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AN INTERVIEW WITH LUIS CALVACHE

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kevin Rosero: Hello, this Kevin Rosero from the Rutgers Oral History Project, under Dr. Lilia Fernandez for the Latinos in New Jersey Project. June 12, 2018, interviewing--you can say your name.

LC: My name is Luis Calvache.

KR: Okay, so we will begin. Well, first of all, a pleasure and thank you for your time to do this interview. So, I'm going to begin with the life of your family and when you were young--well, you're still young. [laughter] Yes, well, first of all, where and when were you born?

LC: I was born in Quito, Ecuador, in the year 1940, the 20th of October.

KR: Okay, and you said you were born in Quito, but did you grow up in another city?

LC: I was raised there until the age of fourteen, when I went to the city of Ambato in Ecuador itself.

KR: Okay, well, before we talk about Ambato, in Quito, tell me how was it living in Quito, your experience there.

LC: Well, I was there through elementary school in Quito.

KR: Okay.

LC: There, I finished elementary, and from there, I left for the city of Guayaquil, where I had family. From Guayaquil, I went back to the city of Ambato from the age of fourteen years old until I was nineteen years old, I went back to Quito again.

KR: Yes, and before you went to the cities, when you were in Quito, did you live with your parents or no?

LC: Yes.

KR: Or only with your mother?

LC: I lived only with my father, who was named Eloy Calvache Perez, because my mother passed away when I was seven years old.

KR: Okay, and how did your father support your family? Where did he work?

LC: My father was a merchant and sold new clothes and he would go fairs in different cities, Latacunga, Saquisilí, that is in the province of Ambato. So, he would go to the fairs that were there. By that manner, he would travel and return, and that was his manner of support us.

KR: Yes, now talking about your father, in the questions I asked previously, from those I saw that your father was in the military.

LC: Yes, I was. I was drafted in the mandatory manner like it used to be.

KR: Yes.

LC: That was done when you turned eighteen years old ...

KR: Okay.

LC: ... You were required to go to the military because you had to be trained. The military lasted twelve to fourteen months and then you left.

KR: And during the time that he was in the military was the country at war or?

LC: No, no.

KR: Okay.

LC: It has always been at ...

Doña Gloria Sanchez: Peace.

LC: Let's say, the laws of the republic.

KR: Yes.

LC: Before, they were all male citizens; today, women want to go to the military.

KR: Yes.

LC: Turning eighteen years, you go to the army or ...

KR: The army.

LC: To the army.

KR: Yes. However you feel comfortable, and also talking a little about your father, did you have brothers or sisters?

LC: Yes, I have sisters. I have one sister and one brother. They are alive and the rest of my family is deceased, four brothers.

KR: Wow, when you were living with your father were your brothers and sisters there too? Or did they live with another family?

LC: No, I had two sisters from the first marriage. Then, my father remarried to marry my mother, who then had four kids. So, then, my mother died and he married once again. From there, I had another brother from a third marriage.

KR: Okay.

LC: What can you say about it?

KR: Yes, and before your mother passed, how did your parents meet?

LC: That I don't know. I was an orphan at seven years old, so I didn't have much understanding.

KR: Yes, and speaking more about Quito and Guayaquil, do you remember your favorite food from either city?

LC: Of course.

KR: What do you remember?

LC: In Quito, my favorite food has always been yaguarlocro.

KR: Yes.

LC: That is my favorite food.

KR: Yes.

LC: Which was in the grocery stores or at the restaurants, the rice with meat.

Doña Gloria: *Seco de chivo* [goat stew].

LC: The *seco de chivo el que me por ahí que me sopla*. [laughter]

Doña Gloria: Yes.

LC: And in Guayaquil it has always been the seafood.

KR: Oh, yes.

LC: One thing is true, my maternal grandmother's home never lacked fish. Every day, there was seafood there. Also green plantain, cassava.

KR: Also something else from Ecuador, what type of music did you listen to or dance to?

LC: All types of music except *pasillo*. A Sanjuanito, rumbas. There's music; some merengue, some cumbias, until now I still like the music. To this day, I'll dance whatever they play for me.

KR: Wild.

LC: With the exception of reggaeton and the *perreo*.

KR: [laughter] Oh my God! That's my era, no?

LC: That era is for young people now.

KR: Yes. Well, now speaking a bit on a more serious topic, did you believe in a religion?

LC: I have been Catholic.

KR: Your whole life?

LC: Yes, because I have had a godmother since birth. When my mother passed away, I went to live with her, and I thank her for doing my First Communion. She always focused me on the Catholic religion.

KR: Yes. What is one memory from your childhood that you remember, good or bad?

LC: Well, my childhood had always been a little difficult. I left my father's house at fourteen years old and started my life by myself. I defended myself during that time period selling

newspapers, polishing shoes, loading baggage, but I grew up like that and it made me an honest person. I realized how to make the best of what people who were close to me gave me.

KR: When you left at fourteen and did all that, where were you living?

LC: I lived where I could.

KR: Wow.

LC: I used to live on the street, I would sleep in the kiosks until a family, excuse me, picked me up from Ambato. They gave me housing quarters, let's say. From there, things got a little better because at around seventeen years old, I had responsibilities myself. I could supply for myself.

KR: Yes, and the family that you met from Ambato, were they people you knew or complete strangers?

LC: No, they were Ambateños.

KR: But did you all know each other?

LC: No, I continued in Ambato. Through a man who had a taxi. Like I tell you, I would carry bags to cars ...

KR: Yes.

LC: ... That would arrive. So, I would pick them up and give them rides. They had a preference to call him to hookup, like they say.

KR: Yes.

LC: So perhaps I gained his trust. As I was a single person and he would take me to eat dinner at his house. And later on. . .

KR: Wow.

LC: . . .he gave me a place to sleep.

KR: Well, a good man with a kind heart.

LC: Yes, the whole family.

KR: Yes, also I saw that you were in a soccer club in Quito.

LC: Yes, I played soccer at the municipal club from... the Marin, in the neighborhood, la Marin. When I was twenty, twenty-one years old because I had gone back to Quito at nineteen.

KR: Yes.

LC: I liked the sport so much that I went again to Quito and since I was in the Marin neighborhood they invited me to play. And I played 2-3 years.

KR: And ...

LC: And then later the responsibilities, obligations, I had to go study and all. During that time, I withdrew a little because I worked in a soda company, Pepsi-Cola in Quito. There I got out, I would go in at six in the morning and get out at five in the afternoon.

KR: Wow.

LC: From there, I would go study. From there, I entered the labor union of drivers from Pichincha to get a professional driver's license. So, I distanced myself a little from soccer. However, Saturdays and Sundays, once in a while, I would stay active.

KR: When you say that at fourteen years old you left your father's house, were you still studying or just ...

LC: No. Later on, I returned, and then I went back to high school, Jose Marti in Quito, and I was there until--based on my count, I was there three years until I completed the basics.

KR: Okay.

LC: Because I didn't have the support of my father after I left the house. So, I could not study what I enjoyed. I wanted to be a little prepared, and I give thanks to God that he has helped me gain an, let's say, some knowledge, or a base through my own hard work.

KR: Talking about school, what were, let's say, your favorite subjects that you remember?

LC: Don't even tell me, I liked math.

KR: Really?

LC: And geography.

KR: Oh.

LC: My two, I liked math and I still like it today.

KR: Wow, and when you returned to study in primary school, during that time was it free or you had to pay for it?

LC: Free, free. The schools were public in Ecuador. They are still public in Ecuador, some don't charge. I studied in public school for free. The same in high school, I never had to pay. Everything was free.

KR: Do you have an experience in primary school or high school that you will never forget? Any ...

LC: Of course, the good friends I made during my childhood. Later on in my maturity, let's say. Because around my twenty-two or something years old, when I'm saying that I worked at Pepsi-Cola, from there, I would go to school. So, basically, I went out at five in the morning and would return home at eleven o'clock at night.

KR: Wow, and when you were in school, I know that you were working for yourself. However, did you have any problems in school?

LC: No, I was in high school but taking the basics. I was in 11th grade, 12th grade.

KR: Yes.

LC: 9th grade until ... 11th, 12th. I was already in--later on after high school I studied for three more years. I worked and with my earnings maintained myself because I worked, like I said, at the soda company, Pepsi-Cola.

KR: Yes, and after studying and all, did you keep working there or no?

LC: I kept working there and got a commercial driver's license through my own hard work. In other words, they gave me my driver's license there and I had to keep working, but I also liked to drive.

KR: As a taxi driver?

LC: Taxi driver, all types of cars.

KR: Buses and everything?

LC: Buses, trucks, and taxis..

KR: Wow. Out of those which one did you like the most? As a taxi or bus driver in Ecuador?

LC: I liked transporting new cars for a company in Ambato called Ambacar because it was popular. That company, Ambacar, was owned by Mr. Pedro Vasconez--no, Mr. Hernan Vasconez Sevilla. So, he would give each one of us every month, eight to ten days for many drivers to go get cars from the port of Guayaquil. New cars that were imported to Ambato Ambacar. That job was the one that I liked because they paid a little bit more. Of course, I had my own taxi, but it was different because that was what I liked to do most. From there, I drove "interstates," I've driven trucks and my taxi that I had. Before I had it, I was a taxi driver, before I had my own taxi. So, all these things are part of my life.

KR: Was it a taxi company, or were you by yourself?

LC: Yes, it was a cooperative of taxis.

KR: Oh.

LC: It was a cooperative. Over there, it is a cooperative. Here, it is a company like the one in New York. Over there it is a cooperative.

KR: Yes.

LC: So, basically everything was organized over there too.

KR: So, still talking about jobs, and after your jobs, how did you decide to come to the United States?

LC: I had some difficult moments in my life. Things were not good at home.

KR: Okay. Things were getting complicated in my life. My home was a mess. So, I had the opportunity to come a couple times. I didn't realize that people wanted to help bring me here sooner. But given the circumstances of my life at the time, I decided to come here.

KR: And did you come with people who helped you, or did you come completely alone during your trip? What was your trip like?

LC: No, there were people who gave me my visa. Also I came through Mexico and passed through Tijuana. So, then, I entered the United States without any obligation and without a single thing.

KR: And when you were in Tijuana how was the country, state, or whatever it is, province?

LC: It was madness over there. Everyone there offers and promises things. But I had a man, a friend of mine, that I had contact with from Ambato.

KR: From Tijuana or Ambato?

LC: From Ambato. I had a friend who has already passed away. His name was \*\*\*\*\*. So that man helped people get visas from Mexico and from Tijuana. From Mexico, he put one in touch with his contacts in Mexico. And they would take you to Tijuana and from Tijuana would put you in contact with people who would come to the U.S.

KR: And how old were you and what was the year you started your journey?

LC: When I came at that age I was old. I was forty-six years old.

KR: Wow.

LC: I came in the year 1990 over here.

KR: And did you come with friends, family, or alone?

LC: Associates because the journey isn't with friends or people you know.

KR: Yes.

LC: During the trip, one makes friends and you join together and become companions for the moment and given the circumstances that one is facing.

KR: How long were you in Tijuana?

LC: I was there for eight days until we got everything together.

KR: And where did you stay at a hotel or someone's house?

LC: In a house. At the house of someone who knew to expect us. We were ten people there, comfortably. We ate because the contact that they gave us from Mexico was already there.

KR: And I know that you were on your journey to the United States but did you explore Tijuana a little or no?

LC: Of course, you go out to walk but always with caution because ...

KR: Yes.

LC: Over there, you can't do anything because the first thing our contact told us is, "Don't do anything. You can't do anything because you should do things quietly. If anyone asks you anything, tell them you are Mexican and tell them to stop f\*\*ing with and it's over."

KR: When the man told you not to do certain things, can you give me an example?

LC: Of course.

KR: What couldn't you do?

LC: I couldn't go to vice areas. I couldn't drink. I couldn't be out too late at night on the streets because they gave us a curfew until nine at night. You guys are supposed to come back and stay inside.

KR: And you were like this for eight days?

LC: We were like that. Sure, we went out to walk and everything. We were taken to see the *murrietas*, like the Mexicans say.

KR: How is Tijuana compared to Ambato?

LC: No, no, no. I already said Tijuana is madness. There is every type of vice and everything else. Ambato is a quiet city.

KR: Yes, and after Tijuana, how did your journey continue?

LC: They told me and everyone else that they would leave us in Los Angeles and that's it.

KR: And how much time were you there in Los Angeles?

LC: I wasn't there for more than eight hours because they quickly put me on a flight. They had already purchased the ticket.

KR: Oh.

LC: And I arrived on a domestic flight.

KR: And from Los Angeles, where did they take you? To which city or airport?

LC: To New York directly.

KR: To LaGuardia, I imagine?

LC: ¿Ah?

KR: To LaGuardia, the airport?

LC: No, no, no, I arrived at Kennedy.

KR: Oh, okay, okay. And when you arrived in New York, did you stay there for some time of what happened?

LC: No, from there, I had a contact. A friend of ours who was already living here. He came to see us because in Plainfield there were a lot of Ambateños. So since I was well known over there as a taxi driver, people knew me and stuff. So they helped me here. I got to the house of Mr...

Doña Gloria: Juan Tobar.

LC: Juan Tobar and his wife, Doña Monica. Very excellent people who always helped me and I am very grateful for the generous gesture they made. Not only to me but my wife and family when they came here to their house.

Doña Gloria: And for many people.

LC: Yes, but I'm talking about my experience.

Doña Gloria: Oh, yeah but ...

KR: No, it's fine.

LC: No, no, yes or no? [inaudible] I'm saying Juan Tobar was always a kind-hearted person. He still is. Because he also helped get me a job where he worked. We worked with carburetors at Columbia Produce in South Plainfield.

KR: Yes, and when you came to Plainfield, where did you live? As in do you remember the street?

LC: I'll tell you, no, I told you with Juan Tobar on Westervelt. Westervelt and Front.

KR: Okay. When you came to Plainfield, how was your experience in Plainfield? Did you feel more comfortable because there were many people from Ambato?

LC: No, no, no.

KR: Or what was your experience here?

LC: Every human being is affected you when you leave somewhere and to go another place. I was a very lively person in my country. I had many experiences, but over here it was a hard blow being all alone and just the things one goes through. However, I thank God for the support of my friends because there were friends who helped us. During the first week that I was here, they gave me food. During these times Juan Vicuña and his wife, who passed away, Doña Carmen Jordad. So they were part of the help as well. Days later, more people came around and helped me. We shared things and it was different. After three months it was different because I was starting to get along. I felt my anxieties that human beings feel when they find themselves far away.

KR: Yes.

LC: And more than that, I was here for two months and my father passed away and no one told me. No one in my family told me because they thought I would return to Ecuador. That also impacted me so much. Those are things that you feel in your soul.

KR: Yes, and I know how big a change it is from Ecuador to the United States. Let's say though, what was most difficult? Was it the language or any other thing?

LC: Of course, the language is the most difficult here. Also where I worked, there were many Hispanic people. That made things easier because if I didn't understand something, then you could call another person who speaks English and Spanish. They would translate what I needed

to know or what my foreman needed from me. However, little by little, one understands and learns.

KR: And when you came here in 1990, how was it? I know you worked but could you tell me which jobs you've had? Whichever job you can remember, what jobs have you had in the past?

LC: That I had here? Here in the United States?

KR: Yes, here in the United States.

LC: Over here, the first company I worked for was Columbia Produce. That job gave me my papers. In other words, the company gave me a work contract and my U.S. residency. From there, I followed all the procedures and after six years I got my residency. Then, I requested [visas for] my wife and youngest son since he was a minor.

KR: And after that job?

LC: I left there after ten years. I went to work at American Panel, a company that made prefabricated homes. I went to work at American Panel. I used to cut iron sheets for panels there. In other words, for floors, walls, roofs, and other things. I was there also for another ten years.

KR: Because I also noticed that you used to work not only as a driver but in construction as well.

LC: Of course, in Ecuador I worked.

KR: Oh, in Ecuador. I thought it was here.

LC: Over here in construction, of course, at American Panel. American Panel is construction work. We made prefabricated houses and buildings. I worked construction over here. I hung sheetrock, I would cut material, and load up the trucks. That is a construction company.

KR: And during the two jobs you were telling me about, in each one that was ten years, I know you said one has a lot of Hispanics but I'm not sure about the other one. Was it difficult any way being Hispanic, let's say, if a boss treated you in a bad way?

LC: Well, there has always been difficulty with us Hispanics amongst ourselves. This is because we always want to be more than the rest. It doesn't matter if we are Hispanic. Like "I have a year more here [than someone else], a year more over there." So then, those people who don't think about or don't understand other people's needs, they create many problems for you. So then there are arguments.

I used to have arguments when I worked at Columbia Produce with a man who was the supervisor, a Puerto Rican. He would feel like he was the owner of the company, and he told me, "You leave, Calvache. You have to leave," he'd say. "Punch your timecard and get out." I told him, "You are nobody." My foreman was called – his last name was Lee. "When my foreman comes and tells me to leave I'll punch my card and go. You are nothing," I'd say. So, when this happened, the Puerto Rican guy went to call the foreman and said "look." So they brought me a translator. During that time, I had been working there three years already. So, I explained to him why I was arguing with this man. So, I explained to my foreman and he told him (the supervisor who was in charge of my section), "He told him he wanted me to go." Through my translator he told me not to worry about it. So I asked him if he could give me a job directly under him without having to be on the list through the man who was my supervisor. So, he told me, "I'm going to give it to you," and since I worked for the company, in the electronic department, they gave it to me. He would say, "I need this, this and this done," and that week everything was complete and the problem with the man was over. These are things that happen in the workplace here with other Hispanics. Americans aren't as bad as the Hispanics are, sincerely speaking.

KR: Wow.

LC: No?

KR: Yes.

LC: That is the truth because the same happened to me at American Panel with a man with the last name of Cordova. He was also the manager of the department but felt like he was the owner. So he would tell me to punch my timecard and to get out. Just like that I told him to, "Clock me out and I'll go." And "what are you going to do?" he asked me. "Nothing. You aren't my boss," I told him. Then my boss came and told me, "You have to respect him." "Why don't you tell him to respect me? I am an older man than him and by age he should treat me in another manner." So that has happened to me in certain places.

Later on, I went to work in Flemington at 3M. When I left American Panel, my boss laid me off as I saw newer people with fewer years working. Was it because of my age? So, I asked him, "Are you discriminating against me?" "No," he said. This just happens, end of discussion. He told me to give him my information because the boss of American Panel speaks really good Spanish. He told me to give him my information, and I told him, "And for what?" I told him, "Ten years working here and you don't have my information? What an absurdity!" "Are you crazy? If you don't give it to me you'll never come back," he told me. "You will be without a job." I told him, "You know what? Do whatever you want." I left slamming the office door and I left. Later on, they called me when I was gathering my belongings since I had a locker where I

put my things at work, and he told me, “Calvache,” and I told him, “What happened?” I answered in Spanish, he is American but speaks Spanish very well.

KR: Okay.

LC: So, he told me, “No, give it to me. You're not working anymore?” “No, give me. . .” At that time you needed a paper indicating that you were out of work to go collect unemployment checks. I told him to, “Give me my paperwork, so I can go collect my unemployment.” They didn't have it at the time, so I came back two days later. He said, “Leave old man,” and I left. That wasn't a personal problem of mine; it's just things that happened. From there, I went to work at 3M in Flemington. My daughter and wife worked there, and seeing how I was without a job, they spoke to the office people to inquire about employment. The employment office, no?

Doña Gloria: Yes.

LC: So, they brought me an application, we applied and I went to work with them in Flemington.

KR: And talking about your wife and your daughter first of all, how did you guys meet and where?

LC: You want me to tell you about that? [laughter]

KR: Yes.

Doña Gloria: You need all of that?

LC: All these things happen in life.

KR: Because it's an interview about your life as well.

LC: Of course, that's fine.

KR: It's about the experience of your life here.

LC: Things are very easy.

KR: If you don't want to, it's okay.

LC: No, no.

KR: However you want.

LC: I have no reason to--I met my wife in Ambato. So, her family, since I . . . like I told you, I was a bit of a mess. I didn't have ... let's say, I actually didn't have something stable for myself at the time. So many times I would see her since she was young. For example, I am five years older than her. I met her and things worked out. One time, I told her, "What a pretty girl." And she responded something nasty. Then time passed. So, I left and said nothing else. I went back to Quito, and I returned with my commercial driver's license. I started working as a taxi driver. However, she had stayed in my mind, the woman who is today my wife. She was in my mind, and physically. Since I was working, I didn't see her for five years. One day, I was working, since I drove my taxi at night, I went to my room where I would go and rest. And I see the same woman and she says to me, "Come here, handsome," she tells me. The word was that she sold food at the market, chicken broth and tortillas. Since I hadn't eaten breakfast, I went to eat before sleeping. It was a surprise to see her. "Hey, what part of the chicken do you want?" "Any part," I tell her. I left such an impression on the lady that she almost cut her finger cutting the meat. So, the friendship started from there. I got up, since I was fresh out of the military and I got up. I knew first aid. Did you cut yourself around here?

Doña Gloria: No, it's over here.

LC: Even to this day, she still has it [the scar].

KR: Wow.

LC: I got up and I made a tourniquet with a piece of my sneakers. I even went to buy her some bandages at the pharmacy and I left. From there things were done and later on we talked and the friendship and trust started. After 5 months I was married. I saw her in October and in March I was married.

KR: Wow.

LC: Losing my freedom. [laughter] That's how my family started. That's how it is, my friend.

KR: How old were you when you were married and her?

LC: My wife was nineteen or twenty years old and I was twenty-four and a half. She is now sixty-nine years old and, look, in October, I will be seventy-four years old.

KR: And in Ambato you guys got married?

LC: Yes, we did, of course. That was where I made my home and from there I never moved. That's where everything was left.

KR: And what was her family's reaction?

LC: Well, they didn't like me.

KR: No?

LC: My mother in-law didn't like me. I went against all odds. They would tell me ... when they met me, she would say, since I was a taxi driver at that time. "But are you stupid or dumb? How are you going to get married? Don't you know they say taxi drivers are like this and that?" She would throw me out onto the street always.

KR: And what was your family's reaction to her?

LC: No, as I said, I only had my father. So, when I asked for her hand in marriage, I went with two friends. I went to ask for her hand in marriage for the woman who is my wife today. I didn't have family in Ambato at the time. The first condition that my father-in-law and mother-in-law gave me was that they wanted to meet my parents. So, that was when I told them I was an orphan since the age of seven years old and that I then lived with my father. They said okay, "To move things forward, you have to bring your father." That was Tuesday, Sunday. On Saturday, I went to Quito, and on Sunday, my father went back with me. I went and explained the situation to him. He did not want to accompany me. He said, "That's your life, you are a man now." So, that was that.

KR: So after, you left at fourteen years old, let's say.

LC: I went back to Quito.

KR: With him?

LC: No, with my father. I went back at nineteen years old to Quito. To the same house my father and I lived in. However, later on, for some time, I went to work at that company Pepsi-Cola. So, I became independent, but with what I earned during that time wasn't enough for everything. I went to live with a family member of mine--with an aunt in Chimbataj in Quito. It was closer because my father lived farther. So, during all that time, I stopped ... When I graduated as a professional driver, then it was an entirely new thing. With that job, I earned a little more money.

KR: And after you guys married, how many children did you have? Also can you tell me their names?

LC: Of course, we had 4 children. Rosa Fernanda Calvache, Maira Cecilia Calvache, Julio Venizio Calvache, and Luis Edison Calvache. They are four children. Out of those, my second daughter died, Maira Cecilia. I have one daughter and two sons. They live here in the United States. They are American citizens. They are independent in their homes and in their lives.

KR: And did you have them in Ambato too?

LC: Yes, they are all Ambateños.

KR: Yes, and while you raised them, were you still a taxi driver?

LC: Well, I already said I worked as a cab driver and truck driver.

KR: Of everything.

LC: Interprovincial driver, I worked for the Ambacar company, but always driving.

Doña Gloria: All his life.

KR: And now talking a little more about your life after Ecuador and here in the United States. I know when you said you came here, your father died. However, did you still have any family or was he the only one left?

LC: No, my father ... I had my brothers. I had my older brother, the second one. My other brother Carlos is still alive and my other brother Manuel.

KR: And do you still have contact with them since you've been here?

LC: I've always had contact, yes, always. They would send their greetings and everything over the phone, since things were complicated by letter.

KR: Okay, and now talking about the Hispanic population of Plainfield or of the United States, New Jersey, whatever you want to talk about, how was it when you came in 1990? How were the Hispanics here?

LC: Very few Hispanics, very few Hispanics. What there was was more people of color [African Americans]. One would be afraid to go out at night on the street alone. You had to go out in

groups of two, three if you wanted to walk outside. This is because people of color were very aggressive during that time.

KR: How were the people of Plainfield towards Hispanics or Ecuadorians, whichever?

LC: No towards Hispanics the people ... there were Peruvians who had businesses on Front street.

KR: Okay.

LC: There was a restaurant here ... to this day, they have a restaurant there on Park Avenue and on Fourth, another Hispanic has a super famous restaurant. Here there have been many Hispanic people who have helped us, such as Maritza, who has her store over there on Front Street also. By the produce of the Chinese store. Over there the lady Maritza has helped us. There was Carlos ... Carlos, Carlos. Well, there were many people before me. They were Ecuadorians who always worried about our wellbeing.

KR: Those Ecuadorian people who were here before you, do you know how they came here or when?

LC: No, no, during that time was very complicated. You know, Hispanics are very reserved. They think someone is going to take something from them or ask them for something. So, if I ask them a question like that they would say, "Why do you ask me that? Does my life interest you?" That's what Hispanics reply even to this day.

Doña Gloria: They don't like it.

LC: And being good friends and us knowing each other, we talk. However, life is very complicated.

KR: And living here in Plainfield, have you had a bad experience that you remember?

LC: No, no. I'm thankful to God because I have been very lucky. I have always taken care of myself and I still do to this day. I always respect things that I know so I don't fall [into trouble] because when I arrived you would see drug dealers. Just like now you see people selling drugs. So, it's better to keep quiet, not out of fear but out of common sense to avoid problems.

KR: So you weren't involved with things like that?

LC: No, no, no.

KR: Okay.

LC: Sometimes I would drink a bit--a "chumadita" sometimes. But in relation to big things like that, never in my life, no, no, no. I have never even had problems with the police. If they have given me a ticket, two tickets ... it'd be an overestimate. I have never been arrested.

KR: So now, on the contrary, do you have a good experience living here in Plainfield or ...

LC: No, of course. I always, I am very well known here. The people that know me are very friendly and everything. They respect me as a person. It's been twenty-eight years that I have lived here.

KR: Wow, a long time. Also, living here in Plainfield, where there is a good number of Ecuadorians, are there other cities in New Jersey such as Elizabeth ...

LC: Elizabeth, of course.

KR: Or Paterson where there are more Ecuadorians or North Plainfield? How come you have stayed here for so long? You never left?

LC: No, no, it's just that I had a friend who brought me here. And they were waiting for me, so to speak. I had three friends who were waiting for me. Mr. Cesar, Mr. Vicuña, Mr. Jose Enrique Awayo. So I had references and had somewhere to go to. So for my own security I came here and got to the house of Mr. Juan Tobar. Then we got in contact with many people from Ambato here. So everything has been peaceful and tranquil.

KR: And the last question, unless you have any experience, anything, you would like to share with me. But something I do want to ask, how has the Hispanic community changed since you came in 1990 compared to today?

LC: They are more united. You see many Central American people who are more united. You see Central Americans who are not restricted. The Ecuadorian continues to succeed in terms of a general sense. Like I said before, the first one who came here believed they were the owners of this city. We still are getting to know each other, knowing that we all are ...

Doña Gloria: Equals.

LC: All of us are equals and all of us have the same rights in this country. Nobody is less than anyone. Respect is the most important factor.

KR: I know that there has been a change because you said when you came here there weren't many Hispanics.

LC: There weren't any.

KR: But today there is more unity.

LC: Yes, of course.

KR: There are many Hispanics, but what has that change influenced, not only of the population but also in politics or business?

LC: In politics and in business, before there weren't any. When I came here to Plainfield there was a Macy's. Today, it is a market, El Supremo. There used to be a Macy's store. Apart from that, there weren't any Hispanic supermarkets here.

Doña Gloria: Twin City.

LC: Please! There weren't any Hispanic supermarkets here. For us to buy Hispanic foods, we would have to go to Elizabeth. Farther past Elizabeth, there was a Twin City. So when we'd get there, seeing other Hispanic people, they would ask us, "Where did you guys come from?" they'd tell us. "We live in Plainfield." And, "Where is that? Where is that located?" "Do you know North Plainfield?" North Plainfield was better known than Plainfield and South Plainfield. If you got lost near there, they would say "Where are you trying to go?" To North Plainfield or to Elizabeth." So, we would get more results. So we told people we lived in Plainfield. "You know North Plainfield?" I'd say. "Of course." I tell them "you cross Front Street and you're in Plainfield. You cross another and you are in North Plainfield." So, they did a survey and where today Twin City is, A&P used to be. So, then Twin City came here.

KR: Do you remember in what year?

LC: Like in '93 or '94, Twin City was here by then.

KR: And I imagine it was the first Hispanic supermarket.

LC: Yes, of course.

KR: In the city.

LC: Of course, because there were none of the fruit stands, not even anywhere to buy vegetables, nothing. We would have to go into Watchung, next to Kohls.

KR: Yes.

LC: Over there from Saturday and Sunday, they would sell vegetables and fruits. Like let's say banan ... Of course, we had other American markets, but honestly, they were more expensive, no? So we would go over there and shop and things were cheaper and more comfortable for us.

KR: Wow, okay. One more question I wanted to ask. I promise this is the last one.

LC: No, no continue.

KR: You said that Ecuadorians here from Plainfield are majority Ambateños. However, let's say, have you seen any differences because in the work that we are doing ...

LC: [Yes].

KR: We have noticed that the majority of people who go to a city in the United States, mostly come from one sole city. Let's use Ambateños as an example, they come to Plainfield.

LC: [Yes].

KR: However, have you noticed any difference with the Ambateños if you remember?

LC: [Yes].

KR: When you were in Ecuador and the Ambateños who were raised here in, let's say, your era.

LC: Well, the Ambateños who were raised here are different. They don't have as much charisma or love for people. Here, just like most Hispanics and as I repeat many Hispanics who've lived here for a while feel very ...

Doña Gloria: Big.

LC: No, like they have everything. So, you start to lose that sense of community, that friendliness. They don't want to respect others. So, the love from Ambateña people, if you have you ever gone to Ambato

KR: Yes, I have gone.

LC: They are sensational things.

KR: Yes.

LC: Because those people are very caring, very friendly, and very spontaneous. Here, you don't find that in the people that you meet. It isn't there.

KR: And since you have been here twenty-eight years, do you think about returning to live in Ecuador? Or do you want to retire here?

LC: So many things this young man asks me. [laughter] You hit me right in my heart. How many years I wished I could be in my country but to stay with my wife, and with my kids, I still live here. My companion has been my wife for many years. We have had fifty years of marriage.

KR: Wow.

LC: So that is what keeps me. If I leave, she will get ahead, but not with the same capacity because I am always taking care of her. She didn't learn to drive, which is one of the biggest problems in this country. You can catch a taxi and all that. But also the love for my children.

KC: Okay.

LC: The love I have for my grandchildren is another thing that has tied me here.

KR: Okay, if there is any other experience or something else you would like to share, I have no more questions.

LC: I don't have anything else. The experiences that have happened in our lives have been worth it. Since I came to this country, it calmed me down. It has not formed me, but it gave me discipline. Because in my country everything I had was discombobulated. I didn't care if I spent all my money. When I came to this country, I started to save, through my work, because I always worked. I always worked in my country, but I wasted so much money in Ecuador. When I came here I started to control myself, to save, thinking about my old age, thinking about everything I did in the past. So sincerely speaking here this country has given me a new vision because I had a complicated life over there.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

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