also has relatives from Honduras, so we have roots from there, too.

*GLORIA*

Yeah, it's very common I found. A lot of Central Americans, like myself, have different family in different nations, so...

*CHERYL*

Yes!

*GLORIA*

It's really interesting. I don't think it happens with other groups. for some reason.

*CHERYL*

No, no, we were all over the place. We, you know, colonized them. [Laughs] They're all Central America. Yeah, so it's very unique to have, you know, family, close family members, that are just like, yes, I have my aunt in, in Honduras, and I have my aunt in Guatemala, and when I went back to visit it was, like, so amazing. The first time I went to Guatemala, and my aunt was telling me the story, "You were almost born here in Guatemala because if your mother was seven or eight months pregnant, you would've been a Guatemalan! But you know what? No matter what you're a Guatemalan!" [Mutual laughter]

*GLORIA*

I get that, too. It's funny, yeah.

*CHERYL*

And to see relative pictures, my pictures, my father's pictures right there and to just see the close family connection, you know, I, I never say that I'm not a Guatemalan or I'm not a Honduran. I always say I'm all, I'm from everywhere, you know?

*GLORIA*

Yeah, that's great.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, I have a little bit of everything.

*GLORIA*

Yeah, I feel the same way, actually. So what high school did you go to?

*CHERYL*



I went to, I went to two high schools. I went to Lincoln High School in South—what is it? East LA.

GLORIA

East LA.

CHERYL

Multnomah Drive. Yeah, and I graduated from the Los Angeles Technical High School, and I went to college in Tacoma, Washington.

GLORIA

Really? How did you end up there? You have to tell me that story.

CHERYL

Okay, yeah, that was from my first husband. We migrated over there to... relocated to Tacoma, Washington, and I went to school there, just to take some general education classes and everything like that, and I —

GLORIA

Do you have family there?

CHERYL

No. We just, you know, picked up and moved over there. [Laughs]

GLORIA

How did you choose Tacoma, Washington?

CHERYL

It was just, you know, he—and you know what? He went there through Job Corps or something there, and he remembered having a good time when he was there. When we got married he was like, “You know what? I was planning to move out here,” so we moved out there, and I was like, “okay.” [Laughs] So we moved out there, and it was really nice.

GLORIA

Oh, good. How long did you live there?

CHERYL

For about three-and-a-half, four years.

GLORIA

Oh, okay. What was that like? What was that experience like?

CHERYL

It was... it was nice, and kind of depressing at the same time because of the weather. It rains too much.

GLORIA

I’ve heard that.

CHERYL

But it was nice because I loved the greenery.

GLORIA

Yeah, I bet.

CHERYL

So it was really beautiful and odd. Yeah, it’s a love-hate relationship with Tacoma. I loved the —

GLORIA

And what was the... I mean, environment like for you to move from, you know, being in LA to Tacoma? I imagine the sort of ethnic canvas was very different.

*CHERYL*

You know? I never really —

*GLORIA*

You never noticed.

*CHERYL*

I never noticed it. I mean, once I get somewhere it's like—I'm one of those people that I can just... adapt really easily, and I, you know, get along with people, so it was like.... The, the only thing is I remember when we got there, it was not too long ago that we had a major earthquake here in LA, and then I went back. I think within a week they had an earthquake out there! [Laughs]

*GLORIA*

They were following you.

*CHERYL*

And my classmates were like "you brought the earthquake with you!" I was like, "oh, I'm sorry!" Yeah, that, that's one. I remember the earthquake.

*GLORIA*

What did you major in, or what were thinking of majoring in, or did you have a major?

*CHERYL*

Not at that time. I was just, I was just taking classes. At the moment I wasn't really, you know, I wasn't really focused in on exactly what I wanted to major in, but currently, right now, I'm going to school and I'm majoring in Cultural Anthropology.

*GLORIA*

Really? Okay, great.

*CHERYL*

Yeah. So yeah, that's my...

*GLORIA*

Where are you going?

*CHERYL*

I'm going over here at Long Beach City College, and that's what I'm working towards, is my AA in Cultural Anthropology and hopefully transfer, you know, to— I don't know yet [Laughs] I don't know which university I'll transfer to eventually.

*GLORIA*

You can to UCLA. That would be great.

*CHERYL*

Yes, I would love to go to UCLA!

*GLORIA*

Yeah, you should. We definitely need people like you there.

CHERYL

Thank you.

GLORIA

Yeah, and when did you decide to leave Tacoma?

CHERYL

Oh, that was, aum, when me and my ex-husband at the time, we decided to separate, you know, so, and really not even... then. We separated there in Washington and everything, and I stayed behind, but then my father, he ended up getting sick, so I came back over here to be with my mom and everything and help her get through the passing of my dad and everything.

GLORIA

How old were you when he passed away?

CHERYL

I was... how old was I? Twenty-three? About 23 when he passed away, yeah, and, yeah, that was my, my sidekick. [Laughs] My dad was, like, my really, really best friend. He was, like, what... continued to make me aware of my Garifunanness, because growing up he always told me that no matter what, no matter that you're in this country, "remember you're Garifuna first," and he would tell me, remind me [Laughs], you know, "your grandmother was Garifuna, your grandfather was Garifuna, your grandparents before them were Garifuna. I'm Garifuna, your mother is Garifuna, you're a Garifuna. Don't ever forget that no matter where you're at." So it was instilled in me, you know, that being Garifuna was very important and a proud thing for my father, and, in fact, I learned to be very proud to be Garifuna, and when he passed away it was just like... I was just so... I guess... what's the word? I was just so... I wanted to honor him. I wanted to honor him in a way that, you know, he would know that, yes, I'm proud to be who, you know, Garifuna, not just because you told me, but because I know what it was, you know, being... seeing my dad as a Garifuna man. He took care of his family. He did everything that a man is supposed to do, and I remember when I got married my dad was like, "You know what? You never, ever had to beg for anything. You know, you're a proud woman. You're, you know, we've always provided for you, and when you go out there in the world, know that you're a Garifuna woman. You don't ever have to beg for anything. You don't ever have to take anything from any man, because if, if I can't provide it for you, nobody else can. You know, be proud, and you can provide it for yourself. If you can't do it for yourself, your mother and your father are always here to do it for you, to always have a hand for you," but they taught me to be strong and they —

GLORIA

Was that from, you know, from very... from...?

CHERYL

The time that I was little.

GLORIA

Wow.

*CHERYL*

They taught us all to be independent. Education was very important to my parents, and, you know, that was something, you know, it's like you have to be smart. My dad always said, "You can't have two dumb people in the same family. You always have to have an educated person." [Laughs] You know, my dad would say, "You always have to have an educated person and a fool. Two people can't be foolish in the same family!" So he was, like, don't be the fool, be the educated one! But it's good to have both. You know, so he always taught me, you know, little things like that. You know, when I got married, he gave me advice about you always have to treat a man like a man. If you treat a man, like, a man he'll always treat you like a woman. Never treat a man like a child because you didn't get married to child. You got married to a man. You know, so he would always give me advice that at the time you're like, huh? You know, but then later on you're, like, okay. His number one saying: "Before you I was." You know, meaning that you can't pull the wool over my eyes, because everything you thought of doing I've already done. [Laughs]

*GLORIA*

That's true.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, and so, you know, he always had these sayings that it just... it, it helped me, you know, in life, in, in just dealing with everybody. You know. Show me who your friends are and I'll show you who you are. It's like you may not do that, but if people see your friends doing negativity, they'll assume that that's what you're doing, because why would you surround yourself with people that, you know, you're not doing the same thing with. So little things like that that made you kind of think, well, yeah, I don't want people to think that I'm doing that when I'm not doing that, but then if you're with that surrounding, they will, you know, put you in that category of being mischievous or whatever, so if you don't want to have that on, you don't hang around that. Choose your friends; don't let your friends choose you. So all of this, all of this stuff I'm like rattling, but these are the things that I grew up with every day and it helped me, you know, to be a parent, and growing up with my daughter, it, you know, I used to feel like, oh, my god, I sound like my dad! Because the same thing that he was telling me I'm, like, hearing myself tell my daughter and my son, and I'm, like, oh, Twilight Zone! [Laughs]

*GLORIA*

That's great. What did your father do in Belize? Do you remember?

*CHERYL*

My father was a police officer.

*GLORIA*

Okay, and your mother?

*CHERYL*

My mother, she was a stay-at-home mom. Yeah, she raised us, and when she came here she continued her education and now she's... end up doing [Inaudible] she's a... administration in... what is it, at the... what is that called?

*GLORIA*

Administrative Analyst?

*CHERYL*

When you, ah, when people come to the emergency room and they... administration? Do the—register the people in the hospitals and stuff like that. I don't know the job title.

*GLORIA*

So more than a receptionist.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I don't know the, the proper title for that thing, yeah. Yeah, that.

*GLORIA*

Probably Administrative Analyst. We'll leave it...

*CHERYL*

Yeah, something like that.

*GLORIA*

We'll leave it as such.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, but she dedicated her life to taking care of the children, you know. I, I always knew that when I came home from school, my mom was there, you know, food was there, lunch was there. We didn't have to worry about anything, because she was there. I mean, we were fortunate to have that because a lot of people, you know, didn't have that. So, yeah, I was raised up with my mother in the house taking care of all of us and, you know, teaching us how to cook and be young ladies and everything like that. So, yeah, I think we were fortunate to have that.

*GLORIA*

Was she also a very proud Garifuna woman, and did she instill that in you as well?

*CHERYL*

Oh, yes, oh, yes. She taught us that. I mean, she taught us, you know, how to just be independent. That's one thing my mom taught me how to do also, was to be independent, you know, and just, you know. How to take care of ourselves, how to cook and take care of our family, and to, you know, the... in the Garifuna family, the family is so important. It's like the center, you know, so my mom, you know, my father was the provider but my mother was like the center, you know? She took care of us. She made sure that, you know, we were raised up, you know, that she raised us up, you know. Nobody else raised us up but, but my mother. You know, you didn't have to

worry about anybody, any of the young ones, us getting into trouble and mischief because our mother was there to raise us.

*GLORIA*

Yeah, I was reading somewhere that it's supposed to be a matrilineal culture. How does that work in the family?

*CHERYL*

I would... have to say like from.... I have to go back to being in Belize, because I remember—a lot of the stuff that I remember as far as culture took place in Belize when I was kid, as young as I was. I remember the things that my grandmother used to do culturally, you know, in preparing for ceremonies and stuff like that. I remember a lot of the things that she did because I was, like, what they say, her hip and tail? Wherever she went, I went because I was the youngest one. So even though she would, like, talk to her, her peers, her age-range people, whatever they were planning or whatever, I was always there. So I would just sit there and just listen and look and see what they're doing when preparing the food. So a lot of the cultural stuff I got from my grandmother, just a matter of fact of just being there, you know, and everywhere she went, every time they did something when they were preparing for— whether it's a birth, you know, the rituals that they did in preparing for the birth, I saw that, even though at the time I didn't know what they were doing, but I, I saw what they did. It was like you have to do this, you have to do that, and you see it a number of times growing up, the four years that I spent with her, you kind of learn, okay, when somebody's born, that's what they do, that's what they do, that's what they do. You do this, you do that, you do it this way, you do it that way, and you're just looking and everything is just going so fast around you, but then all of that I, I, I absorbed. So I remember a lot of the stuff from my grandmother, and coming here, I used to ask my mother, oh, when I was... I'm like, when my, Ma—because I called her Ma—I'm, like, "They did this. Why did they do that?" And my mother would explain to me, "Oh, they did this because of that." Why did they do that?" So my mother, you know, God bless her soul she was so patient with me, because at—when I learned, I was able to, like, what is—why do they do that? Why do they do this? And she was so patient in answering all the questions, and it's like, well, they did it this way because... they do this because— so she, you know, helped me to develop more of my culture of why they did the things and the understanding of why they did the stuff.

*GLORIA*

So your grandmother was obviously a very important person in your life, not just because she was taking care of you but because she was also transmitting a lot of this knowledge to you.

*CHERYL*

[agreeing sounds].

*GLORIA*

And so do you see yourself as carrying that torch?

*CHERYL*

I think so. Not by choice. You know, it's just, it's just something... it's just part of me, of who I am. You know, I, I don't think I have a choice in, in what I do. It's just a given that it has to be done, and, you know, I'm the one who's doing it [Laughs] and I love it. It's just part of me, part of who I am. You know, I think it's instilled of all of the ancestors that came before me. All of that stuff is still there in me, and I'm learning more every day about myself and about my ancestors.

*GLORIA*

I imagine in high school, or even in college now, most people probably don't know about the Garifuna culture, and in fact probably don't know that there is a sizeable community of Garifuna people, not only in California, but, you know, pretty much all over the country. What do people say to you when you say "I'm Garifuna"? What are those interactions like? I'm curious.

*CHERYL*

The first thing is, like, what?

*GLORIA*

Like what is that?

*CHERYL*

Gary who? What? You're African! I'm, like, no, no. I'm, like, no, and, you know, I explain my history, where I come from, the difference in my history from the African-American history, that we weren't enslaved, that we do have our language. We do have a slightly different history. We, we came here by choice, you know? You know, so I, I try to explain the difference in that, and usually often it's, like, yeah, you're kidding. No, you're making that up, and, you know, I'll give them, like I said, it was like this is how we say, you know, "how are you?" in Garifuna, and I'll tell them, and they're, like, "oh, wow!" and then they think that that's interesting, and, you know, I tell them a little stuff. You know, this is the difference between my culture and another culture, you know, and this is what happened. This is why we're here. This is why we speak the language, and this is why we have the last name, Spanish last name and not English last name. So I explain a lot. It takes a little longer to introduce myself, you know, but, you know, I think it's, it's... it's, you know, worth it to identify myself as who I am and not what people assume I am, you know? It was important for me, even at work, you know, when you fill out black, white—whatever—and I put "other" and I write in "Garifuna". They're, like, what, what is that? And, you know, in the middle of an interview I have to... well, this is who I am, and, you know, I really take pride in my culture, you know?

*GLORIA*

That's great. I'm curious, too, about the kind of alliances that it seems, from the little that I have read, that Garifuna people make with African-

Americans. Particularly in New York, it seems that the Garifuna are much more integrated into the African-American community...?

*CHERYL*

Yeah, I think it's a lot easier for them to integrate, because the first thing most people look at is the skin color, you know, so it's a lot easier to put us in the African-American category, and for people it's a lot safer. You know, they don't want to have to go through the whole, like, self identification and explaining where they come from, you know? But, you know, it's, it's a lot easier and safer for them to identify as that. You know, with me, I mean, I, I really do believe in honoring the ancestors, and I believe that if my ancestor fought, you know, they fought for us to be who we are—Garifuna—to maintain our culture, to maintain our homeland. If they sacrificed their life for us, you know, I owe it to them to recognize myself and identify myself as Garifuna, you know, not as anybody else. It's easier for me to just say I'm black and be done with that, but then, you know, that's a disrespect to the ancestors, and, you know, I wouldn't want to disrespect them. I wouldn't want to disrespect my father or my mother that way, so it's very important for me to say who I am, even though it takes a little bit longer.

*GLORIA*

Yeah, and I think most people want to put you in a little box and say just give me that one word that is you.

*CHERYL*

Yeah.

*GLORIA*

You know, I think it happens to me a lot, too, but I was also—and, you know, this is also coming from academics who have done field work in New York and particularly Honduras, and they talk about how a lot of Garifuna youth, in particular, are much more... I guess feel much more at ease saying, you know, we fit with the African-American community in New York, and talk about the kind of attitude that they perceive from the Mestizo culture in Honduras, that, you know, somehow doesn't sit well with them, so I thought that was interesting and I wanted to ask you if that had been your experience.

*CHERYL*

I know right now— I mean... I say in this day and age, it's more nationalistic. You know, more Garinagu would rather describe themselves as "I'm a Honduran"; "I'm a Guatemalan"; "I'm a Belizean" instead of I'm a Garifuna, you know, because, you know, in the whole, you know, it's easier to be just that one whole, that nationality instead of "I'm a Garifuna" or I'm a whatever; again, with having to explain yourself and wanting to fit in. It's a lot easier to fit into a nationality than it is to fit into a culture. You know, I mean, they're not saying that they're not proud. It's just, you know, easier to just say "oh, yeah, yeah, I'm from, I'm from Honduras. Yeah, I'm a Honduran. Yeah, I'm from Belize; I'm a Belizean," you know, instead of,"



well, yeah, I'm from Belize but I'm Garifuna." You know, it takes more time. Well, what is that, you know, and they don't want to have to explain, you know. And a lot of them sometimes don't know their history, so it's a lot easier to say that "I'm from the nationality" instead of "I'm from the culture," because they honestly don't know their history. So, yes, I'm a Garifuna, but what does that mean? You know, and then that's where it ends, because a lot of the, the parents are not explaining to the children, the youth, what their history is, so, you know, it's lost, you know, and it's a shame, you know, but that's what's going on. It's easier to be something else, you know, than to be who you are, you know, who you really are, and to find out and sit down with your elders to say, you know, what is it really to me to be Garifuna? You know, what is it? Where—Give me my history, you know, it's a lot harder for people to sit down. It's easier to just say "well, you know, you're from Honduras; you're Honduran." "You're from Belize; you're Belizean," you know.

*GLORIA*

What is the role of language in the Garifuna culture in identifying as such, especially when you have to leave your homeland and sometimes leave the language as well?

*CHERYL*

I think that's one thing with the, with the music and the, and the songs and a lot of the stories. You know, the language is always there. I mean, with the different festivities that they have, the language is prominent; it's always there. So you always hear the language somewhere, you know, within the household. Even if it's just with the, with the parents and the elders speaking it you always hear it, you know, and with prayers and with, you know, special... the traditions that our friends, the language is always there, because the good thing about it is, like when we're doing traditional stuff, when the ancestors require that it be done in that language, you don't have no choice but to do it in that language, so you're hearing the language when the adults are doing the stuff, even though they may not explain to you what's going on, at least you're hearing the language being spoken, and I think in every Garifuna household is probably like a Latin-American household. When your parents are upset at you they usually yell at you in your language. [Mutual laughter]

*GLORIA*

That's true.

*CHERYL*

So growing up you often hear, you know, you know, the words that you know. Oh, my goodness, well, my mom is speaking that language. I'm in trouble now! So I think that's a given. I think that most people who migrated here to the United States, they'll probably have that similar story. When my mother is mad, oh, she yells at me in the language, so you know the words that they're saying when they're upset. Yeah, and it's so funny,

even with my son, if, when he's playing outside with his friends, and if I'm telling him, you know, to do something, and I've probably asked him two or three times, you know, and once I get to that level and then it's, like, "Mommy, mommy, don't yell at me in English. Yell at me in Garifuna," because he'd rather me chastise him in Garifuna—

*GLORIA*

That's funny. So that they don't understand.

*CHERYL*

—than in English so they don't understand it.

*GLORIA*

His friends don't understand. Oh, that's funny.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, and then when his friends ask him, "What did your mom say?" "Oh, she says she loves me," you know? [Laughs] But he'd rather me, you know, chastise him in Garifuna so he—

*GLORIA*

Is he learning the language?

*CHERYL*

He is learning the language. He is learning the language. We're making sure he learns the language. He's learning from the Garifuna School, and he's also learning from his grandmother. I emphasize to my mom, please, you know, when you have him, talk to him in Garifuna. And that's what she does, talk to him in Garifuna. Every time she sees him she greets him in Garifuna. They have conversations in Garifuna. She asks him, you know, "What is this in Garifuna?" So he knows a lot of Garifuna. And our daughter she knows a lot of songs in Garifuna because she was raised up listening to Garifuna music, to Punta and everything like that, so she's like me. I could sing in Spanish, and she could sing in Garifuna!

*GLORIA*

I love Punta myself.

*CHERYL*

Oh, yeah, I love it.

*GLORIA*

I remember having a conversation with somebody about the origins of Punta, whether it originated in Honduras or Guatemala or Belize. They were, like, "No, it was here." So that was really funny. Now that we talked a little bit about your family history, can you tell me a little bit more about the community, the Garifuna community in Los Angeles and your relationship to that community?

*CHERYL*

The Garifuna community in Los Angeles, from the time that I was young I know that they've always done things, but it's so funny. With the culture, with my growing up here, my house, my parents' house, because at the time I have to say it was probably... not a big community but there was a lot of

families, but, you know, we were just, you know, starting to migrate a lot here, so the few families in the area. I always say that in the Garifuna community where I remember them, there was always a Garifuna family within a five-mile radius. It was like they just migrated in that area, so in every house there was usually something going on. I remember every weekend we went to somebody's house. Every weekend the women would get together and cook something, and then we would either have it at my house or somebody else's house. The women were in the kitchen cooking; the men would be outside playing cards or dominoes; and the children would be playing or something. So I remember growing up doing all that, and then during the different festivities, you know... [phone? rings, recorder off]. What were we talking about?

*GLORIA*

We were talking about the community and your memories of going to different houses.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, going to everybody's house. Everybody always had something, so when there was a birth, a new person that was born, there were rituals that they did. So if somebody had a new baby in the house, they would go over there and they would just do things. When there was a christening they would go over there and just do the cultural stuff there. When they... marriage! They would do the marriage thing. When there was a death, you know, they would do the cultural, you know, celebration with the death and everything that needed to be done, the special food that needed to be made. So I grew up, you know, seeing that. It was just like the thing to do, and honestly, because we did it every weekend I thought that was the way life was, because, you know, it was like the same thing that we did back home, you know, transitioned, transcended and continued over here when we came to the United States. It was just like, okay, yeah, we're just in a different country, but they were still doing it. It was like there wasn't a disconnect. It was still going on. Every weekend we knew—dit, dit, dit, dit, dit—that's what's happening this weekend. We knew it. Every weekend we're seeing this relative or seeing this cousin. They're doing this celebration or whatever, and when they had, like, Easter, Christmas or whatever, the traditions from back home carried on. So you would see the different cultural stuff happening on a daily basis, to me, growing up. It was just like, okay, yeah, that's what they're doing, and the old ladies would break out into song and dance in Garifuna. Next thing you know they're, they're just doing what they're doing and it's like, oh, you know? So I guess because I was raised up in there, it wasn't like something different or something weird. It was just... as an everything, matter of fact; they're just doing it, you know? But I think we... when they stopped doing it, when they... when it was just done, like, once in a while, when people started to move further away from each other, and it was harder for everybody to get together on a weekly basis, I think

that's when we started to, like, oh, well, they don't do that as much anymore, you know, and they started to just do the things, like, yearly, you know, when we only did like the festivities yearly, when we only got together like for the deaths and stuff like that. Then it was just like... they still continued to do it, but it wasn't, you know, as often as it was when I was younger.

*GLORIA*

Was there a particular church in the community that knew about the Garifuna and had services for the Garifuna?

*CHERYL*

The one church that, growing up, with me, it was called Mother of Sorrows. You know, that was the school, the elementary school I went to.

*GLORIA*

Was it Christian? Catholic?

*CHERYL*

Catholic. It was a Catholic school-church, and there was a few Garifuna families that went to Mother of Sorrows, and the girls went to high school at St. Michael's [laughs], so those churches are the ones that I remember that they would allow the Garifuna people to have their functions there and stuff like that, growing up, and then eventually other churches. The first church that had the first major Garifuna mass that I can remember was St. Francis Cabrini on Imperial and Vermont in LA. They used to have, like, big festivals over there, and then later on they had... I want to say, I remember going to Holy Cross, and they have, you know, festivities over there, and then eventually at St. Rafael's. That's where they currently have, like, Garifuna mass, at St. Rafael's, and activities. So it's always been a Catholic church.

*GLORIA*

So it's always Catholic Church, okay.

*CHERYL*

Um-hmm [affirmative]. It's always been, because 90 percent of Garifuna people, you know, at that time were pretty much predominantly Catholic, but now, you know, various denominations, but they always go back to the Catholic Church for the different ceremonies and... you know, so I wouldn't—I always remember that.

*GLORIA*

That's interesting, and I think in general there has been a trend in Central America that has gone from, you know, predominantly Catholic to a lot of Protestantism,

*CHERYL*

Yeah.

*GLORIA*

[inaudible] it's been a trend a lot in the last what, 20 years maybe.

*CHERYL*

Yes, yes, but I remember my grandmother would always say, "I'm Garifuna from Monday to Saturday, and I'm Catholic on Sunday." [Mutual laughter]

*GLORIA*

And what did she mean by that?

*CHERYL*

Meaning, I mean... I again would remember, and I remember every Friday, the ladies in the, in the village, they used to, they used to do, like, I guess, the only thing I could call it is like a temple. The ladies in the village would go, and they would always just, you know, do whatever they... whatever it is that they did they would do, and I remember every Friday night, you know, we knew that all of the ladies in the village were, were going to do something. You know, at the time, of course, we didn't know what it was that they were doing, but it was, I guess, some kind of a prayer ritual or whatever, you know, and we, being mischievous, we would follow them and look and see what they're doing, and that at a certain time they would allow us watch what they would do, but then at a certain time they would close the windows and doors.

*GLORIA*

So it was mainly women.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, it was mainly women. I, I remember that growing up, you know, and I've asked my mom and some other people. I was, like, "What is it that they did?" You know, was it, was it... It was—In my mind this is just something that happened. In my mind, it happened every week, every Friday, I remember it, and I'm trying to remember, was it every Friday or was it on special occasions or whatever? But I remember every Friday, you know, that's what they used to do, but, you know, they—I don't recall them later on when I came here to the United States, I don't remember that happening, you know, but I do remember that in my village, that happening on Fridays, you know, so... yeah, but my grandmother always remembered. Yes, on Sundays, you know, yes, I'm a Catholic, but everything else was Garifuna for her, you know, because I know there was like a conflict with the church that it was, like, this or that, but my grandmother was, like, yeah. She managed to juggle, you know, both the Catholic aspect of it and the Garifuna spiritualism, you know, she.... A lot of people manage to continue to do that, you know, because... they are who they are, you know? In the Bible it said, you know, God said come as you are, and I think, you know, we're human beings and God created us like everybody else, so, you know, he created us to be Garifuna, and we have to come as who we are, Garifuna, no matter what, you know?

*GLORIA*

Do you see that Garifuna spirituality is still practiced in the United States?

Do you see that there is a definite sense of continuity there?

*CHERYL*

Um-hmm [affirmative]

*GLORIA*

Do you yourself?

*CHERYL*

I think in California. I know they are... making an effort. There's a, a lady by the name of Marie Santini. She is making an effort to bring the Garifuna spirituality. She has ceremonies, you know, healing ceremonies and stuff like that that she does, you know, for the ancestors and everything, and for individuals, you know, and I, I support that. I mean, I believe in the spiritualism. The Garifuna, you know, spiritualism is something that I was raised up doing. You know, the way it was growing up was, like... even with my hearing, when my parents realized that I was deaf, you know, before they went to... after they got the diagnosis, before they went to a doctor they went to a spiritualist. They went to, you know, a person and, you know, to find out, you know, what is causing this ailment on this child. You know, I think most people from America probably wouldn't do that. They would probably, you know, continue to go to the path of the doctor, but before they decided, when they said that I needed to have surgery, my parents were, like, wait, before you cut my child, let's go to our healer and find out, you know, what else could we do. I remember going through a healing ceremony, herbal ceremonies and stuff like that, and once they exhausted all of that, that's when they decided to, okay, let's do the traditional medicine and let's do what the doctor said, but I remember everything was "let's do this first", you know. So growing up I remember that. When I was sick, you know, growing up it was... before you go to the store to get a Tylenol or whatever, it was go to your local [Laughs] ... your local healer, and it was like the same thing, like, going, you know, when we were in Belize, you know, of course you didn't have a corner doctor in the village. You didn't have, you know, a pharmacy in the village, so you went to your local, you know, healer, Buyei, you know, herbalist or whatever, and he, you know, whatever the earth gave you to help you get better, you got better, you know, and, you know, that's what we believed in and... that's the way we were raised up.

*GLORIA*

When did you have surgery? Was it here in the United States?

*CHERYL*

It was here in the United States. I had—excuse me—I had two surgeries. I had one when I was in first grade and the second when I was in third grade. You know, they tried to repair my hearing in my left ear, but they were unsuccessful the first time around, so they tried it later on, and it was successful. So I'm totally deaf out of my left ear, but I—

*GLORIA*

Really?

*CHERYL*

Yeah, but, you know, through the years I've, I've adapted and I've learned, so a lot of people don't know that I'm deaf, completely deaf. I've managed to, you know, maneuver my way that I could, you know... yeah, and the speech therapy helped it, and, you know, they, they teach me sign language and everything, because they were, at the time they were unsure if I was going to lose my other hearing on my right ear, so they did teach me a little bit of sign language when I was younger, and lip reading and a whole bunch of stuff, and I remember when I came through my first surgery with everything that was going on, I don't know if they plugged up my ear, but I couldn't hear anything like for the first two weeks after surgery, and I remember the first thing that I heard. We had what they call ICAP programs when they would come to the schools and they would do like a little performance, and I remember the ladies were doing the sign for Laverne and Shirley theme song, and that was one of the things that I started to hear when I was, like, starting to hear, the theme from Laverne and Shirley, but the first song that I heard was the Muppet songs, you know, The Rainbow Connection?, and that's my favorite song. Every time I hear that song I cry because that was the first thing that I recall hearing, you know, that it was like, "oh, I didn't lose my hearing for good!" I could hear, and every time that song is like my... [makes crying sound], bring out the tissue! [Laughs]

*GLORIA*

Aside from that first song, what else sort of changed when you were able to hear?

*CHERYL*

When I able— you know, when I was able to hear, it was just appreciation for everything. You know, I was like... you know, just listening to... everything. I, I know I focus a lot on... something that everybody, that everybody takes for advantage is listening. I mean, it's just a given that we hear. We hear. We could hear, but it's not too often people listen.

*GLORIA*

Right.

*CHERYL*

And I think I learned to become a good listener, because throughout the year, for some reason people always found it easy to talk to me, and I think, you know, it's because I do listen to what they're saying, and because I consciously and subconsciously have to really concentrate and listen to what a person is saying instead of compared to when people are often talking to people. It's like they're thinking of what the answer is, you know, and I'm one of those persons. I really can't chew gum and walk at the same time. I have to just really focus on what you're saying and asking me and talking to me. So I think I've learned to be a good listener, you know, and also when I was going through the speech therapy, you know, they really focused on articulation, so that's one thing, that's like a little pet peeve with me is, you

know, the proper English [Laughs] because hearing it's, like, oh! Dang! They didn't say it right. So that's one thing, you know, that's really, you know, the proper English language and, you know, articulation and everything like that, and language and [inaudible] because, I don't know if I mentioned this, but I, I couldn't say my name until I was in eighth grade because of my speech impediment. You know, I, I couldn't say S-Hs and C-Hs until... and of course my name is CH, and it was, you know, it was, it was something not to be able to say your own name, and I remember when I graduated from eighth grade, and, you know, it was a presentation that we had to do in church, and upon doing the presentation, I had to say my name, and my eighth-grade teacher, you know, worked with me day in and day out. "Your name is not Shual, it's Cheryl. Pronounce it, pronounce it the right way," and I couldn't say it. I kept saying Shual, Shual, Shual, and I cried because I couldn't say my name. I couldn't say my name, and then, you know, during that, that time, you know, I, I learned, you know, to say my name, because she would break it down to me. "You have to say your name. You can't go through this world without saying your name," and I remember when I got up there and I said my name, and, you know, in my, in my head I heard it the wrong way, but it came out the right way.

*GLORIA*

Wow.

*CHERYL*

You know? And that, you know, that's something that I won't ever forget because I had to go in front of people and, and, you know, say my name, you know, and it was like... you know, like, people didn't know who I was until I said my name, you know, and I was so afraid of how it would sound, but it came out right, and I think, you know, that's like what identified who I am, too. It's like, you know, sometimes I think, well, do I tell people that I'm Garifuna? But they may not know about Garifuna, but then that's part of who I am, like my name, so when I say who I am, and then when people are, like, oh, tell me more, it's like wow. They're not, you know, they're not, you know, backing away from who I am. This is my opportunity to tell them more of who I am, and that's like with my name, when I was so afraid to say my name because I thought it was going to be wrong, that people would make fun of me for saying my name wrong, but, you know, the mistake that I heard in my name, you know, only I heard that mistake, you know, but they didn't hear. You know, they accepted and they, they were proud of me. They got up, and the people who knew the journey that I went through to say my name, they were crying, you know, because they were, like, "she said her name!" and I was, like, "I said my name!" You know, and it was a big, it was a big thing to me, and, you know, it, it just took me so long to, to get to where I was able to say my name and that's very important to me.

*GLORIA*

And what kind of presentation were you doing?



*CHERYL*

We were doing a... it was prayers before our graduation, so during that time we were, like, every person in the graduating class had to say their name. You know, I mean, say their name and then the prayer that they were saying. And, yeah, and I had to go up there. "Hello, my name is Cheryl Noralez" and, you know, that was just going through that first line was like... I could say everything else but I couldn't say my name. So that was something that I remember, and it made me stronger, and it made me proud.

*GLORIA*

I bet.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, because I remember I used to sit in the back. With everything with my hearing I used to... even though I was supposed to sit in the front. I didn't want the hearing to be, you know, my identity. I didn't want to be the deaf girl in the room, so I would just sit in the back, like, don't tell everybody you're deaf, you know, just stay in a corner, and, you know, I deprived myself of learning a lot more, because half the time I couldn't hear anything! [Laughs]

*GLORIA*

Right, in the back.

*CHERYL*

So, you know, and, and I think about, I mean, the things that I, that I did when I was younger, it was like... I relate it to my culture. Now this is like, you know, right now, and growing up, the Garifuna people were in the back, in the corner, where nobody knows. You know, it's like, you know, yes, you're there, you're whatever. You're just blending in. You're just there. Nobody's paying attention to you, but now it's like, you know, I want to be known. I want to be heard. You know, I'm proud of who I am and I'm moving myself in a, a little bit, you know, closer to the chalk board and, you know, getting that courage more and more to not just say it to, you know, just individuals but to more people. You know, I'm finding that voice to be able to say, you know what? I am Garifuna. There's Garifunas all around you. You may not know it but we're here. You know, I'm finding that voice, and when I think about, you know, when I was younger, when I think about the journey that, you know, made me comfortable with saying, you know what? I can't hear you. I'm deaf. I need to be closer. It took me a while to get there, but I got there eventually, and once I got to that level of, you know, being... less self conscious? I was able to get the help that I needed with my hearing and everything like that, and I was able to learn a lot more than I thought, you know, and, you know, even with the whole hearing thing, you know, because I was so self conscious growing up, about how I sound and whether or not I was getting, you know, what people were saying. I developed my writing skills, so I was always writing things. I was

always observing and looking and writing down everything that I saw and heard and... You know. Yeah, that was something that I developed and, you know, grew stronger with everything that I went through.

*GLORIA*

What was your relationship with teachers? I mean, were they sort of receptive to what you were going through? Were they helpful?

*CHERYL*

Yeah, my teachers were the ones that identified my, my disability, you know, because I think... what it was was, a lot of people thought... from what I could perceive when I was younger, people around me thought that I was retarded, slow or special, or something like that. You know, they didn't realize that I had a hearing, you know, a hearing issue, and, like I said, growing up I always thought that I was normal so... that wasn't.... Yeah, that's one thing. I didn't think that at the time. There was an awareness that I had a hearing problem, but the teachers, once I went to school in first grade, that's when my, my reading teacher, Miss Jessica Springfield—I remember her name.

*GLORIA*

You remember her name.

*CHERYL*

When we were doing back then Hooked on Phonics, and, you know, when we would do, you know, the Hooked on Phonics with the thing over the...

*GLORIA*

Headphones.

*CHERYL*

...headphones, I, I couldn't hear it, you know, but when we were reading, you know, I could read, and then the way I read—I always read low—but in my head everything was loud to me, and she would always tell me to read louder, read louder, and she always told me my reading is good, but when it was time for us to do the individual thing, I could never get it because I couldn't hear it. So she was the one that brought it to my parents' attention to get my hearing check and everything like that, you know, and my writing skills. I mean, when I wrote things, she was, like, I wrote at a third-fourth grade level because I would just sit there and I would write, because I was, you know, I say I am a self-proclaimed nerd. [Laughs]. You know, one of our homework back then was we had to learn 20 new words from the dictionary every single week, so I learned to build my vocabulary and everything like that, and I was really fond of using my new words in sentences, so that was one thing.

*GLORIA*

Make a good student.

*CHERYL*

Yeah. Yeah, and that was, like, that was freedom, you know. It was like I didn't have to speak. I didn't have to worry about mistakes with my writing. I mean, I could just go to the world with my writing.

*GLORIA*

Go to town.

*CHERYL*

You know, and I could escape in, in reading. I used to love to read, so, I mean, I would just visualize when I would read. I could just see the story and being in the book and being—that was my, my.... I guess I was just lost, you know. These other students would be there playing and everything and I would ask my teacher, "Can I have a library book?" And I would just sit there and read and just be in my own world, so I enjoyed that a lot. I really did enjoy that a lot.

*GLORIA*

Do you recall having any favorite authors or any favorite books?

*CHERYL*

Oh, as a teenager, I read Judy Blume, Danielle Steele, and all that good stuff, yeah! Oh, yeah, I remember that. I think I read every Judy Blume book there was to read, and every Danielle Steele and V. C. Andrews.

*GLORIA*

And do you remember having any books about the Garifuna, or were the stories mainly told from your mom's...

*CHERYL*

Oral history. Yeah, from my parents. They always told me stories about Garifuna and everything like that, so, yeah, I knew the stories, and the stories would always begin, "this is the story that my mother told me" and all that stuff, so that's how I—

*GLORIA*

Did it begin with St. Vincent or more local?

*CHERYL*

When my father told me the story about Garifuna it was always with the perception that Garifuna people were always, you know, there. He would say Yurumein, but at the time I didn't know what Yurumein was, you know, I didn't know it was in reference to St. Vincent, so they would always say "we were always in Yurumein. That was where it all began," you know, and it was like we were always there, and the, the Europeans came and they stole our land and they exiled us. They tried to kill us, and that was how my dad was just like very graphic, like he was—he didn't pretty it up, you know? My dad was very adamant about it, you know. "They stole it, we fought them, and it was just that," but, you know, that was the story that I was raised up with, that we were always there. Nothing with the slavery or anything. My father never mentioned anything with slavery. It was always we were always free people. You know, we fought to stay, we were always free. And I remember later on when I started exploring the history on my own and then

once like, well, when I started reading this thing about slavery and Garifuna, I was, like, wait a minute. That's not the story I remember hearing. Where did that come from? You know. And, you know, unfortunately, that's the story that's stuck in there, that Garifuna people, this shipwreck story and whatever, but that's not the story that I was raised up. As far as I knew that, you know, we were there, we always were there. They don't know how we got there, but we were there. [Laughs] That was our homeland. We fought for our homeland. We didn't win the battle and we got, you know, exiled to Central America, but the slave ship story, I mean, my opinion is something that was added there because they had to have some kind of excuse to why people, you know, that look like us were there. And they used their story to put us that we were escaped slaves, you know? And that's the story that stuck, but I personally don't believe that story. [Laughs]

*GLORIA*

You know, it's that story that has always been told from the colonizer's point of view.

*CHERYL*

Um-hmm [affirmative].

*GLORIA*

I think this is why it's so important to have people like yourself, and people like your father, who live through you, who can tell something different.

*CHERYL*

Yes.

*GLORIA*

Did he ever mention the trip from Honduras down to Belize at all?

*CHERYL*

He told me stories of when he used to travel with his, with his gran—with his father when he was younger, and I know he used to talk about how it was just free. You could just go from Belize to Honduras to... without worrying about anything. You know, you didn't have to get permission to go, you just...

*GLORIA*

You just went.

*CHERYL*

You had a family member there, you went to go see them there, and, you know, that was just the freedom. You know, he would always say the Garifuna people could never get lost in the sea because we know the sea [Laughs], you know, and that's one story that I, I remember growing up with, that, oh, "the ocean? We don't need a compass. We know the sea. We know how to maneuver the sea. We could get you from here to wherever without getting lost." So that was the pride that they have, was the ocean, that we just knew the ocean so well that we didn't have to worry about that, that we just couldn't have gotten lost in the ocean or anything because we knew it so well, you know, so... Yeah, and that was a pride that they had,

they're like no matter what, you know, you're not afraid of the water. "You're a Garifuna. You'll learn how to float. Don't worry about swimming. You won't sink, you'll float!": [Laughs] So things like that about the water and everything. It was, like, "you're from the sea, you're of the sea. Don't worry about it."

*GLORIA*

What were your parents... I mean, what was their policy in terms of language?

*CHERYL*

Well, they spoke to us in Garifuna, but with me especially, you know, because of my hearing and everything, they used to tell my parents that they need to just speak English to me, you know, if they wanted me to learn how to speak and learn how to, I guess, adapt into society, that it was very important for them to just speak to me in one language. You know, so, you know, when my hearing was coming back I do remember them, you know, they would speak to my sisters because my sisters understand more Garifuna than I do, you know, because they would speak to them in Garifuna, and my sisters would now and again answer them in Garifuna, you know, and then when I was younger they would just speak to me in English, [snap sound], speak to me in English, but, again, Garifuna was always around me with their friends and when they spoke to my sisters and everything, it was always there, you know, and this one is like when they would come, because of my hearing at the time, and they weren't sure if I wasn't going to hear or not, but then again, I knew how to adjust myself so I could—I know this is my good ear and I hear better from this ear, so when they would come, when their friends would come and they would engage in their conversation, you know, pretty much with me when they would send the children, you know, "go outside and play," because of me at the time they were, like, oh, well, she's deaf. She can't hear anything.

*GLORIA*

She could stay.

*CHERYL*

So they would just leave me there, leave me be, and I was a little, little thing, you know. They would have their couch and the couch would be a little big—sometimes I would just go underneath the couch and just read, you know, and then I would sit there and, you know, being inquisitive, listen to their conversation. So I would sit there and hear and follow their conversation. I would put myself on my bad ear and just listen from my good ear. When I got tired of hearing them I would put myself on my good ear and listen, and just direct them to my bad ear so I wouldn't hear anything, and then I would just be around them and they would just talk and just, you know, just talk in Garifuna and carry on their conversation, and so I picked up a lot of Garifuna that way, because it was like I knew it from birth, because that was the language that, you know, before my

hearing got really bad that I, you know, would hear it, you know, but then once my hearing got bad and I couldn't hear anymore, and then once they were around me and my hearing was developing again, it was like I was, you know, absorbing it again. I was, like, "Oh! Yeah, I know what that means." In relationship to like the new words that I was hearing, more and more were English, but then I was able to... you know, it was able to work out. You know, I picked up a lot of Garifuna that way, just being around them and just like, you know, they wouldn't send me away. They would just keep me there. [Laughs] So it was an advantage to me because I learned a lot that way.

*GLORIA*

Were your parents bilingual?

*CHERYL*

My parents were very bilingual. My father, he spoke Spanish like the back of his hands. He was very bilingual. He spoke English, Spanish and Garifuna.

*GLORIA*

That was trilingual.

*CHERYL*

Oh, yeah, and, and my, my mother, she spoke a little bit of Queché.

*GLORIA*

Oh, really?

*CHERYL*

Uh-huh [affirmative], and she, she was raised up around Mayans and everything, so she had the Queché and she had cousins that spoke Queché, you know.

*GLORIA*

Oh, wow.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, so the Queché, the English, Garifuna, and a little bit of Spanish with my mom.

*GLORIA*

Because in Belize, the instruction in Belize happens mainly in English, right?

*CHERYL*

In English, um-hmm [affirmative].

*GLORIA*

And people pick up Spanish...

*CHERYL*

They just... pick it up [Laughs] Neighbors and, you know, the travels and everything, yeah. I think, aum, the locations that are closer to Guatemala, you know, more people speak a lot of Spanish, and the areas that's closer to Mexico a lot of people tend to speak more, more Spanish, but then like in the middle portions, mainly English. English and Garifuna.

*GLORIA*

What about Creole?

*CHERYL*

No... That wasn't a language that was spoken in my, in my... in my, in my home with my parents. My father was very—either you speak proper English or you—

*GLORIA*

[inaudible]

*CHERYL*

[Laughs] you didn't. I mean, it was like, I guess, like today. It was like Ebonics, like back then, so my father was like, no, you speak the, the... the English, the proper English the way you're supposed to speak it, so that was the way. You know, Creole wasn't, you know, really spoken, you know, when I was growing up, but then as I got older, you know, being around more people adapted to Creole and stuff like that, so, you know, I hear more Creole now, but I, I can't speak it. I mean, when I try to speak it, they're like "what are you trying to do?" And, you know, I, I try, but it's like—it just, you know—

*GLORIA*

It just doesn't come naturally.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, it doesn't come out. It's like when I'm trying to speak Ebonics. It doesn't work [Laughs] It really doesn't. I mean, it's, it's a pitiful thing to witness and to listen to. Me trying to speak Ebonics or trying to speak Creole is not... is not a pretty sight! It's ridiculous. I've tried and they're like, "Please don't. [Laughs] Don't, don't do it." So I don't.

*GLORIA*

That's funny!

*CHERYL*

Yeah, I can't do it... no.

*GLORIA*

What is your relationship with the community that you are now living in? Do people know about your work, and how is that perceived?

*CHERYL*

My neighbors every, every—my neighbors here, you know, they know who I am. They see me with the drums, they listen to the music because all I, in my house, that's all I pretty much listen to, is Garifuna music. Either Garifuna music or Bachata. [Laughs]

*GLORIA*

I like Bachata, too. It's nice.

*CHERYL*

You know, not... not hip hop. I mean, my daughter, yes. She listens to hip hop and, you know, 80 percent of her music is Garifuna Punta. I mean, she just called my husband the other day. It was, like, "Do you have any new Punta music? I need Punta music out here," so we sent her Punta music, so, you know, and she listens to Punta, and our son, he listens to everything

from Punta to Reggae to Bachata, Salsa—everything. So he's a mixture of everything. He's very multicultural, and I like that, and my neighbors. I think, I have a neighbor, she's from Ethiopia, so she finds the culture absolutely... she's, like, oh, my god. She was, like, "I can't believe that, you know, people like me are able to preserve their culture," and she talks to us about how things were in Ethiopia, how a lot of the things were lost and stuff like that, so, you know, when she comes here she's, like, "Oh, a drum! Oh!" when she sees the stuff and she's, like, "Oh, yeah, we had that, you know, back in" whatever. "You guys still use that?" So she's very fascinated by the culture, and I think, you know, with the African-American neighbors, it's just like—whatever. They don't care to, you know. I'm not putting them all in a category, but I'm just talking about my neighbors. They, they don't question. You know, it's, like, oh, what are you? like I'm Garifuna. Oh, okay. They don't take it... you know, it's just, like, oh.... For some reason the majority of times, it's like, oh, that's Spanish, isn't it? Yeah, I hear you listening to Spanish music in there, and I'm, like, oh, okay, and, you know, I'll, I'll explain to them a little bit more, but you could kind of tell, like, okay, they're not that interested, you know, but, me, I just continue to talk no matter what! But my Ethiopian neighbor, she's very fascinated, and, you know, my co-workers. Oh, I, I just can't stop talking about my culture. My office has Garifuna everything, artifacts and everything there so... and they know that when they introduce me it's, like, oh, "Cheryl, she's Garifuna. She could tell me more about who she is." So that's like usually a conversation piece over there.

*GLORIA*

Where are you working now?

*CHERYL*

I, I work at... it's called the Wellness Center and it's dealing with mental health. You know, I advocate for mental health services, counseling, stuff like that, so...

*GLORIA*

And it's really close by you said.

*CHERYL*

It's really close by, yeah.

*GLORIA*

That's great.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, so all of my clients know, yeah, she's Garifuna, yeah. [Laughs] Like what's that? And they're, like, oh, yeah. So, yeah, I have them brainwashed—Just kidding! And, you know, and when I'm at work, too, when the mood hits me I go to work like this. I wear my Garifuna, you know, wardrobe and everything. And, you know, I don't feel—any way, it's just like some days I just... I just... I don't know what it is. It's just some days I just have to be closer to my ancestors, and one of the ways of feeling



closer to them is, you know, wearing my, my traditional Garifuna clothing, and I just feel closer to them. And at home, I just feel good when I wear it. I feel comfortable, I feel relaxed, and I love it.

*GLORIA*

Is the clothing mainly imported?

*CHERYL*

No. The clothing we... every Garifuna community has a local seamstress or two.

*GLORIA*

Oh, okay.

*CHERYL*

So we do have a lot of ladies that, you know, make Garifuna outfits usually.

*GLORIA*

Here?

*CHERYL*

Here in California.

*GLORIA*

Wow, okay.

*CHERYL*

Usually their busiest season is in November and in April for the Garifuna Settlements Day here in Los Angeles, so they're busy throughout that time, but then we have... ladies in the community that I'm just so proud of, because every single day of their life they are... they are... what is the word? They're just, they're just Garifuna to the bones. I mean, every single day they wear they Garifuna outfit, traditional outfit to work, to school. They, they're just from head to toe, and they don't care. You see them in the grocery store, and they have their outfit out, and it's, like, ah, they're just so proud, and they don't care. I mean, it's just so beautiful to see, you know, and I always say, oh, I want to be like that when I grow up, to just wear it every single day and just... You know, I'm getting there. I mean, I mean, not that I care what people think, you know, it's, you know, just the material is pricy... [Laughs]... you know, for the nice, beautiful materials and getting somebody to sew it and everything like that. It's a lot easier to just go to the store, you know...

*GLORIA*

And get something cheap.

*CHERYL*

Get something cheap, you know, but I would just love to just... if I could just have a wardrobe of Garifuna clothing and just wear it every single day I would love it.

*GLORIA*

Is this one of them?

*CHERYL*

This is one of them.

GLORIA

Yeah, it's very pretty. I was going to tell you that. It's very pretty.

CHERYL

Yes, it's very beautiful, and we also have a lady who sewed for us. She's in Seattle. You know, she sells Garifuna outfits in Seattle.

GLORIA

Wow.

CHERYL

In, in New York, in Chicago, and everybody has their local seamstress.

GLORIA

That's great.

CHERYL

And depending on where they're from—from Honduras, Belize or Guatemala—they have the different patterns and ways that they, that they sew and everything, so it's really beautiful. I have outfits from different seamstresses, from, you know, all the different, you know, nations—from Guatemala, Belize—so you could just kind of see the difference and you can kind of—yeah, somebody from Belize sewed that. Oh, yeah, somebody from Guatemala sewed that, but you could see, like, just the different styles. It's a little bit different, but they're so beautiful and it's comfortable, especially when it's warm. Just relax [Laughs] and just wear it and just be free. I feel comfortable when I go to work like this—yoo hoo!

GLORIA

Happy as can be.

CHERYL

I'm so contented, and, you know, and people love it. You know, they're, like, "oh, wow, that's so pretty!" you know?

GLORIA

It actually makes you look very young, I think.

CHERYL

Thank you, thank you.

GLORIA

It does.

CHERYL

I can't go without my drums, without my drums. My unique drums.

GLORIA

Yeah. Where did you get those?

CHERYL

From Guatemala, from Livingston.

GLORIA

Livingston.

CHERYL

Uh-hmm, yeah.

GLORIA

It's a fun place.

*CHERYL*

Uh-hmm, yeah. And I, it just reminds me every time I just have it, it's a little bit, like my ancestors, you know, so I love it. You know, it's unique and it's... everybody knows Cheryl with the drum earrings. "Yeah, I know Cheryl with the drum earrings. Yeah, everybody talks about you and your earrings so...." [Laughs] That's how they know me at work, like drum earrings!

*GLORIA*

That's hilarious.

*GLORIA*

When they look for me, yeah. They're like Cheryl? I'm, like, how did you know? Drum earrings. Everybody knows you, drum earrings. I'm, like, that's me!

*GLORIA*

That's wonderful. Well, Cheryl, I want to thank you so much for your time.

*CHERYL*

Okay.

*GLORIA*

And I would like to obviously see you again and talk a little bit more about your foundation...

*CHERYL*

Okay.

*GLORIA*

...and what drove you to take such an important step in establishing a Garifuna school and cultural center, so I'd like to talk a little bit more about that next time around, but thank you so much for your time.

*CHERYL*

Oh, you're welcome.

## **1.2. TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE MARCH 28, 2009**

*GLORIA*

Today is Saturday, March 28, 2009. My name is Gloria Chacón, and I am speaking with Cheryl Noralez, member of the Garifuna community. Cheryl, how are you?

*CHERYL*

I'm doing fine, thank you.

*GLORIA*

Cheryl, I wanted to go back to your personal history and ask you about your birthday. I know you were reticent about stating your birth date, but I would like to have it for you to situate you in a sort of historical framework.

*CHERYL*

I was born [August 25,] 1972.

*GLORIA*

Okay, so that means that you were in Central America sort of at the beginning of the political turmoil that many of the Central American countries went through at the time. I'm thinking Nicaragua in 1979, El Salvador, the beginning of the war in 1978, and then of course Guatemala with sort of its long, protracted civil war, and I'm wondering whether, you know, as a child growing up around that time did you hear anything about that, what was going on, or were you very removed from that?

*CHERYL*

I was too young to know anything about that. I was still just a baby, but right now I'm just thinking about... the news stories that I've heard from Flavio Alvarez and a few people that were living in La Fuga, Livingston, Guatemala at the time and they were saying that during the time when the wars were happening that because Guatemala, Isabella was so dis-attached from the mainland, you know, that they, it really didn't affect them [inaudible]. --

*GLORIA*

Wow, that's really interesting.

*CHERYL*

...that the Garifuna community, the Mestizos, the Mayans and the Latinos, you know, it really didn't affect that portion of it, you know, but when they did go to Guatemala City and when they went to the mainland, that's where, you know, you kind of had like the fear of what was going on. So I do remember the stories that were told, you know. Recently, now, in the past maybe two or three years when you're sitting there talking and they tell us little stories about that.

*GLORIA*

[unintelligible] -- I mean, you were probably too little to remember this, but what was it like, or do you remember people talking about the transition of British Honduras to Belize? The naming of the country?

*CHERYL*

I don't. You know, I really don't, but then I do recall, like, the older people living in Belize—no disrespect intended—they would say, some people actually said it was kind of better under the British rule, because they said that Belize was a little bit—their words not mine—was a little bit more classier than if they was more emphasis on speaking the proper English compared to the language that's spoken right now, and it was more sense of pride, you know, having, you know, being part of the British, you know, system, and then other people, you know, saw it, saw it as a negative thing, that, yes, you know, we're not part of that anymore, that we're free from them, they were oppressors and everything. So there's two parts to it, you know, but, I, I went to Belize. I visited Belize back in '87, and I believe they got their independence like not too—

*GLORIA*

In the 80s, early 80s. I think it was '81.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, in the early 80s and everything, and I remember, you know, they still had the residual effects of, you know, being colonies, and, you know, when I went there I was very taken aback by how eloquent. They were well spoken and it was so different and it was like, wow, compared to when I went back in '96. When I went back in '96, you know, the difference was like, oh, wow. It was like night and day. It wasn't like the same Belize that I remember going back to. I was like, oh, wow. The most important thing for me was like language. I was like, oh, they don't speak the proper English as much as I recalled in '87. So that was like, you know, the difference that I witnessed when I went back.

*GLORIA*

Do you think that had something to do with the education system?

*CHERYL*

I, you know, I really wouldn't be able to say. I mean, I would think that the education system is probably still the same, and I know in Belize a vast majority of the educators in Belize have been Garifuna teachers. You know, they were the ones that, that often, you know, set the role of, you know, of educating the community, especially throughout Belize. Historically, the Garifuna teachers were the ones that taught, you know, throughout Belize, so I, I don't know. Maybe there was just... I, I wasn't raised up in Belize, so I couldn't begin to guess. Maybe it was a rebellion thing! [Laughs] You know, let's not speak the proper English. Let's just speak it this way, but that was the one thing that I do recall the difference was. The main thing was the language. It was like, yeah, that really stood out to me.

*GLORIA*

Wow, yeah, that's a really interesting point, because I think now there's a whole idea of valuing the vernacular, the Creole.

*CHERYL*

Yes, yes, and [inaudible], you know, come to think about it the [inaudible]... I'm going to get in trouble—the politeness. I mean, when I went in '87 people were, were so polite and everything, and, you know, it wasn't a rushed system. It was like really... I don't know, like really delicate and really... you know, it was really something different when I went there in '87, and when I went in '96, and I stayed there for an expanded amount of time and I was able to see, you know, so much and I was like, wow, you know what? It's really not what I remember. People were a little bit more abrasive, everything was a lot more faster and, you know, it just seemed, you know... different. I mean, Belize is a beautiful place and the people are generally friendly, you know, but it was just the difference in time that it was like—wow, you know, just the personality, the language, those were the things that really grabbed my attention because I think, I don't remember about this, you know, it was, there were, at that time, I considered it more

Americanized than anything when I went back in '97... I'm sorry, '96. I just had the sense that it was heavily influenced by the Western Civilization than it was the British.

*GLORIA*

Well, let's go back to—I wanted to talk to you a little bit more about your school experience. You mentioned that you went to Catholic schools. Was this throughout your education?

*CHERYL*

Just in elementary school. I went through Catholic. My parents felt that it was important for us to have a solid foundation in education and felt the Catholic education, because they explored, you know, public schools, and they felt that the Catholic education would be more a solid foundation for us to start, but then eventually we did go to public school in high school, and I carried that tradition as well with my children. You know, I sent my children to Catholic school, you know, until they were older, and then I sent them to public high school.

*GLORIA*

And once outside of the, you know, Catholic school system, what were the main differences between, you know, the schools that you attended and the Catholic ones that you can think about?

*CHERYL*

I think the attention that the teachers paid to the children was different in Catholic school, private school. They had the one-on-one attention there. I mean, I think earlier I had said it was one of my teachers that discovered that I had hearing, you know, difficulties and stuff like that, and I, I, I don't know if they would've detected that as early in the public school system. You know, I mean, because she paid attention to me. She noticed, you know, the different techniques that worked for me in learning, and then she was the one that told my parents, "I think you should have her hearing checked," you know, and I think maybe, you know, in the public school, maybe they would've just thought that, you know, something was, something else was wrong with me. Maybe they would've thought I was slow or something like that, but I really have to give it to that teacher, you know, that, you know, Mrs. Jessica Springfield. I mean, I'll never forget her. If it wasn't for her, you know, I don't know where I would be, because she's the one that helped me to learn alternate ways of learning. She was, like, okay, you don't get it this way, but you, you know how to write; you're good at writing. So she emphasized my writing. You know, what I didn't learn with the phonics, she was, like, well, you know, write, write, write, and she would, like, you know, she would watch me. She would follow me. Like when she would walk around the class when she would see me turning myself, you know, and she was the one that caught that. I mean, other teachers didn't catch that but she caught that, and she realized that I would favor, I was favoring one particular side, and on one side I would be able to get everything, and then

on the other side I was just oblivious to what was going on. So she was able to pick that up when, when other people couldn't. So, you know, I really do appreciate, you know, a great teacher like her that, you know, she did, you know, pay that much attention me and was able to, you know, help me.

*GLORIA*

And were the teachers traditional nuns? I'm thinking of...

*CHERYL*

At that time, yes! At that time we had the principal of the school, you know. Her name was Sister Barbara, you know, and I, I remember, yes. We had Sister Pat. She was... oh, my god, she was incredible, and then that was early on in school. We had more nuns when I was probably in elementary school in first through probably... third or fourth grade, and then as we got older in fourth and fifth grade, they started incorporating public school teachers there, so that was a different way.

*GLORIA*

Oh, really.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, yeah, we started having more teachers that were from public schools that came in. They had that.

*GLORIA*

The experience of having other teachers from public schools must have affected you in some way.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, that, that was a, a different experience, because I think when... I remember one distinct difference when I was in seventh grade and I had an instructor that came from the public school into the Catholic school, and their attention was different. The attention was different, you know, and I remember it was a new experience for a lot of us, because we basically, you know, started school from the first grade on so—

*GLORIA*

Together.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, together, so we kind of noticed the difference, and we all said, "she doesn't like us! She doesn't care!" So that was like the big difference. Like we knew. We felt like the nuns cared about us because, you know, maybe—also because we were raised up with them for such a long time, so when this new teacher came in, I think maybe we were a little bit biased toward her, but I, I don't know. I mean, it was just a different approach. It was really a different approach.

*GLORIA*

Now I understand that this Catholic school was predominantly—you said Mexican-American?

*CHERYL*

Uh-hmm [affirmative].

*GLORIA*

Was there any bilingual education, or was it solely in English?

*CHERYL*

It was solely English, and that's one thing that I remember. We were really forced. It was emphasized that we had to just speak English. Even during recess they were like, no, you can only speak English during, you know, on the school grounds and everything like that, because one thing I do recall, there was a lot of fights between, like, the few African-Americans that were there, not the Central American people. It wasn't a problem, but with the few African-Americans and with the Latino students, you know, I guess when they spoke in Spanish they always felt that they, you know, were being talked about, you know, but then for us, the little bit of Spanish that we understood we would just like know what was going on, so we'd know it wasn't about us, and we never felt like it would be about us. We didn't have that assumption that if somebody was speaking a different language that it was about us, because, like I said, as I grew older, you know, we had a few more people from Belize and Garifuna coming there, so we had our own language, too, so it was like when we would say, like, little things in our language, you know, it wasn't an assumption that we were talking about them, and again, with the African-Americans not knowing what to make of us, I, I recall a statement. It was like "stop talking that African language to us" and we were like, wow, okay. So it was just like when they didn't understand what you were saying they just automatically assumed that you were talking about, about them, and it was kind of funny to us. We were like we're just talking in our language. Yeah, we kind of felt a little bit comfortable with, you know, when we mentioned food names and stuff like that. And, you know, it was kind of interesting.

*GLORIA*

During that time did you gravitate to those few students who were Garifuna?

*CHERYL*

I gravitated to, aum, to students that... that had more of the same cultural background, not necessarily Garifuna, but I say Latino culture, because, you know, we shared similar foods, similar, you know, customs with, with our... with the respect to our parents and grandparents and, you know, a lot of the things that we did, you know, I guess because we are in the heart, you know, of, of a Latino community, you know, we imported with Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras and everything. So, you know, I was more comfortable around, you know, being around Latinos growing up than I think I was around African-Americans, you know, because I was able to relate to them.

*GLORIA*

Right.

*CHERYL*

I understood, you know, when we were like, oh, we're having tortilla in the morning. Yeah, [inaudible] yeah, I had tortilla this morning, too. So just



things like that. We were able to relate in so many different ways compared to, you know, when I, when I spoke about, you know, food or anything like that. As far as African-Americans were concerned, they didn't understand that, you know, and at times, you know, when you're a kid, you don't feel like explaining everything, so it was just like... you're like you just gravitate more towards the people that you have to explain less to.

*GLORIA*

Right, and were Latinos... did they seem to understand where you were coming from?

*CHERYL*

Uh-hmm, yeah. I've never had any problem growing up with Latino people. I mean, I really don't understand the difference... back then to now. I mean, back then, it was just like we got along, you know, compared to when my daughter was going to school and when they were having race riots in high school between the brown and the black. I, I couldn't relate to that, you know, because I was like—my best friend, my first boyfriend was Hispanic. The first guy I kissed was Hispanic, so I couldn't understand, you know, that, you know, that race riot thing that was going on. But, you know, we, we used to get along like really good, you know, from what I remembered, and, you know, it was just kind of, you know, interesting, and I remember when that happened here when my daughter was in high school. She was like, "Mommy, that is not us, not us, you know, not us from Central America. They don't have issue with us. They're like, you're one of us. It's the [Laughs] the people that were born here." I was like, "Well you were born here." "No, but I'm" [inaudible] [Laughs] So that was kind of, you know... something different to experience, because, like I said, I didn't experience that growing up, yeah.

*GLORIA*

Right, yeah, a very different time.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, yeah.

*GLORIA*

So you were in Catholic school through seventh grade?

*CHERYL*

Up until eighth grade.

*GLORIA*

Eighth grade.

*CHERYL*

Uh-hmm [affirmative], and then I went to public school in high school.

*GLORIA*

The junior high school that you went to. I don't think we mentioned that.

*CHERYL*

That, well, in Catholic school...

*GLORIA*

It's all one.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, it's all one. From first grade to eighth grade it's considered, you know, elementary. [Laughs] Yeah.

*GLORIA*

And you ended up in East LA.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, East LA.

*GLORIA*

What was that experience like? Was it just more of the same or mainly—

*CHERYL*

More of the same. More of the same. It was, it was, you know... no different.

*GLORIA*

Now were you tracked differently in school? Given that you were coming from a private Catholic school, were you tracked differently? Because I know some... you know, some time around ninth grade, I think, teachers and counselors start thinking, you know, this person's going to go into the college track. This person is going to go into something else.

*CHERYL*

I don't remember them having that at that time. You know, I really don't. I went to a medical magnet school, so, you know, I think the emphasis was the majority of the people wanted to get into the medical field, so a lot of the programs that we had there had to do with biology, emphasis on biology and science and stuff like that, with the medical aspect of it so—

*GLORIA*

So everyone was expected to continue.

*CHERYL*

Yes, yeah, and I particular chose that school, you know, because I was like this is, you know, at that time I wanted to get into... particularly the medical field, but I wasn't sure what, where, and then, you know, later on, you know, when I got pulled into the cultural aspect of it more, then I wanted to get into Cultural Anthropology or some kind of Sociology or something that has to do with the world, and you know, getting to know different cultures and appreciating different cultures.

*GLORIA*

When did you decide that you wanted to follow a different track other than the medical field?

*CHERYL*

That was probably... when my daughter graduated from high school, and I have to say honestly, when I was pursuing the medical field, it was basically because, you know, I was a single mom and I was looking at the aspect of where, you know, what field can I make the most money to take care of my daughter, you know, and I think that was what drove me towards, you know, that, you know, and so I used to really be fascinated with, with, you

know, as a young kid I used to really be fascinated with, you know, with the... body, with what makes us function and that was like the main thing. I was really into science and everything like that. It was either being a doctor or being an astronaut. I was really fascinated with all that stuff, too, with, you know, what's out there beyond the earth, you know, the universe and everything, so I was really interested in that, too, you know, but, you know, when you're young you're interested in a lot of things, but those were the two things growing up that I was absolutely fascinated with. Either I would be an astronaut, astrologist or a doctor. Those were the three things. And then when I had my daughter my focus was, like, okay, you have to think about something that you could get into that you could take care of your daughter being a single mom, so I really focused on the medical field, and was, like, okay, I'm going to try to, you know, do something in the medical field, but my heart wasn't in it. My heart really wasn't in it, and I kept trying and, you know, I, I just.... it wasn't in it, and then I guess [laughs] when things are meant to be, they're just meant to be, because I was taking a nursing class for my LPN, and at that time you had to do a manual test, and the one thing that I couldn't get was the blood pressure. This was before you had to do the digital way, so you had to do it the manual way and listening, and because of my hearing I could never hear it, so [laughs]... and they kept telling me, well, you're going to have to, you know, pass it. This is part of whatever requirement, and I was like, well, you know what? There's probably a reason why I shouldn't be doing this if I can't hear the blood pressure. So I think that was an excuse that I also allowed myself a lot. Okay, I won't be able to hear if somebody is, you know, dying on me here... [mutual laughter], so that was my own way, I guess, of just justifying not following that path, you know, and when my daughter, not even really when my daughter graduated from high school, but, you know, when my... when my dad passed away, that was when I really started to, you know, follow the path towards the culture and everything.

GLORIA

What year did he die again?

CHERYL

He passed away in 19... it was 12 years ago so I want to say 19....

[inaudible]...

GLORIA

[inaudible]

CHERYL

I want to say 1997. Yeah, yeah, 1997. That's when he was born. I was born, ha! That's when he passed away, yeah, 1997, and when he passed away I really, you know, wanted to, you know, find out more and more and more because he was so into the culture. He was so... you know, really, really emphasized, you know, Garifuna, [inaudible] about being Garifuna, the importance of doing that, and, you know, I wanted to just learn more. I've

always been fascinated to different cultures. One of my favorite subjects was Social Studies, and I remember Social Studies. We used to learn about the different cultures, but I.... Every time I learned, you know, about different cultures in Social Studies class, I was like, yeah! Oh! Tell me more! I want to know more! I want to meet a person from Egypt. I want to meet somebody. I was just so fascinated with that, and... that went away, you know. It was like [makes bored sound] Social Studies, that's something that, you know, it was just one of your favorite classes.

*GLORIA*

It doesn't bring [inaudible].

*CHERYL*

Yeah, and I, I didn't, you know, really... you know... when I think about when I was younger, you know, that those were like the things that, like, really—Uh!—Social Studies, culture, yeah! And then journalism. That was another thing, and I remember when I told my parents, probably when I was in sixth grade, I wanted to be a journalist. Are you crazy? You'll never make money being a journalist! Get into something else. Don't think about that.

*GLORIA*

That's funny.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, so I went through my different stages of what I wanted to be, but the Social Studies is something that always fascinated me. When I would go and go to the library and buy books, it would always be something about history and other cultures, but I would just, like, put it on the back burner, like I'm, I'm just a curious person, you know, and when my dad passed I was like, well, yeah, I really want to learn more about cultures. What can I do? What can I do? You know. And I kind of let that sit on the back burner, and I started focusing more on the Garifuna culture, but I really wanted to learn more about other cultures, too, in relationship, you know, to Garifuna, especially Native American culture. That was one thing that fascinated me because I knew my Native American roots, so I wanted to focus more on the Native American roots and, and also look at, you know, the difference. I always notice the difference between Garifuna and African-Americans, so I wanted to learn more about the African-American roots, history, because believe it or not, even though I was raised up here, I honestly didn't know anything about the African-American history. I mean...

*GLORIA*

That's interesting.

*CHERYL*

That was something that, you know, you kind of... pass over at that time in school. It really wasn't taught, you know, so it was just, the only thing really that was taught was, okay, African-American slavery and not really, you know, much about that. So, you know, I honestly didn't know about that, and when we were at home, of course, you know, we didn't talk about that.

We talked about who we were as Garifuna people. So I, I was absolutely, I could admit it, naïve when it came to African-American culture. You know, I didn't try to learn about it. I didn't know anything about it. You know, I was focused on my culture and the Native American culture and wanting to learn a little bit more about the African-American culture. So that's what got me into, you know, the Cultural Anthropology aspect of it, and when my daughter, you know, went to high school and everything, graduated from high school, and she went to college and she told me, she was like, "Mommy, you know what? You've raised me. You know, you've put your education on hold." You know, because she, she said, "I never... I don't remember a time that you weren't in school." She told me, "You are always trying to go to school and you always had to drop out because you had to make a choice between, you know, me, paying for me to go to school, for a private school or whatever. You know, you always, you know, put aside your education," and she was like, "Now I'm in college. It's your turn to go back to school. You have no excuse now." You know? And my fiancée, you know, he told me, "She's right. You have no excuse. You know, I know you've wanted to go to school and you're putting it on hold and everything, but now it's your turn." So I was like, oh, my god. I have an opportunity to go back to school now [laughs] and, you know, and the support of my family, you know, it was just like... it was amazing. You know, my first year back in school, you know, I took a full load, so I went to school full time, and it was like don't worry about working. I want you to go to school. Don't worry about it, and he, you know, allowed me the chance to go back to school full time for the first year to get my feet wet and just slowly get into that, and boy, was that an experience going back to school!

*GLORIA*

I'm sure. I'm sure.

*CHERYL*

You know, it was, it was a great experience, a great learning experience, and, and when I took my first Anthropology class, it was a mandatory class, and I was like, ah! This is home!

*GLORIA*

You felt at home?

*CHERYL*

[Laughs] Yes, the angels were singing to me, and it's, like, this is what you—oh, yes, and it was... it brought back that, that, that spirit that I had when I was taking that, that Social, Social, ah...

*GLORIA*

Studies?

*CHERYL*

Studies class when I was a kid. I was like, yeah! I could look—I looked forward to that class. It was a four-hour class once a week, but I looked

forward to that class. I was like, oh! You know, so that's what brought me into, you know, Cultural [laughs]

GLORIA

Anthropology.

CHERYL

Anthropology, yeah.

GLORIA

Now I know you mentioned you were a single mom, and I'm wondering, aside from the fact that being a single mom sort of precluded you from continuing your education. What other challenges did you face at that time?

CHERYL

Besides, just my education, because I was fortunate that I had the support of my family—my, my mother, my father, and my sisters and, you know, good people around me that—

GLORIA

I was going to ask you about, about your father—

CHERYL

Yeah...!

GLORIA

—especially and what was his reaction when you told him—

CHERYL

Oh... Goodness [inaudible]

GLORIA

—when you broke the news?

CHERYL

I was the last person that they expected in my family, because I was so quiet and I was so into school and everything, and, you know... I'm, like, I remember the day my father found out, and I, I... my father always told me don't lie to him, you know? And I didn't lie to him about my pregnancy. I just... failed to tell him. [Laughs]

GLORIA

[inaudible]

CHERYL

It wasn't really a lie [laughs]... and, and, and I —

GLORIA

How did he find out? Did you—

CHERYL

I didn't tell him. What happened was, one of my aunts noticed me when I was coming from school, because at that time I was, of course, going to school out there in East LA, so I had to catch the bus coming back down to school, you know, so one of my aunts saw me getting off the bus and she said that I was moving like I was pregnant, you know, and at that time, you know, I mean, I wasn't big or anything. I was, I was still... believe it or not I was still a size 8 at that time. I was a little thing, you know, and I was still

active. I was still, you know, doing everything, and I honestly didn't have the symptoms of, of being pregnant, because I was so active and everything, and it was, the funny way how I found out I was pregnant, you know, is like read through an encyclopedia, because I... the little symptoms that I started feeling I was like... when the milk started coming... I was, like, okay. I started reading things in the encyclopedia because going to a Catholic school all of my life, we were sheltered. We were so sheltered. I remember when one of the nuns told us if "you kiss a boy you'll get pregnant," you know, and I always say well I never kissed a boy, [mutual laughter]... you know, and they're like "yeah, that's what got you pregnant." You should have just kissed the boy. I said, "But the nun told us not to kiss the boy, you'll get pregnant," but that was the extent of sex education in a private school. We were so, so sheltered. It was ridiculous, and then, of course, growing up at that time, many parents didn't talk to children about—  
*GLORIA*

Oh, yeah, even now—

*CHERYL*

Yeah, even, even now, many parents did not have that conversation about sex, that open conversation, and I think, you know, that was, that was something, you know, that just, you know... got me into that situation. But I did know about condoms, you know, and the way I got pregnant, you know, and I don't mind sharing this story because I hope somebody learns from it. You know, when I got pregnant, you know, my daughter's father, you know, we were, we were, we were seeing each other and everything like that, and we used condoms, and he felt that it would be really cute and funny if he would put holes in the condoms. He thought it would be just really cute to put holes in the condoms, and, you know, me being trusting and me, you know, being naïve and everything, you know, it was like, oh, I saw him put the condom on, you know, I would watch him do it, but not knowing that you could bore holes in the condoms. So you should keep your own condoms and make sure you give it to them, you know. That's the moral of that story. So that's how I got pregnant with, you know, my, my smart boyfriend thinking that it would be really cute to put holes in the condom and see what happened, and nine months later, we ended up with our daughter.

*GLORIA*

So your father found out through your aunt.

*CHERYL*

My father found out through my aunt, and she told him, you know, "I think your daughter's pregnant," and, and then when he came in he, he... he [inaudible] because I was so... [inaudible] so innocent, and he was like, "Do you know what intercourse is?" It's like, "Yes." "Do you know what sex is?" I was like, "Yes." "Have you been having sex?" I was like, "Yes," and I just see his eyes like getting bigger and bigger, but I'm being honest with him so, you know, he was, like, [inaudible] to tell us, as long as you're honest

with us, I won't, you know, I won't... get too—I guess I'll be mad but I won't be that mad. So he kept asking me the questions and, you know, I kept saying "Yes" [laughs] to the questions, and he was like... "Are you pregnant?" And I said "Yes," and he just... total silence. He was like... "Are you pregnant?" He asked me like three times and I say "Yes." "Do you know what it means to be pregnant?" I said, "Yes, the baby's growing in my belly." "And you're pregnant, right?" I said, "Yes."

*GLORIA*

Oh, my god.

*CHERYL*

So that was that, you know, and he was disappointed in me. He cried, you know, he cried and everything like that, and, you know, everybody was shocked. It was like they couldn't, you know... they didn't... the baby of the family, you know. They were like, she's quiet, she's a nerd. How could she get pregnant, you know? But I did, you know? [Laughs] And, you know, my—

*GLORIA*

Was he mainly disappointed because he thought that being pregnant would mean that you wouldn't be finishing school?

*CHERYL*

Yeah, yeah, but I did manage to finish school. He told me, "No matter what, you're going to finish school. You're going to graduate." You know, so it's like no matter what. So, you know, at that time.... I, I, I don't know what their reasons were, but at that time I was sent to Queen of Angels. It was a, a home for unwed.... unwed teenage mothers, predominantly Catholic, you know, so we went there. Of course, in East LA, too [laughs] You know, and I went there, and, you know, I was among other Catholic, Catholic girls that were pregnant, quietly... and we talked about the stories, how our parents, you know, you know, the Catholic upbringing, you're not supposed to have children unwed, and everything like that, and, you know, that was an experience.

*GLORIA*

So this was a specialized school for unwed mothers?

*CHERYL*

Yeah, it was a specialized home. It was a group home.

*GLORIA*

Oh, it was a group home.

*CHERYL*

It was a group home for unwed Catholic girls [laughs]

*GLORIA*

So you had classes there.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, I had classes and everything there, and, you know, it was a continuation, school-type setting over there, you know, and there—my



experience there was, you know, my experience, they were like really trying to, you know, talk us into giving our children, you know, to other Catholic families that wanted children, you know.

*GLORIA*

Yeah, I was going to ask you about that.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, they were really heavily emphasizing, you know, us to give our children up for adoption to good Catholic families and everything like that, and I remember having a conversation with my parents, because I don't think they were aware, you know. I don't think that that was their assumption, that the school was, you know, it was just one day when they found out I was pregnant the first thing they did at the time was call the priest to get, you know, counseling, you know, and they referred him to that place and everything, and so I really didn't think they knew or were aware of what they were doing, because when our parents would come to visit it was a totally different atmosphere, you know, and a different façade that they showed, you know. It was a great place though. It was a great place. You know, it was just... I felt personally like they were, like, really trying to pressure us into giving up our children for adoption, and when I told my parents, "You want me to get rid of this baby?" And my dad was like, "No! No. [inaudible] you know, you made a mistake. This is, this is our child. This is our family. We don't get rid of our children. We take care of our children, so..." You know, and I remember telling my dad, you know, "I think, you know, that they, you know, want me to, like, get rid of my baby, to give my baby up for adoption," and my dad is like, "No, no. You know, this is just supposed to be a place that makes sure you get your prenatal care and all that kind of stuff," and, you know, and I was, like, well, I wasn't feeling that way, you know, I felt like... that's how I felt at the time—

*GLORIA*

Were other young women feeling the same way?

*CHERYL*

Other young women were feeling that way. You know, I remember one of my roommates, she was like, "I don't want to, you know, give my child up. They're forcing me to," and I was like well freaking out so, you know, I even contemplated running away from there because I was like, "oh, no, they're trying to take my baby away!" And my dad and my mom reassured me, no, no. We just wanted to make sure that you're getting, you know, the help. The baby is going to be taken care of and they specialize in teenage pregnancy because it is high risk, and so I trusted my parents. I didn't necessarily trust the facility where I was at, but I trusted my parents wouldn't, you know, tell me a lie like that, because my father was really about telling the truth. So I went there and everything, and, you know, ended up having my daughter and my parents just... they just fell in love with her, and they were very supportive, you know.

GLORIA

Was the baby born at a Catholic hospital or—

CHERYL

At a Catholic hospital, hospital. She was born in a Catholic hospital in East LA. [Laughs] That's a funny story. When they ask my daughter where are you from? And she's like [inaudible] East LA [laughs] and it's a big joke! At first she said? [inaudible under laughter] I was born in East LA, but that's a funny story there.

GLORIA

Meanwhile, were the father's family involved at all? Did they know what was happening?

CHERYL

They didn't know what was happening, but they, they were not involved at all. They, you know... that's a different story. [Laughs] [inaudible] He was, he was not involved in my daughter at all. We gave him a picture. He saw her once when she was a baby, and I gave him pictures, and I remember telling him, you know, "I honestly don't want anything from you. All I need to know is how to contact you if my daughter ended up— if my daughter ever needs a blood transfusion or something I'll know how to get in touch with you." So that was the relationship that we always had. I always knew where he was at, you know, so in case of an emergency I was able to contact him, and he knew where we were at, but he chose not to be a part of my daughter's life and, and that was okay until my daughter was probably around nine, and she started asking more about her biological father, and I told her, "Okay, if you want to, you know, meet him I'll support that and everything like that." I never said anything negative to her about him because I don't think, you know, that's right. I always told my daughter, you know, that, you know, I told her the good things about him, things that I knew of him then, you know, all of the positive things. The relationship that created her was a positive relationship. I never badmouthed him, and now it's like one of the big things that he was concerned about is that I filled her head with negativity, and I remember when he met her when she was nine, and he was so scared and he was like, "What have you told her about me?" And I was like, "Nothing." And he was like, "I don't believe you," and then when he spoke to my daughter one on one, you know, and my daughter's like, "No, my mom never said anything bad about you. My mom always said how athletic you were, how cute you were," [inaudible] Like that was [inaudible], when I was, you know, ah, [inaudible] "That was me when I was in high school and everything," and my mom said, "That's all she's ever said, she said positive things about you." And after their first meeting, initial meeting, he said, "I don't understand why you never, you know, said anything bad about me," and I said, "I don't have to." I said, "My daughter will judge you for who you are." I said, "She know what parent has been there, has been there every there, who blew her nose, stayed up with her. I

don't have to say anything bad about her. That's something you'll have to explain to her when she asks you why you weren't there throughout her life. I have no reason to say anything bad about you. If it wasn't for you I wouldn't have my daughter. I have nothing bad to say about you."

[Inaudible] So we've had, you know, a civil relationship, you know, an understanding. We're not, we're not friends, but we do have a civil respect for each other in regards to our daughter.

*GLORIA*

And she still keeps in touch with him?

*CHERYL*

She keeps in touch with him, and I allow them to have their relationship.

*GLORIA*

That's good. That's important. So your father and mother fell in love with—

*CHERYL*

My mother and father fell in love with her and my father was in all sense pretty much, you know, her father. You know, he took the role as, as her father and everything like that, and my ex-husband, too. I, I did get married when she was probably three or four years old, and my first husband, he played a vital role of being a good father. You know, he provided for her, took good care of her, but my father was like, no matter what, you know, he was like, "If she needs anything, you come to me," and he was very adamant about that. He was like, "Yes, that's your husband, but he's not your—her father. I am the one that will take care of her no matter what. If she needs anything you come to me and your mom before you go to anybody else." So they were very, very, you know, there for me when it came to my daughter.

*GLORIA*

I'm really struck by your father's.... dedication to you, and your education in particular, and I'm wondering what was his experience with education? Were his parents also very strict about him getting an education in Belize?

*CHERYL*

I know... in Belize, it's very hard for people to continue on with education, because I believe, if I recall, once you're in high school you have to pay for school, so not too many families have the opportunity to go to school, but my dad did go to school, you know. He did graduate from high school and everything like that, so he realized the importance of getting an education, and he always said, you know, in America you have to have an education. If you don't have an education you will not be anything in America. So he was very, very, you know, strong on education and everything, and he always, you know, gave me the opportunity. You know, it's like, you know, we'll take her if you go to school. We'll watch her as long as you're going to school, working and doing whatever, you know, and so the emphasis on education was very strong, yeah.

*GLORIA*

He also must have received that message from his parents, I imagine.

*CHERYL*

Uh-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, I mean, aum, see, my mother—with my father's parents, I really don't know them that well. I don't remember them. The little bit that I remember about them is when I met them again, when I went to visit in '86. I really don't know too much about them except for the stories, and my father had said that they, they were, too, into education but... and it was funny, too. When, when my—when they did find out that I was pregnant, going "that child...!" They called my grandparents in Belize to tell them [laughs] and I remember my dad handing over the phone to me to talk to his mom and dad. They're like, "Tell your grandparents what you did," and I was like... And they were yelling at me in Garifuna about getting pregnant! That was one of the most hysterical things to me. It's like... they're calling my grandparents in Belize! I was like, wow!

*GLORIA*

But these are not the grandparents that raised you.

*CHERYL*

No, these were not the grandparents that raised me. These were my paternal grandparents that, that, I mean, they knew of me, they, they've always—my parents, of course, when they talked to them they talked, you know, about us, so they know us from, you know, I guess from when I was younger, but I don't remember them when I was younger. I remember my maternal grandmother because that's who raised me, you know, and at that time my maternal grandmother had passed away.

*GLORIA*

Oh, so no one could yell at you.

*CHERYL*

Yes, oh, my goodness. So, you know, she couldn't yell at me [laughs] [inaudible] it was so ironic that I remembered that... that he called his parents and told them, you know, that I got pregnant, and he called his sister, and, and, you know, I was getting yelled at more from across the way, from across the ocean, than I was from my parents, so that was kind of interesting. I was like, wow, you know, I'm getting yelled at from Belize for getting pregnant. I was like, wow...! That was hysterical, when I look at it now, but then I was just like crying on the phone like, "yes, ma, yes, ma." [Inaudible] you know, they were yelling and I couldn't really say anything. I was, like, okay, you know, sorry, sorry, but then now when I look at it it's like, wow, he actually called Belize to tell them I was pregnant. That was priceless.

*GLORIA*

Now going back to being raised Catholic and also partaking in Garifuna rituals and celebrations. Did you ever see a contradiction between those two?

*CHERYL*

You know what? It was like two different worlds, and I never associated them. In my mind I never associated them as being the same. It was just like when I went to Catholic mass on Sunday, that was just a different life, a different association, you know, and when we practice the Garifuna spirituality, that was what it was, so I really didn't associate the two.

*GLORIA*

There was no syncretism in your mind.

*CHERYL*

No. I mean, of course you saw like, you know, some of the rituals they have, like... the, of course, the cross and things like that, but then I didn't associate them. It was just this is this and this is that.

*GLORIA*

I do this on Sundays; I do this on Saturdays [inaudible]

*CHERYL*

Yeah.

*GLORIA*

That's interesting.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, whenever we did anything. I remember when we did an anniversary, aum... a anniversary, a one-year anniversary for my grandmother, my maternal grandmother, after she passed we did a... a mass for her, and then it was just... it was all spiritual, and actually, we did a mass at the church that Sunday, you know, just a memory mass, you know, just mentioning my grandmother's name, and it was, like, okay, that's what we do, and then that Saturday we did like this whole spiritual thing for my grandmother, and it was, like, okay, that was totally different, and then when we did a, a [shabu?], that was when one of the ancestors came to somebody in the family and they wanted a mass, you know, for them, and then we did all of the things that we're supposed to do spiritually. We offered the ancestors food, we brought them, you know, the clothing and all that kind of stuff that we're supposed to do as a spiritual offering and everything like that, and we did that on a Saturday, you know, and we just did the spirituality portion of it—you know, the drumming, the singing—everything that we need to do to honor the ancestors, and then on Sunday we went to church.

*GLORIA*

Yeah, there was no contradiction.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, no contradiction, you know. It was just, I mean, life as usual, yeah.

*GLORIA*

And what about in terms of the dress? Did your mom use the traditional Garifuna dress or just on, you know, special occasions?

*CHERYL*

Growing up, no. My mom dressed Western, you know, but I know my grandmother was a seamstress, so when... during the time when she would

come to stay with us when I was younger, you know, she would make our dresses, you know, and we would just wear it, you know. It was just... clothing, you know, it wasn't really anything particularly different. But then, you know, again, that's like the association with the Latin American community because a lot of their grandmothers also made their own clothing, you know, so it was like no big deal, and of course growing up going to the Catholic school it was like we wore the uniforms and everything, put on a pretty dress, you know. Of course we were happy to wear the clothes that our grandmother sewed for us, so it wasn't a big deal, you know? Yeah, [inaudible] the clothing back then wasn't a big deal. Yeah, and as far as wearing traditional Garifuna outfits, I think... I don't recall having a traditional Garifuna outfit until probably... four or five years ago, and I was adamant about wearing a Garifuna outfit, and I said, "You know what? I don't remember having a Garifuna outfit here in the United States." I mean growing up back home it's a given. That's what you wear. It's not considered an outfit; it's just clothing. But then at that time here it became basically like an outfit-type thing, and I look at it like, you know, how here African-Americans wear the traditional Dashiki on special occasions for Black History Month. So that's like how I started to see the Garifuna... some Garifuna people putting on their outfits, you know, for specific occasions, and I remember my aunt came down, my, my mother... my father's sister, and she saw us, and I told her, "You know what? I really want a beautiful Garifuna outfit, but I don't want it just for special occasions. I want it so when I feel like wearing it I could just wear it." You know? And she was, like, okay, and she made it for me. That was my first Garifuna outfit, and I love that outfit, and when I get in the mood I just throw it on, you know, and since then I've had, you know, like a few, you know, made, and when I just feel like it. I think I mentioned when the mood hits me, I just get up in the morning and I just throw it on and I go to work, and I just feel the most comfortable because I'm not thinking about it. I'm just going out there and it's, like, okay, that's just part of me. You know. I try not to, you know, think of it as an outfit. When people expect me to wear it, you know, that's when I don't want to wear it. When I'm wearing it because I want to wear, not just because everybody else is wearing it, that's when I feel more connected to who I really am, you know.

*GLORIA*

So the dress is really something that came later for you. You know, it's a kind of reaffirmation of your cultural background.

*CHERYL*

Yes, Uh-hmm.

*GLORIA*

Okay. I want to shift gears a little bit here and talk to you more about your organization. I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about what led

you to establish the organization, just like when, what year, you know, who else was there, if you could name people.

*CHERYL*

Garifuna-American Heritage Foundation United, acronym GAHFU. Of course, it's a dedication to my dad. My dad's nickname was Gahfu. In Garifuna, it means box. His father... my grandfather's nickname was also Gahfu John Box, you know, so when I thought of the acronym, you know, I knew I wanted to use something that made sure the acronym was Gahfu for my father, because, you know, I wanted to, you know, honor him as well as my mom and everything like that, and I felt with that name, because when my parents came to America all these years, 35 years before he passed away, you know, when people would come to my house, they would always call my parents, hey, what's up Mr. and Mrs. Gahfu

*GLORIA*

[laughs]

*CHERYL*

[inaudible] Box, so I figured with making sure that was in there I was honoring both my mother and my father, you know, so, yes, GAHFU became an official, nonprofit, charitable, educational... nonprofit charitable organization November... November 16, 2005. But prior to that, you know, we were doing other things in the community with other organizations, you know, just trying to do our part in preserving the culture.

*GLORIA*

What other organizations were you working with?

*CHERYL*

I was working with, aum, [inaudible] Empowerment Movement. That was one of the first organizations we worked with. I've worked with the Los Angeles Settlement Day Committee. They celebrate the annual Garifuna Settlement Day November 19th. That's an organization, one of the oldest organizations, that started back in the late 70s, you know, and then the Garifuna Cultural Group is another organization that we worked with, and, you know, we volunteered in the different organizations, and, you know, I just felt that there was something more that needed to be done. Everybody had their expertise in different fields, and my thing is why replicate what other people are doing? There were other, other things that, that needed to be done, you know, that I, that I saw that wasn't getting done, while the other organizations, what they did, they were doing great in what they were doing, and I just felt that there were other aspects that wasn't being met, and the first thing I, I did—this is prior to incorporating—was the first annual Garifuna Forum in 2005, April of 2005, and that was just basically... just getting the Garifuna community together to talk about, you know, what's going on in our community, what are we doing as individuals to preserve the culture? What can we continue to do? What ways? What, what do we need to do, you know? That was the initial...

*GLORIA*

Was this meeting in Los Angeles?

*CHERYL*

[inaudible] first initial meeting was in Los Angeles, and I think it was just my way of seeing, you know, who's interested, who's interested in, in... in the culture, who's still interested, you know, because... of course, I would see people come in... come out for the different celebration and masses, but then it was just once a year for the celebration, and then what happens after that? So with this it was basically, you know, let me see, are people really, really interested in the culture? Do they really want to preserve it? You know, let, let's just see if... what's going on, you know. What don't we know? You know. Is there Garifuna businesses out there? You know, maybe there's Garifuna entrepreneurs that we don't about and we could learn to support them. You know, other organizations in... in other states that we don't know about. Let's try to find a way to unite all these things, and let the community know what we're doing and what we're all doing in preserving the culture wherever we're at in the world. So when we did that in 2005, I mean, people showed up and people were fascinated, and they were like, oh, wow, we need to do this, because prior to that, they did do a Garifuna Forum, I believe it was. I wasn't part of that. I was living out of state during the time they did the first Garifuna Forum. I think it was in 1992. I can't recall the organization who did that, but they had did a Garifuna Forum, and it was at the Hilton Hotel by, by USC area, and everybody talked about this forum, you know, and I didn't know anything about that, but people kept referring to that, and they were saying that they haven't had, like, anything like that since 1992 or something? And at this time it was 19... I'm sorry, it was... 2005, so that was a great span between, you know, anybody doing anything, and then I remember, I said, "Well, if I'm going to do this I want to continue to do it. I don't want that great span to go without us, you know, connecting and, and following up with each other with what's going on in the Garifuna communities all over the world." Because at that time so many things were going, going on. I mean, things were happening in Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and throughout the Garifuna [Diaspora? Continues under Gloria] all over the world.

*GLORIA*

Probably there were all these movements.

*CHERYL*

Yes, but we weren't connected. You know, everybody was doing their own thing, but we didn't have a united voice, so, you know, people were doing little things but, you know, just little things that, that this one group did, that one group did, so it didn't amount to a whole bunch of big stuff. You know, it was just little things, sometimes what individuals could do and everything like that, and I felt that in order to have a strong voice, we had to be united, you know, in some form, some manner—whatever. Let our



voices be heard and let everybody have this opportunity to get together and let, you know, inform. Let us know what's going on in the communities united, you know, and see what we could do as a community to try to rectify what's going on. Maybe we can't do anything; maybe we could do a little bit, and also to support what other groups are doing, you know, and we won't, we won't be able to support what a group is doing if we don't know what's going on. So that was the main focus of just, you know, kind of letting everybody know what's going on in your neck of the woods. So people came to the forum and... and that was amazing. That was the most amazing experience... in my life, aside from having my children, you know? And it was amazing because during that forum, you know, we were reunited with our Taino, you know, brothers and sisters, you know, and we were reunited with our, our brother from St. Vincent, and St. Vincent, of course, is our homeland, where were exiled in 1797, and the Tainos are descendants of our Arawak, you know, Native American heritage, you know. They were in the bigger islands, you know, over there, like in [inaudible]—

*GLORIA*

Puerto Rico —

*CHERYL*

Puerto Rico and Cuba and all that, so we're, we're cousins, you know, and the funny story was when we had [unintelligible]. He was one of the Taino leaders from the United Confederation of Tainos here in, in California, and when he came, you know, there, and he told us the story, he was like, "You know what they told us about the Garifuna people?" And, you know, and we were, like, "What?" He was like, "They told us that you all died. As far as we knew, we, we didn't know that you existed, but, because you were gone, you guys were dead, you know. And then when our brother, Dr. [unintelligible] from Yurumein, he came down and he told us that's the same thing they told us in St. Vincent, in Yurumein. They—We thought that the Garifuna people that were exiled, we thought they were all dead. We didn't know that you guys still existed, you know?" And then we thought, because in most of the history books, in almost all of the history books, they said that the Arawak people did not exist.

*GLORIA*

Were exterminated

*CHERYL*

Were exterminated, you know, so we didn't know that we still had, you know, these close, close cousins, the Tainos, you know, that were still out there. We didn't know that. You know, I read about the Tainos and everything like that, but it wasn't until we sat down and we talked to each other, and we're, like, we're the same people, we're cousins, you know, and tear, tears in that room, and we cried and we hugged each other, and to have Taino and to have, you know, St. Vincent and to have Belize,

Guatemala and Honduras in here, in Los Angeles, you know, together, it was, it was just an amazing experience, because we all thought he had died.

*GLORIA*

Was that documented in any way?

*CHERYL*

In pictures, pictures. It was documented in pictures, and we do have... some of the, the pictures, I think, online. And, yeah, it was, it was an amazing moment. It was really an amazing moment that, you know, we didn't expect that to happen, you know, we didn't know if that was going to happen. It was just like talking to each other and, and learning about each other, and, you know, people came to me afterwards, like, how did you make this happen? I'm like, I didn't do anything. I'm like [laughs], you know, I, I, you know, I just sent out the call and the people responded and this is what happened. You know, we were able to find our, our distant cousins, you know, and reconnect with our homeland, you know, in that moment and it was beautiful to me, and that just inspired me more and dedicated me more to—we can't stop, we have to continue to do it, and since then we've done the Garifuna Forums back to back from 2005 until now. Every year we have a Garifuna Forum. You know, the first one, of course again, was in LA. The second one was at Southwest LA College. The third one was in New York. The fourth one was also in New York again by special demand. [Laughs] You know, they, they loved it the first time around and wanted us to bring it back there the second time, and then this time, the fifth-year Garifuna Forum is kind of a... a controversy because New York wants us to have it there again, and then LA wants us to bring it back here.

*GLORIA*

It's time for it to be in LA.

*CHERYL*

Yes, yes, yes. So, you know, we're aiming for it to be in LA, and we'll have to figure out what we'll do in New York, because they really want us to do it in New York, too, but, you know, it takes so much planning to do that, you know, and it's a very big event that I, I don't think we would be able to do two. It would have to be one, and by consensus, everybody is like, "L-A, L-A, L-A!" So I think, you know, this year our 2009 forum will more than likely be in L-A.

*GLORIA*

When would it be scheduled?

*CHERYL*

Tentatively it'll be scheduled in... in September for the Central American Independence celebration that occurs, you know, throughout Los Angeles, you know, and we do always participate in the Central American parade, so it'll be around that, either before the parade or after the parade, you know, so we're looking at those two dates, and....

*GLORIA*

What are some of the issues that either you discuss in these forums or do you feel the Garifuna community still faces?

*CHERYL*

The main... I think the first forum, the main issue was how can we get our young people interested in the Garifuna culture? How can we preserve the Garifuna culture? That, those were the most important things in the first one, you know, just, just how can we preserve it? How can we really, you know, continue, you know, the, what the other people have done throughout, because even though we've lived here for so long, there's always been somebody or an organization that has done the same exact thing that I'm doing right now. There's always been a group or an individual trying to preserve that culture, so, you know, what I'm doing is nothing new. You know, you know, it's something different and everything like that, you know, but it's nothing new. [Laughs] You know, so that was the number one thing was, what can we do to get the children interested in learning the language and everything like that, and re-aculturating into the Garifuna community. So that was the main thing, and also, again, the first forum was about how do we, you know, find out, you know, a way to, to connect with each other to know what's going on? You know, and different things started, you know, happening. People started creating Google groups and things like that to, to connect and, you know, let each other know what's going on and that was interesting, that, you know, and those groups are growing more and more now. I think we learned... then how to communicate, not just picking up the phone call but also making use of the technology, the Internet, and everything like that.

*GLORIA*

Oh, yeah, that has changed so much. The Internet has just made things a lot easier, in some respects.

*CHERYL*

A lot easier, a lot easier, but then in some respects the older, you know, generation, they're not familiarized with the Internet, and that, you know, was evident during the second Garifuna Forum, and it was like we were so—our generation is like everything Internet, everything Internet, and it was, like, okay, you know, we just did everything through the Internet and then we were realizing that, hey, we have a whole generation here that aren't getting the information, you know. The, the older generation, they weren't getting the information about, you know, what we were doing as an organization because they were used to the phone calls, they were used to the flyers, and they were used to mailing, and we were now, you know, we were reaching a younger people because they were, like, doing all the Internet stuff. So we had to learn to kind of like do a little bit of both. You know, that was a marketing experience there, you know, but that was one of the focus again. The second one was focused on... on the culture itself. We talked about.... about.... about, you know, preserving the, the music and

everything like that. That was the second, and Garifuna entrepreneurship. You know, what ways can we do to, you know, to make sure that the Garifuna dollar is being spent in the Garifuna communities, you know, and try to bring that up, you know. We talked about that, the economics and everything, and then the third Garifuna Forum in New York, we talked about the culture, we talked about the spirituality and traditions, and we talked about... one special presentation was about alcoholism and how it affects the Garifuna community, an issue that people don't talk about. You know, we talked about, you know, how... just, you know, everyday life. You know, what do we do? How do we react to it as different cultures? You know, how can we do that? How can we, you know, help to make sure that our culture is getting the help needed, you know? Particularly for them, because a lot of our people, you know, they're afraid to get the help that they want, that they need, because, you know, in our culture—we're not the only culture, you know, everything is kept to themselves, you know, so when one of our, our presenters shared his story about alcoholism, you know, I, I thought that was... very brave and very moving, and a lot of the people that were there were, like, wow, you know what? You opened up my eyes, you know, you know, to a lot of things. I experienced that thing, and I'm glad that you brought that out into the open, and nobody ever thought about bringing that up. [Inaudible] Things happen at the Garifuna Forum that you, you know, never thought would happen and things get discussed. We usually have a program, but once you're around Garifuna people, we're free spirits. You never know what's going to evolve. [Laughs] You know, it usually starts off this way and then, you know, it just... it just manifests into whatever it's supposed to be, and it usually turns out to be beautiful. So I learn not to stress out too much about it anymore! Even though it takes a lot of work and a lot of energy. I just, you know, whatever the ancestors want to happen will happen, and whatever will manifest will manifest.

*GLORIA*

I wanted to go back to what you said earlier about after your father passed away, you really saw the founding of this organization as a tribute to your father, and I'm left wondering, was your father known in the Garifuna community?

*CHERYL*

He was known. He was very—he was very well known. He was known in the Garifuna community. [inaudible] growing up, they always had stuff in my house, you know, in the backyard and everything like that, so he was well known, you know, [inaudible] and he was a police officer back home, so a lot of people knew him from back home, being a police officer, you know [inaudible].

*GLORIA*

So they always saw him as a kind of authority figure [inaudible].

*CHERYL*

Uh-huh [affirmative] [laughs] Yeah. I, he didn't have an organization or belong to any organization or anything, but I think personally in our home he always made sure that we were aware. You know, he, he didn't shy away from what needed to be done, and I do know a lot of families here, you know, once they came here, they didn't do a lot of the spiritual aspect of it, but it was just a given. It, it needed to be done; it needed to get, to be done. And my father always made sure that, that whatever needed to be done was done. So we were just raised up knowing who we were, you know, and I think we, we owe that, you know, to our parents, you know, who [inaudible] they always made sure that we knew who we were, you know, not to be ashamed of who we were, so I honor them, you know, in, in this organization. I honor them, I honor the people before me, I honor my ancestors, I honor all of the other organizations that have been here before, but, you know, in the sense that we do need to be united. All of us Garifuna, wherever we're at, we need to be united.

*GLORIA*

Yeah, and it's such a transnational community, as you mentioned earlier, that it's so important to stress the cultural background as opposed to the national identification. I'm also wondering... in terms of your other siblings. You mentioned you're the youngest. Were the expectations different for you because your father needed to push you more, or was it just the same all around for the rest of your siblings?

*CHERYL*

It was the same all the way around. I mean, with me, I think my—I had a... stronger, closer relationship with my father because, you know, I was a tomboy growing up, believe it or not. You know, I was—me and my, my middle sister, we watched the wrestling and sports with my dad, and my other, my oldest sister had a closer relationship with my mom, and I, I, I always say this story, like, when I was growing up my mom used to be like, "oh, you're just like your father," but when he passed away it was like, "oh... you're just like your father...." It was like the more endearing terms, and I think I remind my mom a, a lot of my father. She always says I have his personality. And, you know, he likes to get things done. He doesn't like to waste time. If something needs to be done, it needs to be done. You know, it was like... if he could do it, he'll do it. You know, if somebody is willing to help, you know, yes, bring them in, but regardless, if they, if they are there or not, it's going to be done, you know. But my dad was always, like, okay, it needs to be done. We need to have a mass, we need to have a church [inaudible], that—let's do it. You know. It was just always like that.

Whoever's going to participate, let them participate, but it's going to be done no matter what, you know, because the ancestors asked for it, you know, and you don't question the ancestors. So I think I have that mentality when it came to the organization. It was just something, you know.... it wasn't something that I set out to do, and I, I would say, you know what? It wasn't

my choice, the ancestors told me, called me, just like, whatever. It was just... I mean, I don't recall remembering waking up one day and saying "I'm going to start an organization." It just happened [laughs] and, you know, everything just evolved from the first Garifuna Forum. It was just that passion of you know what? And it's going— I — it's going to be this. I want to do this. It's going to—and it just happened and—

*GLORIA*

Who else was in that founding moment with you [inaudible]

*CHERYL*

Oh, my goodness. My partner in crime, Ronnie Figueroa, my fiancée, my mom, you know, the people in the community, you know, the various leaders in the community, you know, they supported me. They were there. You know. I mean, I think... they looked at me as this bright eye, you know, like, oh! You know, my, my, I was just driven, you know? So I think a lot of people were just like driven by the enthusiasm, you know, of the first one. They were [unintelligible]. We're going to do this [unintelligible], and it was just like so much energy, you know, and, and I think they wanted to see, well, what's going to happen, you know? They... I don't remember anybody ever at that moment, like, saying "what are you thinking?" or whatever. You know, I mean, I had [inaudible] "We've already done that," and I remember, well, how long ago was that? [Laughs] You know, there was, there was that conversation, but even when I, when... we put it out there it was, like, okay, tell us when and, and we'll come, so maybe... I don't know. It wasn't nothing negative. It was just all positive. The way it came about was just all positive, so the first one, it wasn't difficult to me, you know, and it just... it just came to be [laughs] and then even with, with the organization, when I, when I, you know, the decision was made to have an organization, it was just, like... you know... I, I received my 501C3, [inaudible] I, I received my, my 401k statement, and I was like, hmm, looking at the money in there. I'm like, I may not be alive by the time I retire. How can I give back to the community? That was my mentality. How can I give back to the community?

*GLORIA*

That's very brave.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, you know, and, and I looked at it and, and I was, like, wow, you know what? What really can I do to give back to the community? So I, I went ahead and took out the money necessary, you know, to form the corporation and everything like that, and I invested in the culture. I invested in the future of my children, of the next generation, and I formed GAHFU, you know, and I've never looked back.

*GLORIA*

Did you draft up a mission statement or...?

*CHERYL*

Um-hmm [affirmative]. Did all the lovely stuff of forming an organization, and the funny thing is, it took us about a, a year from 2005 to 2006... because trying to form an organization is difficult.

*GLORIA*

I'm sure it is—

*CHERYL*

[laughs] And we didn't know how to do it, and of course we used the Internet, and we tried to follow the steps that you're supposed to do, talk to somebody who already had an organization. We tried that avenue, but you know what? People don't like to tell you how they do things. You know, it was so amazing. It was like I kept asking people, you know, "how are you able to do you organization?" They weren't helpful, you know, and it was like, wow, I don't think this will ever be done, and I read the stuff and it was kind of like, you know, so much information and it was, like, okay, I don't want to do this wrong, and, you know, I downloaded all the paperwork and the instructions, but it was still like, you know what? I want to do it right. You know, so it was by chance. Everything happens for a reason. I went to a seminar. I can't even recall what the seminar was for, but I liked to go to different workshops and community events, and I was, I was talking to somebody about wanting to do an organization, wanting to do a cultural organization and just giving back to the community or something like that, and another lady overheard the conversation, you know, and she was like, "Huh, you want to start a nonprofit, huh?" And I was like, yes, and she was like, "Here, here's the number, this is my cousin. She does things like that. She will help you get your nonprofit," and I was like, "Are you real? Are you really here?" And she was like, "What do you mean?" I said, "You must be an angel or something. Do you know how long I've been trying to get information about how to start my own nonprofit?" Because I didn't want to, you know, just go into it blind sided. I wanted to make sure everything was done. I's were dotted, T's were crossed and everything. She was like, "Call my cousin. She will help you do what needs to be done." And I called this lady, you know, and she told me this is what you need to do. This is how much you need to... it will cost you, and you will have everything done within 30 days, 90 days the max, and I took, you know, a blind-faith leap, you know, and I remember, you know, my better half he was like, "You don't know this lady. You're giving her all that money." I was, like, "You know what? She was sent to me. Let me just..." you know [laughs] I said, "I believe! This has happened for a reason!" He was like, "You're good." I [inaudible] He told me, "I support whatever you decide. If you think that this lady will do what she says she's going to do, I support you." I said, "I have faith in the ancestors. This is what I'm supposed to do," and sure enough, I gave her, you know, the information. She helped us with the mission state-ment and everything like that, and in two weeks I received my letters of incorporation, you know, and I was, like, yeah!

*GLORIA*

That's great.

*CHERYL*

So everything happens for a reason, and she helped us develop the mission statement. She came to our house, and she listened to us for, you know, hours. You know, tell us, what do you do? Where do you see yourself? What do you want to do? And it came from, wow, what do we want to do? And, and my, my mind was, like... my ultimate goal is to have a cultural center. I want to have a place where we could teach the Garifuna language, where we could, you know, hear stories from the elders and unite the elders and the young kids and just, you know, a place where we could continue to learn to make the traditional foods and make the traditional artifacts, sew our clothing, and just honor the things that, you know, I remember growing up that was a given. You know. Back home it was a given that somebody was there, you know, just doing what they normally do. It was a given that you would smell the food that was always cooked. You know, there, that there was a given that you would see the clothing being prepared, the baskets being made, the drums being made, and these things are all being lost, you know. When I talk to my mom and other elders and they tell me, you know what? They used to make this particular Garifuna food, but hardly anybody knows how to make it anymore. That makes me sad, and I'm like, you know what? I'm so fortunate that I have my mom and I learned from my mom and from my grandmother when I was eight. I learned how to make a food stuff because I was always my grandmother's tail, so when she was in her kitchen I was in the kitchen with her. So I was like, what are you doing? What are you doing? What are you doing? So I learned how to cook from watching her. I'm glad she didn't, you know, brush me away. She was just like, "Okay, wash your hands. This is what you do," and I see my mother doing that with my son. "Wash your hands. This is what you do," because my son is just like me. "What are you doing? What are you doing? What are you doing?" So, you know, he learned how to make, you know, stuff at ten years old, because my mom takes him in the kitchen and teaches him, you know, his favorite food. "You want to learn how to make it? Come, make it with me." So he's learning too the same way how I learned. So—

*GLORIA*

So there isn't a thing about he's a boy, he shouldn't be in the kitchen.

*CHERYL*

Oh, no. [laughs] No, no, no, no.

*GLORIA*

Not at all?

*CHERYL*

Not at all, not at all. He, he's right in there. He needs to learn to fend for himself. He's a boy. You know. So with that, you know, my mom, you know, she, when she tells me, you know, that the food is, is disappearing, people



don't know, you know, maybe there was one person in that community that specialized in this one particular dish, and now that person is dead. Their children are here in the States and they've lost that one recipe that's unique to that particular village or whatever. You know, when my mom tells me stories about. oh, Miss So-and-So used to make that, but nobody makes it anymore because she passed away, or we used to have this type of food, but it's not made anymore, because nobody knows how to make it. So, you know, when I thought about the cultural center, I was, like, I want to have a place where we could preserve all of the culture, you know, not just the language but every aspect of the culture. You know, somewhere here in the United States where people who can't afford to travel back home, you know, because back home they have museums, and they still have—fortunate enough to have the people that are still, you know, doing the arts and crafts, but, you know, it was still fast, you know, disappearing, you know, so I wanted to make sure we had someplace here to preserve the culture.

*GLORIA*

Yeah, I notice you have a kitchen in the school. Do you use that often?

*CHERYL*

We've used that very often, like, usually every... the Garifuna school is one of the projects that GAHFU has. It's the Garifuna Cultural Language School in LA, that we started a pilot program at the Glaser Learning Center. A year ago... a year ago in May? We started that program. But we used to have another class at another location prior to that, so altogether, as an organization, we've had, like, a school for the past year and a half, almost two years in various locations. But with the kitchen usually we have eight-week sessions, and at the end of the eight-week sessions we have, like, a... a ceremony, a ceremony for completion of the eight-week course or whatever, and we give a certificate of completion for that particular session, and we, we love to eat [laughs] so we, we will usually, you know, do something there, you know, have a cookout, make a traditional Garifuna dish, you know, and everybody who's in the class will contribute something and just make it there, and, you know, and that's the way of learning the traditional dishes and everything like that.

*GLORIA*

And the language, I imagine, as well.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, yeah, so everything is a learning experience. Try to incorporate every aspect that we can and using every resource that we can in preserving, you know, what needs to be preserved—the language, the food, just everything, you know, and usually in our experience, like, where we do make it, they're just like, oh, yeah, my grandmother made that, and she used to put this in there, and everybody has their little variation on what they did, and I think it brings us all close together. Today, as a matter of fact, right before Spring Break, you know, a lot of people are going to Spring Break, and one of the

students brought tamales to share, so everybody started talking about the type of tamales their grandmothers and mothers made, and we sat there in the classroom eating like a big family.

*GLORIA*

Oh, that's nice.

*CHERYL*

It's beautiful. It's a beautiful experience.

*GLORIA*

Now you mentioned that the classes run for about eight weeks. Who are the classes geared to? Are they mainly geared towards non-Garifuna speakers? Are they geared to Garifuna who need to reacquaint themselves with the language? [Brief interruption by Cheryl's son; they chat about him being forced to stay out].

*GLORIA*

...or are the language courses for kids specifically or adults, or are these classes a combination of all of these things?

*CHERYL*

The Garifuna language classes are geared towards anybody. Anybody, regardless if you're Garifuna, non-Garifuna, who wants to learn about the culture and the language. We welcome everybody. It's open to everybody. We appreciate when non-Garifunas come in and actually want to learn about us. You know. We love to talk about ourselves, so we, we welcome that opportunity to teach, you know, other people about our culture, and also... specifically, you know, when, when we.... when we started the program, it was specifically geared towards, you know, preserving it for the younger generation and getting them incorporated, and at that time when we started we had a particular program for the young children, as we felt that the children would learn better with the music and the drumming and the singing, and that was a very popular class, but unfortunately the instructor that did that couldn't continue with us, so we incorporated the class with the children and the adults. The way our class is formatted is unique, because usually we have the parents learning the same time with the children, and it works because we may have adults that.. my generation I'll say, you know, the 30-something generation, you know, who were raised up here in the United States. We're predominantly... we grew up listening and hearing Garifuna, but we necessarily didn't learn how to speak Garifuna. So we could understand, but we just can't speak it, and now our children, you know, they're... [laughs]... the little Garifuna that they heard us speaking, they know, like, the little commands and stuff like that, you know, so we're all learning together at the same, same pace, and then, like, the more advanced Garifuna, who know how to speak Garifuna, they come there to refresh, you know, their knowledge of Garifuna because, believe it or not, a lot of Garifuna people, they may know how to speak Garifuna, but they don't know how to read and write Garifuna. So there's always something for

everybody to learn, and the way that it's taught is, like, everybody learns something new, you know, and, and it develops into something really beautiful. I mean, my son is, is ten, and he's there, and from the year and a half—you know, I'll just stick to the one year that we've been at this program—I mean, he went from not knowing how to pronounce [sic] any of the Garifuna words to, like, now he's saying complete sentence greetings to people and he's understanding. He's following in the classroom. And, you know, a person like me, you know, I, I understood, you know, it very well, and, you know, now that I'm able to, to... there's a lot of stuff that I do remember and it's at the tip of my tongue. The only thing with me is the pronunciation [sic]. Because of my hearing I do hear things a little bit differently. So, you know, it takes a little bit of time, but then, you know, I'm able to, like, get it. You know? But [inaudible] I remember my grandmother saying about it, yeah, I, I remember hearing Garifuna. I don't know how to translate it into Spanish because—in English because I just remembered her telling me this in Garifuna, and I understood what it meant, but, you know, all these years later it's like connecting. Oh, that's why she said that that way! You know. So we're all learning new things, and where I think we feel connected and we're getting closer, because we are a, a very tight-knit group, you know,, and it's like... it's just, it's just an unbelievable experience. You know, this class is one of the projects that I, that I really take to my heart because, you know, we didn't know.

GLORIA

[inaudible]—

CHERYL

[laughs] We didn't know what, what would happen. I mean, we started off with a few people, and, you know, it's grown and the people that continue to come, they're dedicated. They look forward to it. I mean, because... I mean, on a Saturday morning!

GLORIA

Yeah, it's difficult to get anyone out.

CHERYL

From 10:00 to 1:00. I mean, you have to...

GLORIA

That is a commitment.

CHERYL

Yes, after working, you know, five days a week. I mean, we could all... you know, we could, we could decide to do anything on a Saturday morning, you know?

GLORIA

Sleep in.

CHERYL

But we're there. Yeah! A turnaround trip or something, but we're all there. We're all there dedicated, you know, to, to this class, to this project, and,

you know, when we, when we go there, it's like... wow. It doesn't feel like a classroom setting. I mean, it's like, we're all, we're learning, but it just feels like more. We're— we've gained so much more than what we expected. You know, that's the feedback that I have gotten from many of the students that, you know, went through the Garifuna classes at one point or another. They're, like, that's... you know, it's just something. When I get there I just feel, you know, something.

*GLORIA*

Are the teachers who you work with, are they trained teachers, like, back in Belize or Honduras and have they had teaching experience somewhere else?

*CHERYL*

Aum, well, one of, one of our instructors, he was a teacher here. He was a teacher in the LA Unified School District, so he has that experience as a teacher, and Mr. Joseph and he had been working with the Garifuna language since the 50s, you know? So he is very affluent [sic] in the Garifuna community and he is recognized as the, as the go-to person, you know, when it comes to the Garifuna language and everything. I mean, as far as accredited in Garifuna language, there's not a place where you could get accreditation for the Garifuna language, so, I mean. it's basically, you know, the people who've dedicated their lives to preserving the language, who speak the language on a daily basis and who have the skills to teach it. We have another instructor, Ruben Reyes, you know, he's been working on the Garifuna dictionary for well over ten years, you know,, and he is very, very, you know, prominent in the language and with the history and everything, and he brings what he knows, you know, to the classroom, and he... teaches us so much, many things, you know, it's just... it's amazing what we've learned, and also we use... there's a standardization of the Garifuna language that has been established in Central America from the three nations—Guatemala, Honduras and Belize communities.

*GLORIA*

Nicaragua is not part of that

*CHERYL*

Nicaragua is there, but Nicaragua lost the language. You know, Nicaragua lost the language, so the places where they do still speak Garifuna is Guatemala, Honduras and Belize, and Nicaragua's getting reacculturated [sic]. You know, they, they've made efforts to reacculturate the Garifuna community, the Hondur... Honduras community has gone to Nicaragua and Belize has gone to Nicaragua to, you know, help them reacculturated to the Garifuna community. As a matter of fact, I believe last year was the first year that they celebrated the Settlement Day in Nicaragua. So we are doing our part to acculturate, you know, not just the people in Nicaragua but also the people in St. Vincent, in Yurumein. You know, there's different organizations and different projects, you know, that are going on, not associated to our organization but to other organizations that will support

the reacculturation of the Garifuna culture into St. Vincent. So a lot of people are doing a lot of great things out there.

*GLORIA*

Yeah, it sure sounds like it. And do you ever participate in curriculum development with the teachers, or do you let them sort of do their own thing?

*CHERYL*

We, when we have our teachers meeting, we, on the forming of this project, we had our teachers meeting every Friday when we started it, because the conceptual part of it, and the implementation part of it happened so quickly. Well, we said we'll have a Garifuna class and it was like everybody had this in their mind and everybody... different individuals, I'll say, have done their particular versions of Garifuna classes throughout, you know. This is not an original idea. It's already been done. But what has happened in, in... throughout the years is that, you know, once the number of students begins to dwindle, you know, stop doing it, but, you know, when we developed this, we were, like, no matter if there's only one person, we're going to continue it no matter what. It was a project that we made sure if we're going to start it we're going to be committed to it no matter what. So when we approached the different instructors and everything, and when we, you know, made out the plan and everybody was on the same page. Every—Yes, we want to do this. Yes, we've done it before and this is what happened, and we're, like, okay, well, let's do it again, but let's do it with the commitment that regardless of what happens, regardless of if there's only one person we're going to continue. We're going to continue to develop it and work on it until something does work. So once we got that commitment from the instructors, from Ruben Reyes, Mr. Palacio, the other instructor at that time for the children was Mr. Mejia, and we also have [inaudible] who does drumming on occasions, and we also have another instructor. His name is... oh, my goodness. I went blank right now, but when I remember his name I'll say it.

*GLORIA*

Yeah, [inaudible] —

*CHERYL*

[laughs] Yes, so when, when we started to meet—and also the name of the man who facilitates the, the school, his name is Benny Davenport. He allows us to use the Glaser Learning Center in order for us to have our school there. So when we initially had the meeting, we made sure that we were dedicated to this project, and we set the time and we set the curriculum of what we wanted to make sure we emphasized, and, again, we wanted to talk about the history, the language, the culture, the tradition and everything, and reading, writing and speaking Garifuna. So with that in mind, these are the things that we wanted to focus on, you know. We allow the instructors to, you know, design their own curriculum and then what we

did was, during the meetings that we had on a weekly basis on Fridays, you know, for the class on Saturday, we'll review the teachers' curriculum and, you know, it would be a consensus. Like, okay, this looks good. So we started formulating, you know, just this is how it's going to be done, Lesson 1, each instruction, so that at the beginning we had two different classes because we had a lot of students, so we had the one for the children and we had the one for the adults, so even though the children instructor had his particular curriculum, and the adults had their particular curriculum, they were all talking about history the first day of class, just, you know, in different—

*GLORIA*

Had different levels.

*CHERYL*

Different levels. The second week of class we were, you know, emphasizing the basic language, you know, and then it went from there. So, you know, so we had, you know, the lessons—Week 1, Week 2, Week 3—and what we would focus on. So that's how it developed and—

*GLORIA*

So it's really collaborative.

*CHERYL*

Um-hmm, yes, yes.

*GLORIA*

That's great.

*CHERYL*

And it's, and it's worked out, you know, it's worked out, so when we did have to combine the two classes, you know, since we were pretty much following, you know, the same path, it worked out.

*GLORIA*

That's great. Well, Cheryl, I'd like to thank you very much for this second session, and I will see you in a few weeks. I understand you are traveling to Central America.

*CHERYL*

[inaudible]

*GLORIA*

You're going to be going to Belize, Guatemala and Honduras.

*CHERYL*

[inaudible] Yes.

*GLORIA*

Wonderful. I'm so envious.

*CHERYL*

[laughs] You'll be there in spirit.

*GLORIA*

You'll have to report back and tell me how things are, how things look.

*CHERYL*

Definitely. I look forward to going there. This will be my first time in Belize since 1996.

*GLORIA*

Really? That's over a decade.

*CHERYL*

Yes, I'm really looking forward to going to Belize this time around.

*GLORIA*

Yeah, of course, you're going to be listening for that difference in how people speak, so I'll be interested in hearing what that's like and what the culture is like. Do you see it more saturated with US culture, or not, or a combination. That will be really interesting.

*CHERYL*

I'm trying to go there with an open mind. [Laughs]

*GLORIA*

Yes, of course.

*CHERYL*

And especially this time around, this will be my first time visiting, you know, the land of my birth, my, my village where I was born, since I was born, since nine months old, and I'll be visiting Punta Gorda, Belize this time around. I look forward to that.

*GLORIA*

That's going to be neat.

*CHERYL*

Yeah.

*GLORIA*

It's going to be very interesting. Well, great. Thank you so much again, and I will see you maybe in a few weeks.

*CHERYL*

Okay.

*GLORIA*

When you have to report back.

*CHERYL*

[laughs] Take care.

### **1.3. TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE JUNE 6, 2009**

*GLORIA*

Yeah.

*CHERYL*

...hearing about the culture, so that's hopefully something that's going to happen soon.

*GLORIA*

You have to tell me about that, okay.

*CHERYL*

Okay.

*GLORIA*

Today is Saturday, June 6, and my name is Gloria Chacon.

*CHERYL*

[inaudible under reverb]

*GLORIA*

CLIR Fellow in charge of doing the Central American Series, and I am here with Cheryl Noralez, and we are concluding our interview today, and I know that Cheryl has a lot of important things that she will want to share before we conclude, so I would like to ask Cheryl just one more time about... if you could tell me a little bit more about the latest incidents in your life and what has been going on.

*CHERYL*

Oh, well, I recently got married.

*GLORIA*

Congratulations.

*CHERYL*

Thank you, thank you. I was married in, in Guatemala during the Easter holiday, and that was great. Yeah, it was a really good, exciting time, having family and friends from Belize and Guatemala there to celebrate the most memorable moment in my life, aside from having my children. It was a really great experience.

*GLORIA*

That's wonderful.

*CHERYL*

Yes.

*GLORIA*

And did you plan this ahead of time, or was this sort of out of the wind...?

*CHERYL*

It was really a whirlwind from the time that... my husband Ronnie asked me to get married in December, Christmas. It was just from Christmas until April. We planned it and it happened that quick and—

*GLORIA*

Oh, that is quick.

*CHERYL*

Yes, and he, you know, took the bull by the horn and just, you know, planned everything, and, you know, I guess he probably got tired of me asking, when are we getting married after 11 years? So finally we did it; it's done. We're legal now, even though we were spiritually married before the paperwork. I mean, I believe he's my soul mate and he'll say the same thing and...

*GLORIA*

Can you tell me a little bit about how you guys met?



CHERYL

With Ronnie, how we met, we met... oh, my god, it's so long ago.

GLORIA

When was that?

CHERYL

Oh, my goodness, so many years ago. I think probably in 199...7?, I believe, but I've her—I heard about him prior to that.

GLORIA

Really?

CHERYL

I heard about him... probably for seven years prior to meeting him.

GLORIA

Before that, really?

CHERYL

I kept hearing about, you know, his name in the community is DJ Labuga, so I kept hearing about DJ Labuga for seven years from family and friends. They told me he was the best Garifuna DJ in the world, you know, and I kept hearing about him. He would DJ at places, and we kept missing each other, and I never saw him until we met on his birthday, of all days, at a local park where the Garifuna community happened to, you know, congregate and he was a friend of my cousin and a friend of my brother. So I kept hearing again. People were bringing up the name, oh, DJ Labuga's having a birthday party today. So I was, like, oh, okay, and they're like, oh, yeah, you still haven't met him yet. You and him would make a good couple. So I was, like, "No, I've been hearing about him for years. I, I've never seen him. I don't know what he looks like." So they told me, "Oh, there he is. You can meet him right now." So they pointed to a group of men. There were three Garifuna men that I knew, and then one, you know, Hispanic guy, and [laughs] so I was, like, "Well, I know who they are. Those—They're not DJ's." "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, not those ones. That one, that one." I was, like, "Oh, wow, okay," and they're like, "Yeah, that's him. He's just a light-skinned Garifuna." [Laughs] So the rest is history. I, my, my cousin and my brother took me over there to meet him, you know, and, you know, he invited me to his birthday party and, you know, and the rest is history. I met him, took it and I went to his birthday party and, you know, we talked, and from there on we started courting and, you know, the rest is history. Eleven years going on twelve years later.

GLORIA

Wow. How soon after did you have a boy?

CHERYL

Probably a year later.

GLORIA

Did you know right away this was it?

CHERYL

I knew the day, the day that I met him, believe it or not. I, I was visiting from out of state and the day that I met him I, I told my, my cousin, "I've met my second husband and the future father of my son," you know, and my cousin called me just probably a week ago, and she wasn't able to make it to the wedding and she apologized for not making the wedding. She was, like, "I was supposed to be at that wedding. I was there when you met! I was there when you told me that was going to be your future husband and the father of your son," and I was, like, "Yes, you shoulda been there."

[Laughs]

*GLORIA*

So did you return to California because of him?

*CHERYL*

No, not because of him. It was, it was... I returned back to California. My dad had passed away, and... at the time, you know, my mom and dad—after 35 years of marriage my dad passed away due to complications of diabetes, so, you know, in our tradition, you know, somebody from the family, one of the children or somebody, has to stay with that parent to make sure that they get over the, the grief and if they assistance and everything, and being that, you know, I, it was just me and my daughter, at the time I was already divorced and everything, I just came back over here to be with my mom and everything like that, and to help her out and to help her, you know, go through the grieving process of losing my dad and just really be her support and everything. So it was an honor for me to be here and do that for my mom, and eventually, you know, being around the community, you know, I started seeing... Mr. Labuga more often [laughs], and my intention was to, you know, relocate after the proper time, after I felt my mom was okay, you know, without my presence being here, but, you know, later on he told me, "You can't leave me. You know you can't leave me." So, you know.... I'm here.

*GLORIA*

You couldn't leave [inaudible]

*CHERYL*

You know the answer to that question. I, I guess I couldn't leave him.

[Laughs]

*GLORIA*

What was it like for your daughter? Was it difficult to accept him or...?

*CHERYL*

It was, it was difficult for, for a minute. She was used to having me, and she was a little bit—

*GLORIA*

[inaudible]

*CHERYL*

Yeah, jealous there for a minute, but then, you know, she fell in love with him because he is just... you can't be in a room with him for more than five

minutes without loving him, and she's just, you know, he... didn't come across as wanting to take over and be her father, you know? He gradually allowed the relationship to naturally develop, and they were able to develop a really good relationship, I, you know, a mutual respect. Now she respects him as a father. She calls him Dad and everything like that, so, you know, but that was on her own, you know. She gradually went from calling him, you know, Ronnie to calling him Daddy on her own because...

GLORIA

How old was she at this time?

CHERYL

At that time she was... probably nine and a half, ten, you know, so, you know, it, it took a minute, you know, just adjusting to losing her grandfather, adjusting to that, you know, going through a divorce, and me, me and her father going through a divorce and then, you know, of course, you know, this relationship and everything like that, and it came together, you know, when we had our son. She was so looking forward to having a sibling, because every time she wanted a sibling for so many years, I would buy a... an animal to repla.... Every time she said "Mommy, I want a brother or sister," "Here's a cat, here's a dog, here's a parrot, here's a fish, here's a turtle..." She had so many pets [laughs]... until finally I said "Here's a boy!"

GLORIA

Oh, that's great.

CHERYL

So, you know, the relationship, you know, just, just came together. I mean, once we had [Isani?] it's just that was the sibling she's always wanted, and she just adored him and loved him, and, you know, he was all of our connection to each other. So, you know, it just, it just really came together when, when our son was born with that, you know, with that family, you know, and it's been like that. She adores her brother. She spoils him. She thinks he's a doll. She wants to dress him up, fix his hair, you know, just do whatever she can with him.

GLORIA

That's great. What was it like for her going to school? What's your daughter's name again?

CHERYL

Jalissa.

GLORIA

[inaudible]

CHERYL

Oh, yeah, cha...

GLORIA

Does she have a middle name as well?

CHERYL

Jalissa Cheryl Noralez.

GLORIA

Oh, that's nice.

CHERYL

And Isani, our son is Isani Ronnie Figueroa. Yes, so for her going to school, when... when I got married the first time around, we intentionally moved out of Los Angeles because we wanted a better education for our daughter. We didn't want her to just be exposed to, you know, a particular area. We wanted her to see other parts of the world, and we wanted her to, to know that there's other things aside from California, the way people live and everything like that. So we relocated to Washington State and, you know, she went to school out there where she was pretty often the only African-American student in her class, so, you know, she... you know, she adapted well and everything like that, and when we... years later when we relocated back here to California—she was in junior high school or so—we moved to Orange County, so, again, it was one of those situations. Most often she was one of the few African-Americans in class, but when we moved to Long Beach, like, during her high school year, that was where she had to adjust to being told that she's not black enough, she doesn't speak black, she doesn't act black, she doesn't look black, and "your dad's not black" [laughs] when he came to parent-teachers conference and everything, and she really didn't associate herself with being black. She always said, you know, "I'm Garifuna" or "I'm Belizean" or she'll even say "No, I'm Guatemalan." So it was kind of, you know... her thing of not really being... feeling like she fit into the, I guess, African-American culture, because the things that we, we, we did were totally different, you know, and I think it's like the living in parallel—parallel worlds like I talked about in my experience, that's the same way how I was raised up Garifuna. My daughter had the opportunity to be influenced by my parents. Being that she was the first grandchild, my parents were very influential in her life, so they also assisted in helping me raise her up as a Garifuna child, so she knew. My dad would tell her, my mom would tell her, "You're not Garifuna. [Inaudible] I mean, [inaudible] not American you're not American. [Inaudible] you know, you're not American. You may be born here, but Garifuna [inaudible]. So my daughter always knew "I'm Garifuna," you know, or "I'm Belizean" or "I'm" whatever, you know, but she never really related to being labeled African-American, and she never really had that... that... that, that persona about her. You know, so in a way it was, it was, it was a good thing. And when she was growing up with them, once she was in high school it was just like an identity crisis. Like, "Well, mommy, what is being black?" And I'm like, "You're asking me?" You know? [Laughs] She was, like, "Mommy, what is talking black? What is this? What does being black mean?" You know, so she kind of went through a phase where she, you know, tried to adapt to the perception of what black is, you know, meaning, well, I'm supposed to do this. I'm, I'm supposed to be rebellious. I'm supposed to do that. I'm like, "Who says?" You know,

"Well, that's the way these, these kids are acting." I was, like, "Well, are you those kids? You don't need to act like them. You need to be you," you know. And when she came back to who she was, you know, as a person she was able to, you know, be more content, because she was, like, "Mommy that's not me. I'm just trying to be what they want me to be," and I told her, "You have to be who you are." You know. You really need to be who you are." So, you know, she talks to me. She's at Xavier University now, and she tells me, you know, "Mommy, here I meet a lot of other Garifuna people here, and I'm able to be myself. I'm able to talk about, you know, the things that we do in the community," and stuff like that, and she doesn't have to hide who she is now, and she was, like, "They want to know about Garifuna, mommy! They want to know more. Thank you. I'm glad I listened to you when you were telling me the stories," because she's able to be who she was, compared to in high school, trying to identify with the stigma of what African-American was here in the United States. [Brief interruption while Cheryl takes phone call; will return caller's call].

*CHERYL*

She was listening. She's, I guess, head of African Studies somewhere in the East Coast and she was listening to the, to the program and watching it, and she was, like... "How did you guys do that? I have to, I have to talk to you," and she called me, like, in the middle of the class and I'm, like, "I can't speak right now," and then I left a message, I told her, "Give me a call after five o'clock today because I have another engagement," and I guess as soon as she got the message she's just, like—

*GLORIA*

She called you right back.

*CHERYL*

That was like the same thing with this guy. They're doing something over here in LA by the Japanese-American Museum? They have another building adjacent to it where they have difference performances, so they're having a viewing of the Carib-something, and I'm excited because this will be my first time meeting Caribs. I've met the Tainos, but I never met a real, live Carib, at least that I know of. So he was, like, "You need to be here. This is going to be something unique. Put a Garifuna and a Carib together in the same room," so he kept calling me, and calling me, and calling me, until, you know, he was calling me at work because Ronnie gave him my work cell phone number, so he called me, and I'm, like, [whispers] "I'm in the middle of a meeting. Can I call you back?" [laughs] He was, like, "I just want to make sure that you're gonna..." I was, like, [whispers] "Okay, let me call you back." So finally I got hold of him and he was, like, "Oh my [inaudible], I can't believe this is happening." So I'm like...

*GLORIA*

Did you go?

*CHERYL*

It's happening this week, this Thursday at seven o'clock, so that should be interesting.

*GLORIA*

Yeah, it should be interesting.

*CHERYL*

Yeah.

*GLORIA*

Okay, let me turn this back on here.... So we were talking about your daughter and now she's able to be herself.

*CHERYL*

Yes.

*GLORIA*

Is she almost done?

*CHERYL*

She's almost done. She has about two more years. She wants to go for her Masters in Psychology, so she has about two more years to go, and she's coming back home.

*GLORIA*

Is she?

*CHERYL*

Yes, yes. We want her back here. We miss her. You know, we, we, we're happy that she has the opportunity to explore and, and everything, and wherever she decides to settle, because she's been in so many different places. She's been to Washington, to Washington State, to Utah, and, you know, she wants to visit Belize again. She enjoys Guatemala, you know, but, you know, wherever she goes we want her to be happy, you know. We always tell her, "We don't want you to be stuck." That was one thing my dad always told me. "I'm so glad that at least one of my daughters has the opportunity to travel and go all over the place and don't get stuck," because my dad always said, "This world is so vast and so beautiful and there are so much things to do. You know, you have to just to be free and see everything, see and do everything". [note: At this point "It's a Small World After All" begins playing on (cell phone?)] So I've had that spirit. Ronnie will tell you, you're like a nomad. You just like to be all over the place. You want to see everything, and he'll say, now I have you on lockdown. I was, like, yes, you do, but, you know, we do have the opportunity to see a lot of things, and I enjoy that. I enjoy meeting different cultures and trying different foods and just seeing new things. That's, like, you know, that's the purpose of life. That's the reason for waking up, to see and learn something new and see something new. I love it.

*GLORIA*

What was it like for everyone in your family to go back to Guatemala and Belize?

*CHERYL*

Oh, my goodness. Yeah. My mom it was over... how long did she say? I think she said it was over... 38 years since she's been back to Guatemala, since she was pregnant with my sister. That was the last time she was in Guatemala. Prior to moving here to the United States, she said, you know, when her and my dad, prior to my birth, when her and my dad lived in Belize, my dad every year would take the family to Guatemala to visit his family and everything like that, you know, and she tells me that she wants to travel with us to go to Honduras to visit her side of the family, because that's something that she has not had the opportunity to do. Her brother has met the family in Honduras, but she hasn't, so she wants to take that trip with us when we go to Honduras to visit that family, you know, so I'm looking forward to that, too, as well.

*GLORIA*

Was she surprised or was she just stunned by the changes?

*CHERYL*

It was like... as far as family, it was like they haven't seen each other last week. It was just that connection, like, like, oh, yeah, like they—like these 30—

*GLORIA*

They were never apart.

*CHERYL*

—8 years wasn't apart, you know? They, they had pictures of our graduations and things throughout our lives. It was amazing to see like, wow, everything that we did here that our parents have pictures of, they had pictures of, so they knew, they knew what year my daughter was born, when my son was born. They knew everything because the family was still connected, not maybe physically by visiting throughout those years, but they were connected, you know, with the family visually all these years, with everything. It's like, oh, yeah, this is the picture when your sister graduated from high school, and this is when you graduated and when, you know, and that's the baby picture of so and so, and this is your dad when he was 19 years old. That was, I think, one of the most memorable things. I mean, when I went there before, I saw pictures of my dad, but they had a new picture of my dad when he was 19 years old, and my mom saw that, and she was, like, "That's the man that I married! I remember when he looked like that," and I was, like, "Oh, my god, that's my daddy when he was a baby!" [cell music ends here] So it was very great to see that, you know.

*GLORIA*

What about your kids? What were their impressions? What did they say? Did they love it?

*CHERYL*

You know, Isani has been going to Guatemala since he was probably two or three years old, so he looks forward to going every year. Jalissa, she's been going to Guatemala since she was about ten or eleven years old, so she

looks forward to going there. She didn't want to leave. She was very disappointed that she only spent five days in Guatemala, and she was, like, "I don't want to go back to school. I want to stay." We're like, "No, you have finals. You have to go back." So next year, you know, we plan to take another trip and extend it this time, maybe two or three weeks with the children at least.

*GLORIA*

That's great. Does she come back for the summers to California?

*CHERYL*

No, she's working. She's working so... she wants her brother out there, so we're trying to figure that out.

*GLORIA*

Oh, that's a good idea.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, and she said she'll probably take a week off of work, and she has summer school, so in between that time when she has that break from summer school we'll send her brother over there. I'll probably just sneak over there, too, and spend a week with her, but she comes down for, like, for Christmas and for, you know, the real long holidays and everything.

*GLORIA*

That's great.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, and we're sending her a package of food. She wants some traditional foods, so we're trying to figure out how to overnight the...

*GLORIA*

Yes, they must be [inaudible]

*CHERYL*

Yeah, that she wants. She's like "Mommy, I want, you know, this. I want that," and we're like, you see? That's why you should have taken lessons when we were teaching you how to cook that and learn how to make it. "But I always thought you and my grandma would be there." "Yes, we're here, but you're there." So me and my mom are trying to figure out how to send it to her because she wants it.

*GLORIA*

What was it like for her going through the college process? Were you able to help her out and guide her?

*CHERYL*

We were all able to help her out. It was a...

*GLORIA*

Collective effort?

*CHERYL*

...a collective effort to get her into college. I mean, her being the first grandchild, you know, from my side she was expected to carry... go to college and she's told us, "Oh, the burden is on me. I'm the first grandchild



and everybody expects me to go,” and we’re, like, well, yes, everybody is looking at you. All of your cousins are looking at you. You’re setting the pace. If you don’t go, then guess what? They’ll have an excuse to say well, Jalissa didn’t go, then why do I have to go? And they look up to you,” and at times I know it was a burden for her that everybody was looking up to her. All, you know, seven of her other immediate cousins were looking up to her. Everything that Jalissa did they want to do. When she joined the band, they wanted to join the band, too. When she learned to play the drums... “I want to learn to play the drums like Jalissa. I want to run track like Jalissa.” So that was, you know, the burden that she had to carry, so when it was time for her to go to, go to college it was, like, okay, you know, you need to do this. We’re here with you. We’re going to help you, guide you, and what she did... this is... what she did, which I... I love her did that. Everything that she did, she wrote down what she did, from taking the SAT to doing all of the requirements that she needed to do to submit all that stuff to college. She went to the different college fairs. She went to the different—like the African— what is it? The annual black college tours. She did that when they had it here in Los Angeles, so when she learned what she had to do, she created a folder for each of her cousins as they came up and told them what they need to do and helped them, you know, in, in like navigating their way through the whole process of, did you take your SAT? You need to take your SAT. Start practicing for it when you’re in tenth grade. You could take it in eleventh grade, and whatever, and during the time she graduated they started the exit exams here in California. She passed it the first time out, so she explained to her cousins here, you know, don’t wait until the last minute to take your exit exams. Take it as quick as possible. The first time they offer it, take it, get it out of the way so you don’t have to worry about it. So she gave them, you know, information that they—

*GLORIA*

Wow, she gave them a blueprint.

*CHERYL*

Yeah, so —

*GLORIA*

That’s amazing.

*CHERYL*

—and all of the schools that, that they were interested in going to, she, you know, looked up that information online. It was like, okay, this school offers... you want to be a veterinarian? This school has the best veterinarian program and whatever. So she did all of the legwork for them so they wouldn’t have an excuse not to go to college, and she, she did that, because I remember after her, her third... second or third year of college, she came back and she saw a few of her friends from high school and she’s like, “Mommy, they have kids. They’re married.” It’s like, life is too hard to do that. I mean, they’re only... you know, they’re so young. So she was like I

don't want that for my, for my cousins. I don't want that, you know. No, they need to go to college. She said it. College is the only way. I was, like, eureka! So everything that we've told her now she's getting it, because at... at the time we were, like, you know, just beating our head on a wall. We're like—we felt like we were forcing her to go to college, but she realized it on her own that, you know what? This is the only way I'm going to, you know, get through this life, to, you know, to have a better life at least, or at least a chance in life, is to do what I need to do as far as my education is concerned. So it was a real great moment as a parent for me when she realized that on her own instead of being forced, like I was, like, you know, twisting her arm and saying you're going to college no matter what—even though I was—but, you know, I just felt better when she realized it herself. [Laughs] You know, I was able to, you know, untwist that wrist a little bit and say "Okay, daughter, you're good."

*GLORIA*

And what about your own voyage through the educational system? Tell me about what your latest...

*CHERYL*

Well, I am currently taking classes at Cal State, Long Beach.

*GLORIA*

That's wonderful.

*CHERYL*

Yes, and I am, you know, so, so happy about that journey. You know, it took me a while to get there, but I am... so happy, and I—when my mom, you know, found out, you know, that I'm in the university system, she's like, I'm so happy for you. You know, she, she was, like, you know, just so excited for me, you know. So I'm, I'm happy for myself. I'm happy for her that she's able to, to, you know, live to see, you know, not only her, her granddaughter in the university but also her daughter in university, and, you know, and that sets an example for, you know, my son, you know, that he'll have both parents, you know, with a university degree. It means a lot to me. Education is the key, and me being a community activist, I mean, it's... it's a good thing to have that foundation so I could talk to the children and say, you know, it's never too late. You know, no matter what, no matter, you know, your, your life could take all these different roads, but it's never too late, you know, to get your education to fulfill your dreams, you know. It's just, it's just the thing to do. I mean, life is hard as is, you know,, but with an education I truly believe it makes things a little bit easier, it opens more doors, you know,, and I'm so glad that I'm in the university system—yeah!

*GLORIA*

What classes are you taking?

*CHERYL*

Currently I'm taking a Humanities classes, and I'm taking... the title of the, of the class is slipping my head right now, but I'm taking Humanities, and I'm taking an anthropology class.

*GLORIA*

Are you still studying Cultural Anthropology?

*CHERYL*

Yes, yes.

*GLORIA*

That's wonderful. There's so much you can do.

*CHERYL*

Oh, yes, yes, you know, like, yeah, I love, I love studying different cultures. I honestly do. I just love... learning about new cultures and just... learning new things about people, you know. Here in, in California, we have a... a melting pot of so much different cultures, and I'm so glad that, you know, I live in a place where I could, you know, go to Korea Town and be absorbed in that. I could take my son to Chinatown and he could learn and, and see a little bit of his ancestors there in Chinatown. You know. That's, you know, one thing that we are, too. In our family we're a melting pot. You know, my son is, from his dad's side, is, is mixed with Chinese from Canton, China, and his mother is—his grandmother is Hispanic, and of course me being Garifuna, you know, the Native American aspect, the African aspect and everything, so, you know, we just have such an array, and being of course born in Central America, it's just a total...

*GLORIA*

Yeah, very diverse.

*CHERYL*

You know, diverse. So I'm glad I'm able, here in California, I'm able to take my son, you know, take him to Chinatown, take him to the Caribbean part of my life, take him to the Central American part of my life, and go full circle, you know,, and here in California we have that opportunity, so I love living here, and, you know, eating all the different foods. You can't beat that!

*GLORIA*

Did it help to have gone through the college process with your daughter...

*CHERYL*

Um-hmm, yes.

*GLORIA*

It made things easier for you?

*CHERYL*

Yes. It was, you know, it was... it was just, you know, like I said, I think I've had... I've put my education on hold throughout, you know, because, when there was a choice, during the time when I was a single mom, when there was a choice between going to work or going to school, I had to go to work to take care of my daughter, so I put my education on hold, and, you know,

that's something that I've always regretted and everything, but my daughter... [Gloria takes cell phone call, will return caller's call...]

*CHERYL*

Reminds me of Ronnie.

*GLORIA*

I feel like we just got started almost, right?

*CHERYL*

[laughs] Yeah.... Like I was saying, I think, you know, that's one thing my daughter was always raised up with all, it was always seeing me trying to pursue my educational goals, and she told me many times, and I think I've told this story before. "Mommy, you're always going to school." So she grew up always knowing how important that was to me, you know, whether I was going to school part time or whenever I can. You know, take a semester this year and not take a semester next year. You know, she always saw that I was pursuing the higher education, so she grew up, you know, knowing that education was very important to me, and my father, you know, and my mother, they were always telling her, education is key. You need to get an education. And then when I started this relationship with Ronnie, you know, being that he was an educated man, you know, he always [inaudible], "Jalissa you're going to college no matter what," you know, so she had that, you know, just that influence of education from all avenues, from her aunts, from everybody. You're the first one. You're going to college no matter what, you know, so she knew that. She knew how we felt, you know, as, as a family how much education was. So, you know, she's, she's proud of me now and she told me for years, "Mommy, it's your turn." From the time that she graduated from high school she's been telling me, "Mommy, it's your turn, it's your turn," and, you know, I, I started and I stopped, but now this time I'm totally dedicated, I mean, to just, you know, go through.

*GLORIA*

Yeah, I think you should get your PhD once you're done with your BA. I think you can go to UCLA, I think. That would be great.

*CHERYL*

Yes, that's my goal. I know my father, you know, God rest his soul, he always wanted a doctor in the family, somebody to get their PhD, you know, so, you know, I, I would love to aspire for that. I mean, the sky's the limit. You know, wherever this journey takes me, you know, I'm open to it. I'm just very excited about, you know, just... doing.... Everything in my life right now is just so, so great, and sometimes people are afraid to say, you know, everything's just good in my life. You know, I mean, I'm at peace. I have, you know, the things that I think are important, not monetary, but, you know, just... those things are not important. Material, monetary things are not important to me. The most important thing is my spiritual peace, my inner happiness, and I have that. I have the joy of having a great family, great positive people around me, and it just, you know, fulfills my, my heart.

It fulfills who I am as a person. You know, with everything that I'm doing with my culture, with the Garifuna Culture and Language School, you know,, the work that I do with the people with mental disability, you know, giving of myself makes me feel part of human society, and I just, you know, there's not a price you could put on that, you know? I mean, I really do love giving of myself, you know, to the community in, in both levels, you know, with my job and with what I do with the culture and community.

*GLORIA*

Thinking back about your experiences, would you say that there is something that you would have done differently?

*CHERYL*

You know what? I think everything happens for a reason and with everything that happens in your life, negative or positive... excuse me—there's a lesson to be learned. You know, you know, in school we were always taught, for every action there's a reaction. Everything happens for a reason. So, you know, I live my life by that motto. I try not to stress out. You know. If that was supposed to happen, it was supposed to happen. You know? You, you can't, you know, kind of second guess your life. I mean, if you do I think that's where people get miserable with the what if, I shoulda, woulda, coulda, and it's, like, okay, it happened, let's just move on and let's just, you know, let life be life. Let's live in the moment. You know, I try to live in the moment and try not to look at the past. You know, I just enjoy, you know, just waking up and having a nice fresh breath without the smog. I'm good, you know [laughs]. I mean, if I wake up and there's rain, when it does rain in California, it's like a fresh breath, yeah! You know? I mean, I, I am so simple. I'm such a simplistic person. I mean, even during my time in Guatemala, I took over 900 pictures of almost everything and nothing. Every time I saw something it was, like, ooh, picture, you know? [Laughs] Because just the little things, the little, little bug looked so beautiful to me. The little, you know, just looking at the, at the things in the sky. It was just like, oh, what is that? Trying to figure out what it is. You know, I'm just an inquisitive person, that it's like everything is just, you know, fascinating and beautiful and just... you know, this world is just so beautiful to me so...

*GLORIA*

[Inaudible]

*CHERYL*

Yeah, so I'm, I'm probably what people call, what? A Pollyanna? That everything is just so... you know, and, you know, it's just.... the way I was raised up. I mean, it's just you appreciate the little things. You appreciate you have a roof over your head. You appreciate that you have food in your belly. You appreciate, you know, having your parents, having two parents, having your brothers and your sisters with you, and that's what I have. I have my children, I have my husband, I have a job, I have, you know, people around me, you know, so I appreciate, you know, everything that has

been given to me and everything that I have, you know, and... that's from maybe being raised up... monetarily in a, in a small village where, you know, maybe here in, in the United States we may be considered a Third World country, poor country that didn't have much, you know, but we had rag dolls and those were like the best toys in the world. We played hopscotch. That was the best game in the world. We played tag. We swam on the beach. You know, we, I mean, we walked barefoot on the beach and just swam in the water for all hours of the morning and night. Those are the things that I remember until the age of four, coming over here, and then once we came over here, it was a little bit more restrictive. You're just, you know, in that little corner of your backyard compared to when you were, when I was in Belize in my little village growing up. That whole village was your backyard. So, you know, you just... whatever you picked up you could make that stick into a game that would last the whole week, so everything that you saw around you could potentially become something else. So you really didn't take the little things for granted. You think of ways to make that little whatever it is, whether it's a rock, that little rock will maybe end up being a marble game. You start throwing the rocks and it's a game. You know, so, you know, I guess from that experience I learned how to just, you know, appreciate whatever I see into what it could possibly be. You know?

*GLORIA*

Where do you see yourself, I don't know, let's say, ten years from now? What are your hopes or aspirations or dreams?

*CHERYL*

My hopes and dreams, it's not for me; it's for the community. My hope and dream is to... hopefully have my charter school, a Garifuna heritage and culture charter school where it incorporates, of course, the traditional teaching that's required by the State of California, but also, you know, encompasses the Garifuna language and culture. You know, I would want the opportunity for, you know, Garifuna children and others who wanted to learn Garifuna as a second language. I would want that to be taught. I would want that language to be recognized here in California as it is in New York. In New York, Garifuna language is recognized as an official language in the state of New York. I would hope to see that here. I would hope to see Garifuna history taught, you know, in the school dis... school system. You know, I really would hope that, you know, that Garifuna language is being—continues to be spoken by more people, you know,, not necessarily Garifuna, but at least the information is out there where they could, you know, learn more about the culture and learn about who we are as a people, individual and everything. That's what I see for the future. It's never about me, it's about the community. You know, if it wasn't for the community I wouldn't be here. You know, if it wasn't for my grandmother, my aunt taking care of me when my parents came over here to, you know, make a better life for us, you know, I wouldn't be here. If it wasn't for all the many people,

you know, that, that, you know, helped my parents when they came here to a new foreign state to, you know, get a job, get settled, teach them how to maneuver their, their way in a, in a complicated American system, we wouldn't be here. You know, if it wasn't for somebody teaching them, you know, to make sure that, that we do what needs to be done to get your children here legally. You know, it was a helping hand with the community. Everybody, you know, helped... me to get here. People that I knew, people that didn't know. So, you know, I, I, I take that really seriously, that, you know, I may not know a person directly, but somehow or another I think somebody's helping me and I'm helping somebody else indirectly. So, you know, I try to give back to the universe and hopefully the universe will give back to me. If not to me to my children or to somebody else.

*GLORIA*

What are any last thoughts that you would want someone listening to your story to remember or to keep?

*CHERYL*

Let's see. I... you know... my....

*GLORIA*

Or what would you want someone listening to your life story to learn?

*CHERYL*

I would want them to know it's just simple, just never give up. Always look at the brighter... brighter side of the moon. You know, always reach for the stars. You know, don't let your situation identify who you are. Don't ever let anybody take your spirit away from you. Once you allow people to take your spirit away from you, it's just—you're lost, you know, and that's one thing my grandmother always told me, and I think I've always told my children, that it's, like, don't ever let anybody take your spirit, meaning don't let anybody hold your happiness. You have to be your own happiness. You have to be in control of your destiny. Don't let anybody take that away from you and have control of your life. You have to be in control of your life. So that's one thing that I would want people out there to know: don't ever let anybody take your spirit away from you. You know, you're not your situation. Whatever you do in life, you know, you—your life, your road may take different turns and everything, but, you know, ultimately you're in control of your life, and wherever that road leads you, you know, you were led there for a reason, for a purpose, and just honor your family, your ancestors, honor your spirit, you know, and give back to the universe and the universe will give back to you.

*GLORIA*

Great. Well, thank you so much, Cheryl, for sharing your life history with us and for your time and also acknowledge your family and your ancestors as well. I really do think that through you I've been able to also get to know your ancestors as well.

*CHERYL*

Thank you.

*GLORIA*

Thank you so much for your time.

*CHERYL*

I was honored

Parent Institution | TEI | Search | Feedback

*Date: 2013-10-24*