

Interviewee: Dolly Vazquez
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Abstract: Dolly Vazquez was born in Puerto Rico and lived there for most of her life with her parents and two sisters. When her ex-husband received a job in San Francisco, Dolly and her daughter moved to the United States. Even though Dolly's life is very different in the United States, she remains attached to her Puerto Rican heritage and culture. She organizes cultural events for Centro Las Américas, a non-profit organization in Worcester. Three major events she organizes each year are: The Latin American Festival, the Latino Film Festival, and the exhibition *Viva el Arte*. On a normal day, she carries out many tasks related to culture: she plans various cultural events, looks for funding, contacts sponsors for the festival, reviews movies for the film festival, and contacts people. As she says, "Culture is my job." Dolly discusses how she has become an independent woman and how satisfied she is with the decisions she has made in her life. Dolly is a good example of a strong woman.

L.S.: We are working to collect the oral history of women in Worcester so that we can know more about their experiences. The National Convention for the Rights of Women was established in Worcester in 1850 and focuses on the education, health, work, and the political commitments of women. Today we would like to know more about the connection between your job and your culture. Thank you for collaborating with this very important project!

L.S.: What is your last name and marital status?

D.V.: My last name... my last name is Vasquez. And I am not married.

L.S.: When and where were you born in Puerto Rico?

D.V.: In Puerto Rico, in November 1952.

L.S.: How long have you lived in Worcester?

D.V.: In Worcester... in the city of Worcester... nine years. Before I lived in Northborough, which is a town near Worcester.

L.S.: When did you arrive in the city?

D.V.: To the city... in 1993.

L.S.: Where have you lived throughout your life?

D.V.: In Puerto Rico, in San Francisco, California, and in Massachusetts.

L.S.: Why did you move to Worcester?

D.V.: I moved to Worcester after I divorced. We sold the house in Northborough and we moved to Worcester. I moved to Massachusetts because my ex-husband...my ex-husband... was transferred from California to Westborough.

L.S.: How was your experience immigrating to the United States?

D.V.: In my case maybe it was a little different. I moved to the United States already married and with a daughter. I was doing very well in Puerto Rico, but my husband got a job in San Francisco. He was American and we moved to San Francisco. So I did not move to the United States looking for a better life. I had a very good life in Puerto Rico.

L.S.: What are some of the differences between Worcester and Puerto Rico?

D.V.: Language, first. [Pause] They are two completely different countries even though Puerto Rico is a colony, a territory of the United States. All is different... the food is different. The language is different. But here in Worcester and because I work at Centro Las Américas [it] is like working in a Latin American country because I am talking Spanish almost all the time and I already know the places where I can go to eat Puerto Rican or Dominican food. So, things have not been too bad for me.

L.S.: With which ethnicity do you identify?

D.V.: Latina.

L.S.: Where did you or your family come from?

D.V.: Puerto Rico.

L.S.: What languages do you speak?

D.V.: Spanish and English.

L.S.: What are your parents' names?

D.V.: Flor de Maria, my mother, and my father Carlos Arturo.

L.S.: Did your parents immigrate to the United States with you?

D.V.: No.

L.S.: And do your parents speak English?

D.V.: A little.

L.S.: Do you have siblings, if so, what are their names?

D.V.: I have two sisters: Flor Marina and Elsa Beatriz.

L.S.: Where do your sisters live?

D.V.: Puerto Rico.

L.S.: Do you have a large or small family?

D.V.: You mean like sisters and father?

L.S.: Mmm.

D.V.: Small.

L.S.: Do you have children?

D.V.: A daughter.

L.S.: What is her name and age?

D.V.: Her name is Margorie Ann Boggs and she is 29 years old. [Pause] And she lives in China... she lives in China. [she laughs]

L.S.: What is her cultural identity and what language does she speak?

D.V.: Me or my daughter? (sic)

L.S.: Your daughter.

D.V.: My daughter. She considers herself Puerto Rican but she does not speak Spanish very well. She is very American... she is. But she considers herself Puerto Rican.

L.S.: What has been the most difficult situation in your life?

D.V.: [Pause] Maybe... the death of my mother. [Pause] When I was 14 years old.

L.S.: Who has influenced you the most throughout the years?

D.V.: Who? A person? Who? Who? [Pause] I wouldn't say a person. I would say my family.

L.S.: Have you seen a historical event in your life? How did it affect you?

D.V.: [Sigh] Nine eleven [9/11]. It scared the shit out of me! [Everyone laughs] I don't know how to say that in Spanish! [Everyone laughs] I don't know how you want to put that but you know, it did. [Everyone laughs]

K.L.: Where did you go to high school and college?

D.V.: I studied in Puerto Rico all of my life including college. I did all my schooling in Puerto Rico.

K.L.: What are the names of the schools that you attended?

D.V.: Well, Academia Santa Rosa, Academia San Jose, Colegio Santa Rosa, and Universidad Católica.

K.L.: So, in what year did you graduate?

D.V.: From what? From high school?

K.L.: From college.

D.V.: From college... I graduated in '74. 1974.

K.L.: Do you consider education to be very important in your life today?

D.V.: Yes it is. Even though what I studied isn't what I do now.

K.L.: What is your job?

D.V.: My job is to organize cultural events for Centro Las Américas.

K.L.: What do you like about your job? And what don't you like?

D.V.: Oh, I like everything! I like to organize. I don't like to have to find money to do the events. I don't like that.

K.L.: How did you get your current job?

D.V.: By chance. I had a radio program on a community station. And the Centro called me to see if I would help on the festival. And later they offered me the job.

K.L.: With whom or for whom do you work?

D.V.: For a non-profit organization here in Worcester called Centro Las Américas.

K.L.: What do you do on a normal day of work?

D.V.: On a normal day.... A lot of things... plan, look for funding, and get sponsors for the festival, and get movies for... for the movie festival. Well, it is more—I am in contact with people.

K.L.: How many hours do you work per week?

D.V.: Thirty.

K.L.: What has this job meant for you?

D.V.: [Sigh] What has it meant? I like my job very much. And it is something that, that I like to do... it isn't a job that I have to say, "Oh, I have to work in the morning..." No, I like my job. Especially because I only work thirty hours. And by 3:00 in the afternoon, I leave for my house.

K.L.: How does your job relate to your culture and your past?

D.V.: Culture is my job. One can relate everything to culture. But not only Puerto Rican, but from other countries as well.

K.L.: Does someone help you with this job?

D.V.: Hmmm..., no.

K.L.: What have you done to balance your different priorities, responsibilities, roles, and interests in your life?

D.V.: Sometimes one has to be like a little magician. Sometimes you have to be a little magician here to... to balance things. But I have always been able to do it.

K.L.: What achievement are you the most proud of?

D.V.: The film festival. Because it is... it is an activity that I started sixteen years ago and I still have it. The big August festival was already in place. Centro already had it when I arrived. I did it... I continued to organize it and to add more to it, but it wasn't my idea. The film festival was my idea.

K.L.: Do you think you will change your job in the future?

D.V.: No, I'll retire from here.

K.L.: How did you find your job?

D.V.: By chance. They found me... the organization found me.

K.L.: What is your favorite part of the job?

DV: To work with people and to see their faces when they come to listen to a good performer, a good music group, and a movie that the people applaud at the end. That satisfies me.

LC: How has your past in Puerto Rico helped you with your current job?

DV: How my job in Puerto Rico...how...repeat?

LC: How has your past in Puerto Rico helped you with your job?

DV: Well. My past, in short, ... what can help me is my education, which was in business. And that helps me to be very organized and to carry out the many roles I have here at work.

LC: Which aspects of your job are the most difficult?

DV: Money, always money.

LS: What about money?

DV: Because...in order to do a film festival—we here in Centro do not have money—in order to do the film festival, I have to find money so I can organize this. Because with the sale of movie ticket, I can't pay the festival, I can't pay, therefore I have to receive donations. The same happens with the festival in the street, in the street, in August. Everything happens through donations... and the companies who donate money. We sell each vendor a table but we still have to find ways to fund the entire event.

LC: Do you think a lot of people in the U.S do not understand the Latino culture, can you explain?

DV: No. If we are talking about the U.S, yes, yes many people do not understand it. But it's the same thing when we do not understand your culture or the culture of people from different countries. It's normal. I think.

LC: What is the most interesting part of your job?

DV: [Pause.] When the day of the event arrives. When the day comes for the event I am planning. That's what I like because everything is already organized and then I can enjoy it. And I enjoy it.

LC: Do you think that you have an impact on the lives of the people of Worcester?

DV: My job?

LC: Yes.

DV: Yes, yes.

LC: How did you receive the position of director?

DV: How did I receive it?

LC: The position.

DV: It was little by little. I began as an assistant and later they gave me—the position of department director was created for me.

LC: In your job, do you plan important events for the city of Worcester?

DV: Yes, the Latin American Festival in August and the Latino Film Festival.

LS: Who comes to your events?

DV: To the film festival, comes...the Latinos come but many Americans come, too. All the movies have subtitles in English. And they are presented in Cinema 320 at Clark University. They already have a film series, and have a committed audience who always come to their movies. Well, many of that same people come... they come to see the films we present. They all are American.

LS: Do you think the events...help people... in the United States to understand the culture better?

DV: Yes, that is why we do it, that is why we do it. Let's say "Paraiso Travel," a film about a young couple who wants to leave Colombia, crossing the border between Guatemala and Mexico to get to the United States. Think of what they have to go through to come here. That's why the people who come to see the film learn from it—the Americans who are not aware about what immigrants go through, what is really going on. And the mental problems, the mental and physical problems they face in order to get here.

LC: Are there things that you do not like about Worcester and the culture of the United States?

DV: In Worcester...I do not like the cold [they laugh]. Yes [they laugh]. Coming from a tropical country, I do not like the cold and all these years that I have been here I have not grown accustomed to it, I cannot drive in the snow. And about American culture, if there is something I do not like about it? No. I like it.

LC: What would you like The Women's Oral History Project of Worcester to say about women?

DV: Of the Latina women or of all women?

LC: Latinas?

Everyone: Latinas. Yes.

DV: What I would like it to tell is...the achievements that many of them have reached... of those same women you are interviewing.

LC: Is there any person that you wish we would contact?

DV: I have given you their names, I gave a couple of names already...Gladys Rodriquez Parker, Doctor Mati Castiel... She has been doing a great job, you have to interview her...and there's a lot more. There is a lot of Latina women that you don't hear about them, but they do touch the lives of many people. There, I switched to English!

Todas: [They laugh] It's okay.

LC: Is there anything else that you want to say about your life or the connection between your work and your Latina culture?

DV: Yes, I believe that if I had not been working in Centro Las Américas, with the Latino community, speaking Spanish, listening to music, I would have returned to Puerto Rico already. I

would have gone back after my divorce, I don't have anyone here. So, I mean from my family, my family, my daughter is in China.

KL: Why?

DV: She is teaching English classes in Shanghai.

KL: My cousin does the same thing.

DV: Where?

KL: In China, I don't know.

DV: You don't know where?

KL: Yes...

DV: She knows a lot of Americans who do that and they get together. She is having a great time.

Everyone: Ahh... [They laugh].

LS: Your daughter, ... was she born in the United States?

DV: She was born in Puerto Rico. But remember, that in Puerto Rico.... Anyone who is born in Puerto Rico is a U.S. citizen. We are citizens from birth. Ahh... but she was born in Puerto Rico. When she was 4 years old, we moved to the United States. And at first she didn't want to know anything about Puerto Rican culture. Yeah, when she was a teenager. Now it's like she has found herself again. And now she is using "Vazquez" which is my last name. [All laugh]. Now she likes being a Latina. [All laugh].

Todas: That's all.

DV: That is all?

Todas: Yes, thank you.

DV: Very well. You welcome, you welcome.

Post-interview follow-up question:

KL: How has your [cultural] past helped you in your job?

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DV: Well, in my job... because what I do at Centro is cultural.... My past... because I grew up in Puerto Rico and lived there until I was thirty something years old..., it has helped me. I have been able to bring with me my Puerto Rican culture base.

LS: Do you regret having moved to the United States?

DV: Sometimes... sometimes.

LS: Why?

DV: I have all my family there... I miss my family very much. But, I have had a very good time here... many wonderful experiences. I could, but if not.... No, I don't regret it. I don't regret it. My regret is in part because I had a very good job in Puerto Rico and if I had stayed in that job, instead of coming to work for a non-profit organization, now at my age, I would have had better benefits at the time of retirement than what I would receive now.

LC: If you could work in Puerto Rico, would you do it?

DV: (Pauses) No. No, because I want to stay in the United States until I retire. I wouldn't want to go back to Puerto Rico now because there is a lot of traffic and to go to work every morning facing the horrific traffic jams.... No. Not for now. For now I would not like to go back.