

Interview with: Geraldo and Esther Arce  
Interviewer: Lucien Lafreniere, Michael Solla  
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LL: It's October the 4<sup>th</sup> and we are here at the Arce residence speaking with Esther. I guess we can start by asking, if you like, when and where were you born? And we can just go from there.

EA: I was born in Puerto Rico in Ponce, but I grew up in Penuelas. It's a small town in the south. You want the [birth] date?

LL: Yeah, if you'd like.

EA: August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 64. I grow up in the mountains in Puerto Rico.

LL: What was the village, or the town, like growing up?

EA: It was a small town. It was rural, there's a lot of trees around. To go to the town, it was like a half hour in car before you get to the town. But, I lived in the mountains. I had to walk to my house from the main road. It was a nice life. We didn't have much, but we lived good. I have a brother, two sisters, my mom, my father. I got my grandparents around there too where I used to live. I went to the school then. We gotta go the town to go to the middle school, high school. I finished high school in Puerto Rico before I came here.

LL: What was that like, going to school in Puerto Rico?

EA: Very nice. I enjoyed it. It was very good.

LL: What was your household like? How many people did you have living in your house?

EA: We were six.

LL: What was their names? Your parents' names?

EA: My mother is Lydia. My father's Fernando, my brother's Fernando Jr. Denise, my sister, and Elsie, my younger sister.

LL: Did you have any special traditions in the family when you were in Puerto Rico that you'd do, maybe something every year?

EA: Yeah, we used to get together like Christmas. Like for Three Kings Day, that's January 6<sup>th</sup>. It was a big day for us over there. It's like Santa Claus here, but it was over there. We celebrate that more. I remember, we used to go to my, I got an aunt and they do

something, I don't know how they call it in English, but it's like, people get together and they sing to the Three Kings. And they did that every year and they still do it and everybody from where we live, that day was for that. We used to do that every year. We get together in Christmas. We do something at Christmas we call parrandas. Parrandas is like Christmas caroling, but we got instruments and music and we used to go different houses, friend's houses, all night long, singing. They open the door, we eat there, have some drink, keep going, singing in the other houses. We do that at Christmas. Our main food in Christmas is rice with a kind of peas. We do that and we do what some people call pastelles. Pastelles is green banana and we ground the green banana, we put a little bit of potatoes too. We make pork, we put it inside and then we fold them in banana leaf, and then we cook it. That's the main dish in Christmas. We celebrate too like here, because we are part of the United States, we are citizens. We still celebrate the forth of July, we still celebrate Thanksgiving. All of the holy days here we still celebrate down there too.

LL: What did your father do for work?

EA: He used to be, he worked in a super market. But then we got a little land over there and he used to grow bananas and oranges and he used to sell it too. But his main work was in the supermarket. My mom, she didn't work at that time.

LL: Did you work and did the other children work in the house?

EA: No, we were little at that time over there. I came here when I was sixteen. My younger sister was six or seven years old so we were still young. But when I went to school, I took a secretary course for three years and I did work with a lawyer for six months like an internship.

LL: Before you moved?

EA: Before I moved here. I did that over there.

LL: Did you attend any church or worship down there?

EA: When I was little, but then no. We were Catholic.

LL: I know that you were talking about when you would go singing with the instruments, I found out that Penuelas was the guiro capital, why is that? Do they make it there?

EA: They make it. The guiro grows in, like a vine. The people take it from there. I think we have one over here. They made it themselves. I don't know how they make it, but they do like little lines in the guiro and then make something to play it and depending on how the lines are the sound is better or worse, it depends. In Penuelas they do a festival, they call it guiro festival, and people from other towns; they go there to participate in that.

LL: And that's in May?

EA: I don't remember. I've been here so long, so I don't remember what month, but they do it.

LL: Do you remember what was going on as far as what people felt about Puerto Rico or the United States while you were living there? What their feelings were?

EA: We still wanna be the way we are. People still wanna be a common wealth, but it's divided. Some people would like to be state; some people would like to stay the way we are.

MS: You finished high school in Puerto Rico. Could you talk about how the school system worked because you did secretary classes and everything like that?

EA: Over there, elementary school is from kindergarten to sixth grade. Then, you go to middle school. Seventh, eighth, ninth grade is middle school and ten, eleven, and twelve is high school. When I was there, because I've been here twenty something years, I don't know how it changed now, but when I was there in high school, we used to have workshop, like secretary that when you finished your high school you can work in that if you don't wanna go to college. So, I did that, but when I finished high school I just came right here. So, I didn't go to college. But, the school system, it was good in that time. Usually, when I was in Puerto Rico, they divide the hours. So a group of kids go from seven to twelve-thirty and there were another group of people go twelve-thirty to five-thirty so they have two different hours. Every year they change it, like one year I had to go seven-thirty to twelve-thirty and maybe next year I had to go twelve-thirty to five-thirty so they change. And it depended on the town too. I think all towns, they have their own ways, different ways. But, growing up over there, the school was good, very good school. You learn a lot in the school.

LL: Did most of the kids go to school or was it half of them?

EA: Everybody went to school.

LL: What were the kind of jobs that most people had? Was it many different kinds of jobs in Penuelas or was there a place where a lot of people worked and had certain kind of job or was it a lot of different jobs?

EA: They had a lot of different jobs over there, but like I said, I was only in my teens when I was there so I was young.

LL: Who were the first people you knew when your family decided to come to the U.S.? Did you know anyone in Waterbury or the U.S. before you came?

EA: My uncle, he was living here. When he went to Puerto Rico, that's when my mom decided to come here, so we knew him here. So, we came to his house.

LL: And when did he come?

EA: I think he came like four or five years before us, I'm not sure.

LL: What was the year you came?

EA: Eighty-one.

LL: Why did your family decide to move?

EA: Well my mom, we used to live in the mountains, she was always by herself. She wanted a better life for us. So, one day she just decided to come here and try it to see how it was. But when we came here, my father stayed in Puerto Rico for a couple of years working and finishing business stuff that we have over there. Then, after two years, he came over here.

LL: So you and your mother went first?

EA: Me, my mother, my brother, and my sister, we came here. My father came with us for like a few days and then he came back over there and he stayed there for a couple of years. Then, after he finished whatever he got to do there, pay his bills, stuff like that, then he came here.

LL: You decided to come here because you said your uncle was already living here so you would come live with him to start out.

EA: Yeah.

LL: What did you imagine the U.S. would be like before you came here?

EA: Well, you hear stuff in Puerto Rico. I was young so for me it was like an adventure, you know something different. Living in the mountains, where we were living there was not many people there. So, it was like an adventure. You imagine it's like big and when I came here it was a different experience. I didn't know English. We are not English in Puerto Rico from first grade to high school. We know how to write it, we know how to read it, but we don't speak it. But I know how to read English; I know how to write it too.

LL: I know that your mother had wanted you to come here so you had better opportunities. What were your parents' goals? To find better jobs?

EA: Better jobs, better life.

LL: What were some of the problems that you guys faced when you first came to the U.S.?

EA: You got to get used to, the language is a big problem, you got to get used to it. How to start, you come from Puerto Rico so you have to start from the bottom again. We didn't have much, we started with nothing. Just a little apartment with old furniture and stuff like that. Then, my father came in, my mother started working, my father started working. I was only seventeen when I came here, that's why I finished high school in Puerto Rico. I just took some English classes, but I didn't have the opportunity to go to college in that time. My brother and sisters they were little so they went to elementary school and my brother was in high school when we got here. Then, little by little, my father found a good job that he is still working on for twenty something years now. That's the way it was, you have to do it little by little.

LL: How did you get here? Did you take a plane directly here?

EA: Mhm. To New York and then they pick us up in New York and then came here.

LL: Was it expensive?

EA: I don't know because my mom did all that and I was only sixteen, so you'll have to ask my mom about it.

LL: I know that you said that when you came here, you thought it was sort of an adventure. How did you feel leaving Puerto Rico? Did you feel like you were hesitant to leave?

EA: No, but I was sad because I left my grandparents over there. I have my uncles, my cousins, everybody is over there. My grandparents, now they passed away, but in that time I had all of them so it was a sad thing because we never know when we are going to go back. If we are going to go back or not. And we didn't know what was going to happen over here. You just come here and you don't know the place.

LL: What did you bring with you when you left?

EA: Just the clothes.

LL: Just clothes?

EA: Yep, just the clothes that's it [laughing] nothing else.

LL: Did you get a little nervous not having anything with you?

EA: Yeah, I was nervous.

LL: You said that you knew your uncle, he was here and you came to live with him. Did you know anybody else around or just your uncle?

EA: Just our uncle.

LL: What was it like starting off in a new country that was completely different from anything you knew?

EA: It was a little scary at first, but then you start knowing different people. You get used to it, but it takes time. It's not like, come here today and tomorrow you fit in. No, it takes time and then you get home sick too. But, you get used to it.

LL: Did anyone help you to get used to being in a new place?

EA: My cousin, then I knew my husband. Then I started getting some people that came from Puerto Rico almost in the same time that we went here. We used to talk about it and that helped us, that there were other people too that came in that same time. I know them, and in school, when we went to school. I went to take classes, English classes, then I started knowing a lot of people.

LL: How long did it take you to be able to speak English?

EA: Like a couple of years, two or three years. I think I learned more when I got married and I got my kids and I had to go to school and talk with the teacher [laughing], then I had to learn. But, it was a couple of years.

GA: I think it depends upon the person. Some people can learn it in like two years. Some people can go three years, it depends.

EA: It took me a couple of years to really know it.

LL: Absolutely, it's hard to learn another language.

EA: I know it's not easy.

LL: Was it easy or hard for your parents to find work?

EA: It was a little hard at first. It's like everything else when you come here. It's not that easy that you go here and the next day you find a job, it was a little struggle, but we did find it.

LL: Why did it take a while? Do you know why it took them a little while to find a job?

EA: In that time, you don't speak English when you come here, it's not easy to find a job.

LL: So, language was probably the biggest problem in them finding work.

EA: That's a big problem.

LL: What neighborhood did you move to when you came to Waterbury?

EA: To South Main, the Spanish section. In that time, it was nice. It was a nice area. It wasn't bad. It was a good area.

LL: Mostly just people from Puerto Rico lived there?

EA: There were different people, but there were more Spanish people there.

LL: When you lived with your uncle, how many people lived in the house?

EA: It was him, his wife, and his daughter. Three people there.

LL: Then you, your mother...

EA: My two sisters, and my brother.

LL: Did everyone live together? Your uncle's family and your family?

EA: Yeah, until we found an apartment. We were there maybe a month or so, I think. Then, we found our own apartment.

LL: What kind of jobs did your parents have since they came here? Was there just one or many?

EA: My mom, she worked as a nurse aid for a while. Then, she worked in a factory. She was doing inspection in a factory. My father, he worked in factory and now he works in Torrington Supplies. That's where he works now for twenty-five years I think.

MS: To expand on your father, he worked down and Puerto Rico and when you came here he stayed there for a little while. When he came here, was he able to get a similar job to what he did? Obviously, he was good at what he did to provide for you in Puerto Rico. Was he able to get that similar job here?

EA: No, when he came here he found a factory job in I think it was in Waterbury down on South Main street. That's where he started. Then, my uncle was working in Torrington supply and he got him a job over there. He's been there since then.

LL: You finished school before you came here, but your younger sister, she had to finish school in the United States. Was that hard for her to go from different schools?

EA: Well, I cannot speak for her, but it has got to be because they were little. My sisters, one was seven years old, the other one was nine so it's a big change for them, and my brother too. When they were here, they went to a program where they help you with the English. They do everything in Spanish until you get used to, until you learn how to do it. What do you call it?

GA: Bilingual classes.

EA: Bilingual classes. So they did that for a couple of years, then they were in the main English.

LL: What did it feel like to be a new immigrant in Waterbury? Was it hard? Did people treat you differently? How did that go for you?

EA: I think sometimes they do, but I didn't put too much mind into that, I still don't. I know people go through that, but I didn't feel like that.

LL: You said you live on South Main and most of the other people coming from Puerto Rico lived there. Did they get along ok with the other sections of Waterbury where different people were living or would you mostly stay in your own area?

GA: They got along.

EA: I think they got along with everybody.

MS: You had the Spanish speaking area around you, but you have the education, something other immigrants didn't have. Were you able to go out and possibly get a secretarial job because you already had that knowledge and education?

EA: I had the knowledge, but the language was a barrier for that. Then, I just took electronic classes over here. They had people to help minorities to get a job and I took electronic classes. In that time, electronics was a big thing, in the eighties. So, in eighty-two, I think it was in eighty-two, I took electronic classes. They combine the electronic classes with English classes to help you improve your English. So, I learned a lot in there too. There were people from, not only from Puerto Rico, from different countries. I know some people over there, they were from like Afghanistan. They couldn't even speak English any better than us and I made some friends too. It was an experience. When I finished the electronics assembly classes, I found a job in that.

LL: Where did you find a job?

EA: I worked in, I don't know if they're still there, it was on Thomaston Avenue. There used to be a factory there. They used to make the emergency lights. We used to solder the PC board for that. So, I found a job there.

LL: When did you start working there?

EA: Like in eighty-three. I think I was eighteen, nineteen years old, around there.

LL: So, it didn't take too long for you to finish training and find a good job.

EA: Yep, mhm.



LL: Where did you and your family go to get food? Food that you would have gotten in Puerto Rico, food and groceries that you were used to.

EA: There was a lot of Spanish stores in Waterbury. There were always a lot of Spanish stores. So, if we want something from there, we used to go to the Spanish stores to buy it.

LL: They were already there when you came?

EA: Yep, there were a lot over here when I came.

LL: You said you got used to being here by talking with a lot of other people who came from Puerto Rico, things like that. Were there clubs where you would go or places to go and have fun or talk?

EA: There were clubs, but I never went. I used to go to dances. They used to do dances in the Lady of Fatima, on Baldwin, the church. They used to do a lot of Spanish dances in that time. Now, they don't do it, but they used to do that. There were other places where people would get together, I didn't go to those places, but there were a lot of places that they had in that time.

LL: You said they had dances in the church. So, a lot of people were able to get together and talk through the church?

EA: It was just dances that they used to do. They bring singers from Puerto Rico and they used to do a dance. People go there, dance you know. That was in the eighties, then they stopped.

MS: Can you expand upon that you said how you met some people that you didn't know and that you did know here. Also, in the classes that maybe weren't Spanish speaking, but you made friends with them throughout the technology classes that you took. How did they relate to you? Was it the same process that they were going through?

EA: Most of the people go to the same classes. They come here, they have to start from the bottom. A lot of them, they have to learn English, almost everybody had the same problems.

MS: Are there friends that you made in back in the classes that maybe you still keep in touch with, whether they're Spanish speaking or not?

EA: Some of them, some of them not, but some of them yeah.

LL: When your family came here, did your parents vote? Do you remember them voting at all in elections or anything like that?

EA: Yeah, they did.

LL: Do you vote?

EA: Yes, we vote.

LL: Is there anything that you talk about with people who are still in Puerto Rico about politics and things that have to do with the island or there's not really any kind of talk about that stuff?

EA: No.

LL: Do you still have ties in Puerto Rico? Family?

EA: I still have uncles and cousins there.

LL: They still live in Penuelas?

EA: Mhm, yep.

LL: How do you stay in touch with them?

EA: Usually, through my mom [laughing]. My mom, she always calls up there and talks to them all the time.

LL: Do you ever go back?

EA: Yeah, I went back like two or three times, but the last time I went was two-thousand.. I went back in ninety-eight, I brought Ivette and Richard [her daughter and son] over there to know my grandfather. We were there for a week or so.

LL: Do you miss anything about it?

EA: I did miss my grandparents when I moved. I was very close to my grandparents, but I've been here long enough now. So, now this is my home.

LL: When you've gone back to visit, what was it like? Was it a good experience? Did things change a lot since last time?

EA: Yeah, oh yeah.

LL: What kind of changes happened?

EA: Like the town, it got a little bigger. Different things. You see, in my small town I never though I'd see a McDonald's and they got a McDonald's there [laughing]. That's a surprise. They changed a lot of stuff. It changed a lot in twenty-eight, twenty-seven years.

LL: It got a lot bigger than you remember?

EA: Bigger and more people, yes.

LL: Have the people changed at all?

EA: I don't think so.

LL: Is there certain things that you do here, I know you talked about in January some of the holidays that you do here, is there anything else you do here that still do in Puerto Rico besides the holidays?

EA: I still do the same food that we ate down there. I still cook the same way. I still listen to my music, Hispanic music. We keep our culture.

LL: When you've gone back to Puerto Rico, did they look at you or treat you differently than they used to when you lived there?

EA: It's not that they treat me different, it's just maybe because it has been son long that we don't get together. You know what I mean? It's like, maybe you feel a little stranger because it has been so long.

LL: Since your parents and you came here, did you help anyone else in your family or anyone else in Puerto Rico to come over here to the U.S.?

EA: No, I didn't have anybody come over.

MS: You said when you came here, on South Main Street there was a lot of the shops, the Spanish culture, can you compare what it is in the eighties to what it is now? Because South Main Street has changed a lot.

EA: It changed a lot. I think we got more. I think now we got more Hispanic people from different countries, not only from Puerto Rico. Before, it used to be more Puerto Rican around there, but now it's a mix of different countries, Spanish countries. There's more stores, it's different, they got more. It's a lot of Spanish people, but mixed.

MS: Back in Puerto Rico, you had some place to go for religion or worship. Is that something that's still done here?

EA: They still have the church. Me personally, I don't go to church. I believe, but I don't go to church. Yeah, they still have the church. They have a church over there that is Spanish, it's a Catholic church. Now it's in... Wolcott Street? We got St. Margaret's on Willow, they do a Spanish mass. The other one is on Wolcott Street I forgot the name of it. The big church on Wolcott Street. I forgot the name of that church, but they do it over there.

MS: I know where you're talking about.

EA: Yeah, it's that big church, but they do it, it's a Spanish church over there.

LL: There's something I wanted to ask, and I don't know if you know about it, but in Penuelas there's a big oil refinery. The Commonwealth Oil Refinery Company, do you remember that?

EA: Yeah, we used to call it the CORCO. I remember the CORCO. They closed in the late eighties, I think it was. I was here when they closed almost everything, but when I was there it was still up.

LL: Did a lot of people work there?

EA: Yeah, a lot of people.

GA: Yeah, my father.

EA: His father worked there.

LL: When they closed, did a lot of people have to move?

EA: A lot of people, because they used to make good money there, the earnings were good. When they closed, I was already here, but I heard a lot people got depressed. Some people killed themselves because they had nice houses, expensive cars because they could afford them in that time, but when they closed, you're not going to find a job around there that pays that much. So, from what I heard and my mom, when she'd talk about some people that she knew that work over there, they were very depressed and some people killed themselves. It's sad.

LL: A lot of people out of work.

EA: Mhm.

MS: Since your father worked there, could you expand on what he went through? The working conditions, what he made, how was it better for your family that he worked there?

GA: Well, when he used to work there, I was a little kid. So, I remember sometimes he took me around. I've seen him talking with his boss, but he used to work with a crew. It was like six or eight guys and sometimes I saw him with them and because of that, we were living pretty good. Then, everybody got laid off, and there was a couple of accidents where people got killed. One time, my father was telling me that they called him and said we need you here in the plant. So, that day my father said no, this is my day off. So, they sent someone else and an accident happened, an explosion. So, it killed a couple of guys.

LL: Dangerous work.

GA: Yes, very dangerous.

LL: I was kind of curious about that because I know a lot of people worked there. It's a big place.

GA: They had gases there because of the petroleum and all that.

EA: When you go from Penueles to Ponce, the street the brings you from Penueles to Ponce, you just see, it was right there.

GA: You can see everything.

LL: What kind of advice would you give someone planning to come to the U.S. from what you've learned?

EA: For me, if you find over there that you have a good job over there, you got a house, you should just stay there [laughing]. Because some people, it's true, some people they have everything there but they want to come here because they think it's going to be better, but I think if you have everything you need like a job, family. I like it here, don't get me wrong, I love it here. Now it's my home. I got my kids over here, so this is home for me, but I came here when I was sixteen and I was still just a kid. If I had everything over there now, I think probably I would stay over there.

LL: If you were to come here, knowing what you know now, would you do things any differently?

EA: I don't think so, it's an experience. I think we are pretty good. I got two kids and they're good. They're going to college so I think our goal is for them to be better and they're doing better. The other thing in Puerto Rico is the health care is not like here. Now that I'm here, I know how it is.

LL: What surprised you most, in the whole time you've been here, about the U.S.? What surprised you most about being here than in Puerto Rico?

EA: Here, you really have more opportunities over here than over there. To get a job, it's easier to get a job here than over there. It's harder to find a job over there.

LL: The jobs are the things you wouldn't be able to find in Puerto Rico and you can find them here?

EA: Yup, it's easier to find them here.

MS: Maybe we can go in there a little bit . . . Possibly, we can talk about the hardships that you faced from then, when you came here, until now as a female and male getting different perspectives on it.

GA: What do you mean? In what sense?

MS: When you came here, compared to other nationalities . . . Was it different for you guys compared for example Italians or possibly as a German, compared to them?

GA: I think it's easier for Puerto Ricans because we are part of the United States. We are citizens of the United States right off that bat, so Mexicans, Hondurans, or other nationalities, they are not. They have to have the papers. For some of them, come over with no papers at all. So, right off the bat they are going to say you're an illegal alien. By law, you cannot be here. You have to have the papers. Us, we didn't need them. We just came in as a U.S. citizen, that's it. It was a little easier to get some work too. If you are a Mexican with no papers or an illegal alien, it's harder.

LL: As people from Puerto Rico, have you always felt American or did you feel Puerto Rican, and then when you came, you felt American? Or did you always feel American?

EA: I think we always feel American because, like I said, we celebrate the same traditions we celebrate here. We do Fourth of July, Memorial Day, Labor Day. Since I was a little kid, we always celebrate that too. It was combined. And, I think, more now. The last time I went to Puerto Rico, I noticed that the English influence is more than it used to be when I was there. Now you hear a lot of English everywhere, TV, everywhere. Even sometimes in school too some of the books are in English, like in the college. A friend that I have that went to college over there, they said the books are in English. Now, I think we got a lot more influence with the United States more closely.

GA: Even the street signs, they just started changing. I just saw on the news from Puerto Rico. Before, it used to say stop in Spanish, you know pare, now they are changing the name.

EA: So it's getting more.

LL: More and more English everyday. Do you find that, Puerto Rico being part of the United States, do you feel closer to the Americans in the United States, on the mainland, than maybe people from the same area as Puerto Rico, like Dominicans, Cubans. Do you feel closer to Americans than with other groups down there?

EA: What do you mean?

LL: Everybody down there can say they are Hispanic or Latino, do you feel closer to them? Do you feel a bond with Dominicans or do you just feel that we are Americans, we are closer to Americans?

GA: I think they feel closer to the Dominicans and the Cubans on the island itself, because there are a lot of Dominicans, a lot of Cubans crossing from their islands to Puerto Rico, because they are in a worse situation. There are no jobs over there so they go to Puerto Rico expecting there's going to be a lot more opportunity. From there, they come from Puerto Rico to the United States. So, I think it's more with the Dominicans and Cubans.

LL: You said a lot of Cubans and Dominicans go to Puerto Rico first and then go come to the United States?

GA: Then they come over. Right.

LL: As far as keeping the culture, I know you still cook the same food, have the same holidays, do you feel the your children are going to keep those cultures continuing? Are you still passing it on?

EA: I pass it on to them.

GA: We've tried [laughing]!

EA: If they're going to keep it, I don't know [laughing]. But, remember you're going to get a mix, her boyfriend is Italian and you're going to get a mix, but I think they are still going to have something from our culture that they are always going to keep. I always speak Spanish in the house since they were little. They don't speak the Spanish, but they understand what I say. I think they are going to keep some part of us, the culture. Maybe not everything, but some of them.

MS: I'm really interested in the factory work because that's how my family came into it. So, when you first came over, as Ivette told us and your wife earlier, where did you start off? Did you start off working in a factory?

GA: When I came from Puerto Rico, I didn't come to Connecticut. I went to New York, I used to be from New York, from Manhattan. My aunt, she brought us. I lived there for about a year and a half. Me and my brother, my mom. My father stayed, because he was working for CORCO, the company you were saying. From there, from Manhattan, then we came to Connecticut because my whole family on my father's side lived over here. My uncle, they got us an apartment. So, when we came from New York we got right in an apartment, ready to move in. We didn't stay with no family members or anything like that. Then, from there, I went to electronics training, like her. I think it was at Kennedy, they were giving the courses. From there, I found EDC Electronic, they used to be in Waterbury.

LL: When you moved here, the both of you lived on the same street.

GA: She was on the top and I used to live on the first floor, and she used to live on the second floor.

LL: You lived in the same building?

EA: Yes.

GA: Before she came in, the first time, to bother me [laughing].

EA: His aunt is my uncle's wife, but I didn't know that. My mom knew, but I didn't know that. They are related.

LL: How did you two meet?

GA: I was minding my own business, watching TV with my little dog Pinky. I was about sixteen, seventeen, young. I hear somebody knocking at the door. I opened the door. It was a lady, her mom, my mother-in-law now. She said:

"Excuse me."

"Yes ma'am."

"Can I use your phone? We just got here from Puerto Rico and we want to call them to let them know that we made it here ok. That we are fine."

So I said, "Sure. Yes ma'am, go right ahead." So, she came in, but right behind her it was her [points to Esther].

She said, "Sorry, this is my daughter."

I said, "Hi, how are you doing? Nice meeting you." And that's how we met. She called and said thank you and there she is [laughing].

LL: I have a picture here and I'm not sure if you guys might recognize it. Maybe if you know what it is [handing Esther picture].

EA: That's the green in Penuelas. That's the church. In Puerto Rico, in the green they have the Catholic Church. This is the fountain, they got lions over there, they have that for years and years. They took it from there and put it back again because it's part of, it's the town. They used to do something called the Fiesta Patronales. Fiesta Patronales, they do it in every town in different times of the year. Penuelas, I think is in August or September, and what they do it from Friday to the next Sunday. They used to bring music every day.

GA: It's like a carnival. You got rides and music.

EA: The other thing is, its more for, they have a saint for patron they call it and every town has there own one. I forget which one is ours. They used to that and go to church like a procession that Sunday. Fiesta Patronales is the whole week. You got eat, drink there, food, music. They still do that, that's a tradition. And they do it over here. I've got a picture of that over here. The guiro festival, the one who started that we know him. He started that in the eighties of late seventies or something. I know I was still there when they started with the guiro festival.



LL: I have a map of Penuelas and I was just wondering if you could show me where you used to live [handing Esther the map]. If you can find it on the map.

EA: Here. Jaguas. That's the place I used to live.

LL: Up in the mountains.

EA: That was really a mountain, we were close to that. So I had to come everyday for school from here to here like half hour, forty minutes.

LL: In a car?

EA: In a bus. A yellow bus. To go over there, it's just curves. So when you go up, you have to use the horn to let the other people that were coming down, just to go on the sides and stop for the other person to go because the cliffs were like one hundred feet down.

[END]

**University of Connecticut/Waterbury Campus**  
*Interviewee Cover Sheet*

Name of Interview Subject: Geraldo Arce, Esther Arce

Contact Info: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Interview: 10/25/09

Place of Interview: 369 Highland Ave., Waterbury, CT

Name of Interviewer: Lucien Lafreniere

Contact Info: 203-808-2973

Family Names:

Parents:

Paternal Grandparents:

Maternal Grandparents:

Others:

Other names and terms (spelling):

Other important information:

Does the interviewee have photographs and other documents? [Describe]

Number of Files/Tapes/Disks 1 Number of Copies and Format \_\_\_\_\_.wma  
(Circle type)

Is the interview transcribed? X Yes \_\_\_ No

Interview with: Geraldo and Esther Arce  
Interviewer: Lucien Lafreniere  
Date: Oct. 25, 2009  
Place: 369 Highland Ave., Waterbury, CT

LL: It's October 25<sup>th</sup>. We are back for a second interview. I want to start off with one of the things that you said last time. You had said that you didn't have much in Puerto Rico when you were there, but you still lived pretty well. What exactly did you mean by that? In a small town, how can you still be happy without much? What was that like?

EA: We had enough to eat. We had clothes, stuff like that, we got a house. So that was, in that time, enough for us. We were happy with that. We just lived there like that.

LL: And for you [Geraldo], growing up in Puerto Rico, same question.

GA: We did have enough because my parents used to work at a company. You remember? The one you were telling me before? The CORCO. So, he was bringing the food and we were doing ok. Most of the time my cousin and some of the family members were coming to the house and they didn't have too much because one of my cousins had no father. It was only the mom so it was a little harder for them so they used to come over a lot. They would stay with us, eat, and things like that.

LL: Family helped each other out?

GA: Exactly that's what we did.

LL: The house that you [Esther] used to live in. I know we have the pictures in there and we will go over it a little bit. Can you describe the house? What it was like inside?

EA: That was wood, it's wood. We had two bedrooms. The kitchen and living room were all one. It didn't have division it was just one. Then my father built up, added up in cement. He added up one more bedroom, a bathroom, a real bathroom [laughs], a big kitchen and a dining room. Before, we didn't have a bathroom inside the house. We used to have an outhouse for a while before he did a new bathroom, the whole thing. But, we used to go to the outhouse. Up there we didn't have electricity. I don't know for how long. We didn't have electricity, my mother used to have those old irons that you put in the coals. Then, she had another one. It was iron, but it had holes. So, you put the coal in there and you close it and then you iron with that. I remember that, I still remember that. We used to have candles for a while because my father, when he built the house. When they came to the power lines. The power lines had to go over the house so you cannot do that. So, they said you had to break the house down and build it a little before it. My father, what he did, we put it on logs and we moved it little by little they moved it all the way back.

LL: They moved the whole house on logs?

EA: The whole house and we were still living in there. So, he moved it. In Puerto Rico, in the time, it took a long time before they go on, the lights. They took a while so we were without electricity for I don't know how long, but for a while.

LL: Were you [Geraldo] the same way?

EA: When I used to live in Puerto Rico, we used to live with my grandmother. When I used to live with my father, we had electricity... We were doing ok there.

LL: Did either of your families have property around the house like more land or just the house?

EA: No, my father had the land. He owned the land and the house.

LL: Did he have a lot of land around the house?

EA: Yeah, it was pretty big. It was just mountains, but he used to grow bananas, coffee, gandules , it's like a pea that we use in Christmas for our dinners and stuff like that. He used to grow all that and sell it too and oranges, we used to have oranges. We used to have lemons, limes, all that stuff.

LL: Your father would grow them to sell and for you guys to use as well?

EA: Yeah, we used and sold it too.

LL: How about you [Geraldo]?

GA: My father, he had a couple of chickens. It was kind of big too, the property outside. He got a few chickens. Sometimes he used to sell it to the other guys, a couple of them. One time, it rained real hard. We went over near the river; it took the chickens and everything. [laughing] No more chickens. Some of them drowned. They found them on the fence stuck. I saw it myself when we went. We had to get out of the house, so we went to my grandmother's. She lived on the high land. Next day, we went down and the chicken was there and you could see the legs stuck. They were stuck on the fence; they couldn't escape [laughs]. What are you going to do?

LL: [laughing] That's bad, but it's funny.

GA: It is and you should've seen its legs sticking out.

EA: We had chickens, we had pigs. My father used to have pigs to sell them. So, we didn't get attached to them like people do here. It was just for selling. We had chickens; we got a goat one time [laughing]. My grandfather gave me a goat when I was little.

GA: A pet?

EA: Yeah, I remember [laughing]. He would give me rides on the goat.

GA: You used it like a motorcycle eh?

EA: I don't know what happened with that goat after that. My father wasn't too happy with that goat so I don't know what happened, but we had animals too. We used to sell pigs.

LL: You were talking about things that you would grow to sell and use yourselves; where else did you go to get things that needed like food or supplies in Puerto Rico?

EA: In the town. I lived in the mountains so it took like a half hour to go to the town.

LL: You went south from Jaguas right?

EA: Yeah, to go to the town. We went to a supermarket. My mom used to make a big, big grocery list for two or three weeks so she didn't have to go all the time because then we lived in the mountains; we didn't have a car to go where I live. We had to walk. So, when they bring all those groceries, they used to put it in the brown bags like we use for leaves. They put all the groceries there. So, they were big like that. My mom usually went because my father was working when she did that. She used to carry them from the main road to our house.

LL: Herself?

EA: Yeah. We used to do that. We used to go two or three turns back and forth to get all the stuff for my mom. Usually, she went to the grocery store for a two or three week list so she didn't have to go. Then we got a small store over there so you can buy milk or stuff like that that you need.

LL: Near where you lived?

EA: Yeah.

LL: You talked about an internship you did with a lawyer in Puerto Rico for the secretarial work. Did you do that in Penuelas or was that somewhere else?

EA: No, in Penuelas. It was a lawyer, his name was Novoa. They were a big, rich family in Penuelas. They are still there. He was the lawyer; he had a pharmacy too. I think he passed away. I forgot his first name.

GA: He got furniture too? A furniture store?

EA: Then, his brother had a furniture store. The other brother had a hardware store. They were a big family; they were very rich. So, he was a lawyer and had a pharmacy and I worked with him for like six months I was there doing his secretary work. I did different

stuff like. I used to do, when people are going to buy real estate, when people are going to buy land or houses, stuff like that, I used to write all those papers. But, in that time, it was not like now with computers. In that time, you had to have ten copies laid out with carbon copies and you have to put all of them in the typewriter on top of them and in you make one mistake, forget it you have to go through all of them. So, that's the way we used to do it. I worked with him for six months. It was interesting.

LL: I think you said you both were Catholic and you went to church in Puerto Rico when you were younger.

GA: Yes, I did. My father used to go a lot to the Penuelas [church]. We did the procession, they call it procession. It's a lot of people they usually go on Sunday. Like on Easter, a lot of people go out. So, we used to go the church. The picture you brought of Penuelas [picture of the Penuelas square] it was that church.

EA: Yeah, that was the main church.

GA: Right, that's the main church for Catholics.

LL: And you would go every Sunday?

GA: Every Sunday we used to go, when I was a kid, my father used to go. Sometimes we went with our grandmother too.

LL: You [Esther] were a bit farther away; did your family still go?

EA: We only went once in a while, but not all the time. We didn't have a car either. Sunday you didn't have any public transportation so it was only from Monday to Saturday, but Sunday wasn't. So, we didn't have a car we didn't go [much].

LL: If you did go, would you go to the same one?

EA: Yeah, because that was the church for the town.

LL: I know we talked a little bit about politics; people talking politics in Puerto Rico. Do you remember what the local politics was like in Penuelas like who was the mayor or what they did?

EA: I don't remember. I know there was a lady in there. There were a lot of them, but I don't remember who. I don't remember the names.

LL: That's ok. It's a long time ago. How did the government treat the people in the town like the town you were in and the whole area? Did you receive any kind of services or could you request them like police, fire department, things like that? Was that there?

EA: The fire department? Yeah, they had the police and the fire department.

LL: Is there any other type of government buildings there?

EA: Yeah, they have some. For social services, they have a building. My uncle, he's a social worker. He used to be a social worker over there. Now, he retired.

LL: Your uncle was?

EA: Yeah.

LL: So he went back?

EA: No, not that one. His brother. The one that stayed in Puerto Rico. He was a social worker in that department over there in Penuelas.

LL: I know we talked about CORCO last time and it was big place where a lot of people worked. Do you remember if there was any other big places where a lot of people worked at besides that? Or was that the one big place that a lot of people worked?

GA: No, there was other places, but they were farther down probably to the north of the island like San Juan. In Penuelas, no. The CORCO was the one closer in the area.

LL: So that was the biggest one where a lot of people worked there?

EA: Yeah.

GA: How about the other one? They used to make candles. There was a company a long time ago. They used to have a small factory right in Penuelas. They used to make candles because I remember my father, we used to go through to Penuelas and there was a little company there. Sometimes, my father would stop by to see a friend of his and me and my brother used to go in. We used to go a long time ago. I don't know what happened to it. It went away.

LL: The uncle that I was thinking of, the one that you moved in with when you came here. Is he still here? Where does he live now?

GA: He's still in Waterbury.

EA: Tudor Street. I think that's where he lives now. He used to live down on West Liberty. He lived there for, oh my God, for twenty years or over. Then, he moved a couple years ago.

GA: He used to live on Baldwin Street with us. He lived a couple of years on Baldwin Street. He used to live in the basement and we used to live on the third floor. We came first and then he came from Puerto Rico and got an apartment there.

LL: He came after you [Geraldo] came?

GA: We came first and then he came.

LL: You said last that your mother wanted you to come here for a better life. Can you explain what she meant by a better life? What things besides was she hoping for you to find here instead of Puerto Rico?

EA: I think because where we were living wasn't the city. It was also a jungle. I think she wanted to do better because she was there every day by herself. She didn't work, only my father. She said she got tired. My father didn't want to move to the city. He never wanted to move because he had his land over there. He didn't want to move to the city so I think my mom got tired. When my uncle went there [U.S. mainland] and explained how it was, she just decided I'm going to go. I think maybe she was thinking she was going to be better over here because over there she wasn't doing anything anyway.

LL: Did your father want to come as well? Want the family to come?

EA: At first, he didn't agree with the idea, but she had decided so [laughing] that's it. He couldn't say no. We just came and then he got the idea and now he's over here still. He likes it, he has a job here. He goes to Puerto Rico, now he doesn't go that often, but he used to go often, all the time to see his family. Even from here sometimes he helps his family over there. They need something and call him, oh I need this or something happens he always helps them.

LL: Like sending money and things like that?

EA: Yeah. They still do that. Probably, he is better over here because over there he was working in a supermarket and he wasn't making that much money either over there. So, maybe it was better for us. Who knows?

LL: When you were traveling to the U.S., remember last time I asked what you brought and you said just clothes, what other things would you have liked to bring with you if you could have?

EA: Over there, I liked to sew. My dream was to be a fashion designer, but I never got there. When I was working with the lawyer, I bought a new sewing machine that in that time was like \$500. The good one, but I couldn't bring it. So, I just sold it to someone over there and I was a little sad with that because that was my dream, to be a fashion designer and I used to sew. I never did it, but that was one thing in that time that I was sad to leave and my family. My grandfather, I was very close to my grandfather and it was hard because we were always together. That was very hard to leave the family. We didn't know when we were going to go back or not. Then, you get used to it. Then, I went back to visit him a few times.



LL: And how about you [Geraldo]. Is there anything that you would've liked to take with you?

GA: When we came, I was smaller. We were younger, we were kids. Just give me a lollipop and I'm good, I don't care [laughing]. So we just went. They said, we are going to go to the United States and we didn't understand. Me and my brother said, ok. Then, we were in New York. My father stayed and me and my mom and my brother went. My aunt Esther, we went to live with her for the first two years. Then, my father was doing whatever, fixing this, changing this because he was going to come with us, but he had to stay. So, he sold whatever he had to sell and get rid of. My father, he always wore working clothes never nice or dressy nothing like that just working clothes, but when we went to New York to get him when he landed, he got a suit. To me and my brother, we had never seen that. He looked like a penguin to me. That's dad? Yeah, that's your father. Then, he came and went to New York. We stayed there for two years then we went to Connecticut.

LL: It's funny the first time he buys a suit is when he is coming here.

GA: It was the very first time I ever seen him [in a suit] because he was always working. No partying just work.

EA: I remember when you used to see movies or stuff in Puerto Rico from here [U.S. mainland] you see people that are very nice, dress up in suit and stuff. Maybe that's what he was thinking. You see the movies in that time, it was different and you see the people all dressed up in the airport because the shows that we watch here, we used to watch it over there. They used to have...

GA: *I Love Lucy* and all of that. You know, the real old shows.

EA: Like the *Bionic Woman* and *The Six Million Dollar Man*. All those shows we used to sit and would watch them over there. You're watching all those things from the United States.

LL: You probably watched the same shows that my father and my mom watched.

GA: Sure.

EA: *Gilligan's Island* [laughing].

LL: Can you expand a little bit on how you adapted to living here? I know you had said it took a little bit of time for you to get used to it. Can you give some examples of how you had to adapt to life in Waterbury after living in Penuelas, which is much different. What did you have to change to get used to living in Waterbury?

EA: One thing was the weather. We came in August, but then you have to get used to the weather. In Puerto Rico, it's 90 degrees all year round. You don't see the change of

seasons either because it's hot all year round so you don't see the leaves changing and stuff like that you don't notice. I had to get used to the weather, get used to the city. It was a big city. I came from the mountains so that's a big change. The language, everybody's speaking English and I didn't understand nothing of what they were saying. You know, you got to get used to all that.

LL: The English problem, was that like when you would go out to buy something?

EA: Yeah, everywhere. Everywhere you go. There are still some people that speak Spanish now I think there are more people that are Spanish here, but in that time there was less people. Probably when he [Geraldo] came there was less people also. When you go to the stores and stuff like that, I know how to write English and read it because in Puerto Rico we take English from kindergarten to high school, but you don't speak, you don't understand it. And I wasn't that good in English either. I was so bad in the English class, oh my God. In there, I ended up with a C [laughing]. It was hard. That was a hard part, to understand other people.

GA: I remember coming here. [I] went to the street, just going out, and I heard people talking and I was trying to figure out what they were saying. Sometimes, guys were talking with real bad words. I remember one time, back in school, Mr. Ramos, the bilingual teacher. I heard some guy talking with another guy. I don't know what they were arguing about and he said a bad word, mother something you know. So, when we were in class... [I said] Mr. Ramos, because I didn't know what it meant. He said, yes? What does a mother f mean? [He said] What did you say!? You go to the office! They sent me to the office and I went to the principal. I said, I didn't understand it. They knew that I was just learning. That was kind of hard because you didn't understand at the beginning what word was a good word or what was a bad word. You are still going to hear these crazy words, but you don't understand and it was hard.

LL: You said last time that there was a lot of Spanish speaking people in the South Main area, where you guys lived originally. Do you remember where some of the others came from. Were they all from Puerto Rico or were they from other places like the Dominican Republic?

EA: When I first came here, it was more Puerto Rican over there. I think there were a lot of Puerto Ricans, but then after a while there were Dominicans. Now, it's different. Now, in South Main over there, they've got all kinds.

GA: They've got Hondurans. It changed more, Hondurans and Mexicans.

EA: It changed a lot from when we came here to now it changed a lot, but in that time it was more Puerto Rican and there were a lot of people from out town too. There were a lot of people from Penuelas.

LL: Just from Penuelas?

EA: From Penuelas. There were a lot of people from Penuelas. You would be walking and I'd see a friend of mine. What are you doing here? [Laughing] It was funny because some people that went to school with me and some are still around here.

LL: So, you didn't even know that they were living here?

EA: No, but you find a lot of people. I think Waterbury has a lot of people from Penuelas, a lot.

GA: Even the store, the Puerto Rican one. When we came, the owner was Puerto Rican. Now, you go down there, they are Mexicans or Hondurans, the owners. They keep changing.

LL: Also, I remember you were talking about the program you went into to work with the electronic equipment. Do you remember what it was called or where it was?

GA: METC, that was the name of it.

EA: It was a program that helped people to get training so you can get a job. You had to apply, then they call you. They picked a certain amount of people. Then, you have to go have some tests. I had to do some tests, then you pass it and they get you for the program. I remember, in that time, when I took the test, when I did it that was in 1982 maybe 83, around there. I think 82. It was on Thomaston, you know where the motor vehicle is? Before the motor vehicle you know where they have the helicopter from the army? The offices were there in that time. That's where I went to get the tests and everything, writing tests and stuff like that, I had to go there. I think we had to go there for a week and then they sent you where you got to go like I had to go to Kennedy High School over here. I had the training over here. They give you English. The electronics plus the English to teach you how to speak better and understand and there were a lot of people from different places. Some people didn't even understand much English. Some people didn't even know how to write it or read it. That was that program in that time and he [Geraldo] took it too.

LL: You guys did the same program?

EA: But in different times, but the same program.

LL: Do you remember any of the clubs where either Puerto Ricans or maybe other Latinos would congregate or have clubs in Waterbury? Do you remember any of their names or where they were?

GA: Most of the time, they use to, in Waterbury at that time there was two clubs, main ones that I remember. One was the Puerto Rican club on Baldwin Street.

EA: I remember that was there.

GA: They do a lot of meetings, parties, stuff like that. They bring to music, all kinds of music. And then the Lady of Fatima.

EA: That was not a Puerto Rican club, but they used to rent it and do a lot of dances. They used to do a lot of stuff there. Then, they built the recreation center. They used to do a lot of stuff, they still do it. They do a lot of Puerto Rican stuff like music and stuff for the kids.

GA: In those days, when we came, that was the main one. Those two, the Puerto Rican club and Lady of Fatima.

LL: Those were the two big ones. Ok. In the U.S., we have the Democrats and the Republicans for politics. Was that sort of the same thing in Puerto Rico or was there different political systems?

EA: They got, they call it PNP. It's like the Republicans. It's kind of Republican. They want Puerto Rico to be a state, another state. Then they have the Partido de Popular. I think it's PPD or something like that. It's like the Democrats and those are the ones that want Puerto Rico to stay the way it is, the commonwealth... Then, the independent they call it the PIP. They want Puerto Rico to be independent. So, those are the three main ones.

LL: You said, the last you went back to Penuelas it was a lot bigger than you remember. What do you mean by bigger? Were there more buildings or maybe different types? More people?

EA: More people. In Puerto Rico they used to, the government depending on how much you make, if you didn't make enough money, let's say you were in the poor level, they used to give people a piece of land. It's free, they give it to you, and then you have to build your own house there. So, they did a lot of that for years. They call it Penuelas 1, 2, 3. No, Caracoles 1, 2, 3 and it has grown there a lot. Before, all that land they were just land with trees and sugar cane. Now, it's just houses. When I went there, a lot of people, they said that a lot of people came from other towns to live there. So, it got bigger, it got a lot of people. Now, we have McDonald's. Where the McDonald's is now, it used to be a gas station and it was in front of and high school. When I was in high school, it was a gas station with a little market that we used to go and buy stuff, out to eat and stuff. Now, it's a McDonald's so it's a big difference. They built in Penuelas too, they built it before I came here, it was a big baseball park. They do the triple A games, it's a big thing. I think they built, in the entrance of the town, before it was all land and nobody used it and I think they told me they built over there a track. People run around there, they have something over there. They moved the hospital. It was in the town, now it's in the entrance of the town. They moved that, they moved the post office too. He [Geraldo] didn't see it because when he came here he never went back to Puerto Rico. It has been over thirty years that you've been here?

GA: I went about two more times and that was it.

EA: But not now after everything changed like that. So they changed a lot of stuff. It is a lot of changes.

LL: So the government gave people land?

EA: In that time, it was in the late 70's to maybe the early 80's. They did that in that time at least in the town of Penuelas. I don't know what they did in the whole island, but I know they did that in the town. Not everybody qualified, you had to qualify for that.

LL: You touched on the baseball field they built. Is baseball a big deal in Penuelas or in Puerto Rico?

EA: Yeah, it is. I think it's the triple A they call it. It's a big thing. They go to other places. They do a whole season of that and it was big over there.

GA: And they do basketball too.

EA: The baseball was big thing over there. People used to go a lot over there to see the games.

LL: I know that there has been some famous baseball players that have come from Puerto Rico.

EA: In Puerto Rico you got baseball and basketball, more baseball.

LL: When you have gone back to Puerto Rico, what kind of things do you do, especially when you took your children, what things did you do when you went there? Was it just vacation?

EA: It was vacation. We went to see my grandfather. He never saw them before so we brought them over there. I wanted them to meet my father, my sister, my nieces, we all went together. We just went to show her [Ivette, Esther and Geraldo's daughter] where I came from, but she didn't like it she said she wouldn't come back over there no more [laughing]. We went to the beach, to show them around. My grandmother was still alive, on my mom's side, so we went to see her. We did all that. We didn't have time to go to San Juan to see the castle because it was a big strike in that time for a week so nobody could go there. I forgot what it was all about, but it was a big strike. So we didn't go to San Juan in that time.

LL: You know they just had another one? It just shut down the whole city I heard like a week ago.

EA: Yeah, like a week ago because the government, they are going to lay off 17,000 people. It's supposed to be 30,000 so they lay off a little bit in January, but now it's a big

lay off of 17,000 and then I think next year they are going to lay off more people. It's a mess over there, it's a mess.

LL: When you came here, to the U.S., did your family still go to church? Did they find a new church when they were here, when you guys were young?

GA: They found one, the one on Cherry Street. That was one of the main ones that they got for Spanish speaking people, that was the main one there. Then, they moved that one, it's still there, but now they do it at...

EA: The one I told you on Wolcott Street. I forgot the name of that church, but before it was on Cherry Street.. And St. Margaret too, St. Margaret on Willow street. St. Margaret has a Spanish mass. I think it's on Saturday, Saturday nights and Sunday.

LL: Were you two married in the church?

GA: No.

LL: Which church were you married in?

EA: We were married in one called Bible Church. It's by Chase Avenue. A little street there in Chase Avenue. I'm Catholic, but I don't go to church really. I went a couple of times, but I'm not a [regular]. I don't believe too much in, to get married in the church you got to go through a lot of stuff that I really didn't want... But the bible church, they give you one or two classes, but they are not like the Catholic church. So, that's why we went to that one. It's a church, it was nice, a nice ceremony.

LL: Do you know of any reason why the CORCO plant closed in Penuelas? Did they tell your [Geraldo's] father, did they tell the other employees why they were closing?

GA: Well, actually, my father didn't mention why a lot people were laid off, but I think they were going to move.

EA: I don't know because when they closed, I think in the mid 80's. So, I really don't know the reason because I was already here.

LL: Did you hear anyone else saying that other things closed because of the plant or just the plant closed? Did it have any effect of the town like the economy?

GA: It probably did because a lot of other people were working from there so they bring the economy to the businesses around the store [the CORCO plant]. So, if they [plant workers] have no job, they are going to suffer too.

LL: Why do you think the English influence is heavier in Puerto Rico now than it was when you two lived there when you were young?



EA: It's more now. When I went to Puerto Rico, the last time I went was nine years ago. Now, you have all the TV's, all the channels in English over there. You can get the cable in English like here. A lot of people are trying to speak English. You see the kids are listening to a lot of American music too. Our music too, but American [also]. In that time too, I listened to some of the music in English in that time too. I think there is more influence by America now. You got all the store that you have here, all of them are down there. It's a lot of things that are changing.

LL: You are saying it's television, the music, and the stores that are influencing them?

EA: Yeah, I mean probably a lot of people from here; they come back over there too. I think it's a lot of influence. They got taxes now, before they didn't have taxes [laughing]. Before, you buy in the store, you don't have taxes. Now they have the taxes too.

LL: Just like here.

EA: Like here and it's higher too. I think its 6 point something. 5 for something and 2 percent for something else so they make it 7. Now, you buy something over there when we were [there], I bought something, you just pay ten dollars, ten dollars. Now, no, you got to pay for the taxes.

LL: You talked about, you think that some of your culture, some of the things that are in you are going to pass to your children. What do you think will pass on and why do you think it will pass on to them?

EA: I think they way we still do the family together. The music, I don't know, they listen a lot to English music. I know the family, we like to be together. I think the Spanish families, most of them. We like to have parties together, we like to get together, help each other too. Like my mom, when I'm needed, I go there or my sister needs me, my brother. I just call them, they don't ask. Ok, you need this, ok. We all help each other. I think we are going to pass that on. And probably some of the food too from all the things that we make. I think we are going to pass that, I think it's going to stay there.

LL: Are most people who are here from Penuelas related or do they know each other? The people who came from there to Waterbury. Do you seem to know most of those people and are there still activities that you guys do together?

EA: I don't see that many people now. We are working; sometimes you don't see people for a while. Then you see them, oh my God it's you! Really, we don't have that much time. Now, everything is heavy working, working, working. We don't have time to see nobody. Then, you live in different parts of the city too. When we used to live in South Main, now a lot of people are different, they come and go. When we were living there, people stay for long time and you see all the same people around, but all of a sudden, people start moving, others come in, back and forth.

GA: It's like a new generation, a lot of new kids and new people. The older people maybe went back to Puerto Rico or moved someplace else. Sometimes, I'll drive down [and say] who's that? I see a lot of new people there. New faces.

LL: So, in the beginning, you were all in the same area, very close, and now you've spread out.

EA: We have spread out, yeah.

GA: A lot of new people now. Even with the Puerto Rican club, not anymore. That's gone so they go to the bar here. It's not like a main thing, like it used to be the Puerto Rican club. Not anymore.

LL: Do you think the people who live in Penuelas are different in some way than the people who live in the rest of Puerto Rico? Is there something that makes them different or that they say it makes them different from anyone else?

GA: It's like when they go to a game, they go, we are the best, but actually they are the same. They are all the same island. Maybe they do things like the games, but even here with Waterbury they would say we are the best here at playing basketball and you go somewhere else and they say we are the best, but actually we are all the same, nothing changes.

LL: It's sort of just saying you are from a certain area.

GA: That's all.

LL: And you have your own festivals down there sometimes like you have your patron.

EA: You're right, yeah.

LL: If you could both talk a little bit about when you met and when you got married and you were starting out, what was that like starting out together in Waterbury? Starting a family and everything.

GA: When we met, I was minding my own business.

EA: There we go with the story.

GA: At the beginning, the mother was like; he is crazy I don't like him. I understand though, I was crazy. She was right [laughing]. We were young.

EA: We dated for four and a half years. We didn't get married right away.

GA: We were friends for a long time too.



EA: We were friends for a year. Then, we were together like four years before we got married. We didn't get married right away. Then, there was in a company in front of where Caldor used to be. Now, it's a Bernie's. There used to be a company over there. They moved to Watertown. I worked there for a while and he was working General Direct ...

GA: GDC.

EA: We got our own apartment when we got married. We never lived with my parents. We moved out and we got an apartment on Wolcott Street on the third floor. We were paying, in that time, it was like maybe \$300 maybe \$350 in 86. That was a nice street in that time. It was very good. Very nice and quiet. We lived there, got Richard [their son], then Ivette came, then we moved to the second floor of the same building. They remodeled everything. The owner, they used to have an office in the basement over there. They used to have a business. The Orsini's, she was an Orsini. They were very nice. We were there for ten years. We used to do the yard work, keep it up.

GA: Keep up the house, clean, cut the grass.

EA: The snow in winter. So, we were there for ten years. Then, we moved to Englewood because I got tired of living there. Then, it changed. Before we moved, it was more white people with single families. Then, everybody moved, then a lot of people came. They built like a condominium, but it looked like project or something there. Then, there came more crazy people.

LL: What area was that?

EA: In Wolcott, Wolcott Street.

GA: You know why? That Latin Kings. The gang, remember? One of them used to live on the street, one of the gang members. So then they would do meetings. They call it meetings, I call it stupidity. Then, it got a little rough because of what they were doing. One day, I got out in the morning to go to work and I was getting into the car, and I see a police car come in. I'm minding my own business and he swung in right beside me and he looked at me. Then, there was another cop that said, hey it's over here! So, he went back. It was the other building, somebody died. An overdose, a lady, a young woman I guess. So, he went out, but you see more police coming down. They did an investigation and I found out it was an overdose because of the Latin Kings. By that time, the street got a little rough, so I said no, time to move. This is not good.

LL: Around what year did it start getting bad like that?

EA: Maybe in 92. In 1996 we moved.

GA: It was right in the 90's that it got a little rough.

EA: Yeah in 1996 we moved so it was like maybe 93, around there. Then we moved to Englewood. We lived there for three years and then we bought a house. We moved to Hungerford Avenue. We bought a house there. Then, we moved from there to here. We sold the house and just went back to renting.

LL: Sometimes that is better.

EA: I think it's better. Too many bills, but I think we got good years over there because Ivette and Richard were still in school. We got a little dog. We used to have one, Missy. So, those years were good over there. I think it was the perfect time to have a house because they were still young and all that and we had a dog and we had good times over there. A lot of parties, we did have fun. Then we moved over here and been here a year.

[END]