

Interview with Andora Myrie
Interviewer: Nyasha Warren
Interviewee(s): Andora Myrie
Year of Birth: 1916
Location of Interview: Panama
Language of Interview: English

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Andora Myrie. Ok, Mrs. Myrie I want to thank you for agreeing to participate with us in this project. Ahm, this will surely benefit the community now and in the future. The goal of the questionnaire is to produce a detailed and coherent narrative of your personal life story. We encourage you to say as much or as little as you want to. There is no question that is too long, there's no answer that's too long for us, that's for sure. We realize that you have signed a consent form. However, we want to let you know that you can feel free to let us know if any particular thing you have mentioned in the interview that you would like to keep out of, you know, this work that we're doing. Ahm as you know the work that we're doing will be for educational, exhibition, or presentation materials, you know and it will be based on your interviews as well as the other interviews we've done. So let's start with the first question.

Ok. To start, tell me a little bit about your place of birth and what was going on there as you were growing up. Where were you born?

MYRIE: I was born in Colon, Republic of Panama... In the year 1916...August the 30th.

INTERVIEWER: And how was life there as a kid? What do you remember?

MYRIE: It was good. Yes, my parents were from the island of Jamaica and came here and taught. I grew up in Colon about four, five years took my, came over to Panama and took my educational studies within the Republic of Panama under West Indian, ahm, teachers because in Panama it was more Spaniard in the Republic, mostly Spanish schools, very few English-speaking, you know, schools... One of those private teachers and I came up in... cause for too many years... Our parents were common workers. My father was a deckhand so he kind of catch ship through Panama. My mother... it was very distressful the parents of that day, because it was just 25 cents an hour for men. ...and two dollars a day for a woman...house work...which was... but I grew up here at the age of 18, I was homeschooled, was taught professionally dressmaking... I did a lot of charitable work at the time too.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. What kind of work did you do?

MYRIE: Hmm? Summer vacation, international girls scouts, mm-hmm, national vocation, that was something that the American government... Because all the children over there, were, their parents and grandparents, canal, the diggers and so on. So they were so much cooler 3 months vacation... I forgot now, international girl scouts...did eight to nine years

charitable work in the parish of Paraiso. With um Gamboa, Pedro Miguel. There wasn't much buses... but they had electric car that used to run from La Boca to Santa Ana Cathedral at five cents. You could always go and drive on that... Mmm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

MYRIE: Would be five cents.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, well, that's the tram car, eh?

MYRIE: The tram car, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about your childhood a little more. What were your fondest memories? Who were your friends?...

MYRIE: Who was my friends? Oh. Some of them gone home already. I can't even know. I was an Episcopalian... church member... you know?

INTERVIEWER: Ok. What did you play? What kind of games did you play as a young child?

MYRIE: Games? I was more on a... sewing, like that.

INTERVIEWER: From what age did you start sewing?

MYRIE: Sewing? From I was 18, 19.

INTERVIEWER: And before that, what did you do?

MYRIE: In school? After getting to the age of 18 you graduate at school... 8th grade... you either go to work... or something like that if they even... or allow it. They send you to the Republic Southern a little more, in the Republic.

INTERVIEWER: Where did your friends live?

MYRIE: In Paraiso, Paraiso,... but I grew up mostly in La Boca. I grew up more in La Boca... down the street, La Boca... My mother lived there for many, many years and...

INTERVIEWER: Of the friendships you had growing up in La Boca, how many have you maintained?

MYRIE:...Hall, Anna Moore is one, that is Taylor... most of them gone home. I'm a mother, of three boy children, three sons...

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. Ok, well now I'm going to ask you a little bit about your parents and grandparents and for that I will turn on the video camera, ok?

MYRIE: ...Grandchildren?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, well, no, grandparents and parents. Parents and grandparents. Anything you remember about them at all.

MYRIE: Ahm...

INTERVIEWER: Ok, Tell me about your parents and your grandparents, what were they like, where were they from and how did they come to Panama?

MYRIE: ...on a ship to Panama, of early age, while construction of the canal was going on.

INTERVIEWER: So where did they come from?

MYRIE: Jamaica.

INTERVIEWER: Where in Jamaica, do you know?

MYRIE: Well, St. Thomas.

INTERVIEWER: Both of your parents came from St. Thomas?

MYRIE: No, one from St. Thomas and one from Barbados.

INTERVIEWER: And one is from Barbados. Ok. And do you remember what year they came, do you know?

MYRIE: I think I was an early age, nine, ten years old.

INTERVIEWER: What did they do once they got to Panama?

MYRIE: ...there must have done schooling, because there wasn't much pay after that...was mostly Spanish and they lived in the *colegas*, you know, they live across canal motels and, and single city was the canal zone town, where lots of people were going to retire from the... some went to Paraiso, some went to Gamboa then you know, then you know start the second generation, but my children...

INTERVIEWER: Who were your parents and grandparents' friends?

MYRIE: Friends?...As I told you before, the most of them gone home.

INTERVIEWER: Were they people from Jamaica and Barbados?

MYRIE: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember people coming over to the house to visit?

MYRIE: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: What was that like? What kind of things would they talk about?

MYRIE: Well, the difference between the two countries, the life of living, the costumes, what took place, what they eat, and so on.

INTERVIEWER: Like what? Give me an example. Like what they eat. What did they say about that?

MYRIE: The Jamaicans they like ackee and saltfish. The Barbadian love coucou and fish.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. (Conversation in the background) Break it for now...Ahm

MYRIE: And the clothes was long those days... and with lot of lace and big, wide skirt-dresses.

INTERVIEWER: Was that both in Jamaica and Barbados?

MYRIE: Both of them. But the woman dress like they was impressing on behalf, now outdated... it was nicely attired.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Can I ask you another question?...What was school like? Who were your teachers? Do you remember any favorite teachers growing up? Were your teachers, I guess they were all English-speaking? Tell me a little bit about all that.

MYRIE: ... Stan...and John Thomas. English-speaking teachers. Thomas Lancival Jones.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about them, what was special about them?

MYRIE: English. They was from the West Indies.

INTERVIEWER: And what, how would you characterize them? Describe them to me.

MYRIE: Like, very good, very true, very forward, upright, teach you about honesty, etc.

INTERVIEWER: Give me an anecdote, do you have any anecdotes from their classes? Something that may have happened, that you always remember?

MYRIE: Mmhmm, in my own life is...a son drowned in Gamboa at the age of ten years, ten months and thirteen days in Gamboa. Because there was no pool for colored children, just only the white school had pool but the colored children had the pool on the school ground. That is one thing I did always remember.

INTERVIEWER: Hmm...wow.

MYRIE: His name was Guillermo... Myrie....

INTERVIEWER: Wow. And that was at the school? Outside of the school?

MYRIE: Outside the school.

INTERVIEWER: At the lake?

MYRIE: Yeah. And that was because if the school had, the colored schools had no pool.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, I'm not filming anymore for now, gonna leave that off... Ok. How would you classify yourself in terms of identity, meaning cultural identity, ethnic identity, national identity. How would you...?

MYRIE: Medium.

INTERVIEWER: Medium between what, do you think you are between a combination of different identities?

MYRIE: Mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Which identities would those be?

MYRIE: I try to be honest, cheerful, loyal.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. And what about your cultural background? What would you say is your cultural, ahm, background?

MYRIE: Cultural background is a girl scout. Promise to do your best at all times.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. And what country would you identify most as your country? The country that you are from?

MYRIE: Panama.

INTERVIEWER: Mm- hmm. How do you feel your West Indian background, ahm... How does that form a part of your life?

MYRIE: Very good...Very good.

INTERVIEWER: Mm hmm. How? What are the things you do that are very specifically West Indian and different from many other things in Panama?

MYRIE: Well,... loyal, loyalty, honesty, you know? Kind, gentle, helpful, cheerful...

INTERVIEWER: Tell me, what kind of cultural behaviors do you associate with being West Indian? If someone says, oh a West Indians is like this, what would you say that would be?

MYRIE: Loyalty, truthful, just, honest, helpful,... that's what we were taught.

INTERVIEWER: Taught by whom?

MYRIE: By our parents... And then we grew up with it.

INTERVIEWER: And teachers also?

MYRIE: And teachers...

INTERVIEWER: What role do you think the church religion plays in West Indian life in Panama?

MYRIE: I am an Episcopalian...In the old days, you know we have...the Episcopal faith was in Panama and was also in this canal zone. Those other canal zone was white bishop, you know, American bishop, and then it change over into a Panamanian bishop.

INTERVIEWER: Hmm...Yeah...ok.

MYRIE: Our first Panamanian bishop was *Langdon Eaves Shirley*. Shirley was our first Panamanian bishop.

INTERVIEWER: Of the Episcopal Church?

MYRIE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: I'm going to ask you to tell me a little bit more about your family. You started telling me before, but let me see if you can tell me more again. Are you married?

MYRIE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Who is your husband?

MYRIE: My husband, I was married at 25, 26 years old, 1943.

INTERVIEWER: Who were you married to, what was his name?

MYRIE: Vivian Myrie.

INTERVIEWER: Is he alive today?

MYRIE: Yes...our life together for forty-eight years and ten months.

INTERVIEWER: How did you meet your husband?

MYRIE: Well, he came from Jamaica, come here, and then we met right here. And got married at... had three children.

INTERVIEWER: And where exactly did you meet your husband in Panama? What were you doing? Did you meet him in church?

MYRIE: Yeah, church. We both go church.

INTERVIEWER: What about your children? How many children did you have with Mr. Myrie?

MYRIE: Three. Three boys.

INTERVIEWER: What can you tell me about them?

MYRIE: ... Three boys. One deceased and the other two have three children each in the United States.

INTERVIEWER: But they visit you, no?

MYRIE: Yes. His youngest son...

INTERVIEWER: Ok. What was their childhood like? Where did your sons grow up and what neighborhood did they grow up in, kind of thing?

MYRIE: The Canal zone...

INTERVIEWER: Where in the Canal zone?

MYRIE: ... Red Tank, Paraiso, Pedro Miguel, you know?

INTERVIEWER: And how was their school education different from yours?

MYRIE: Very good. They get two languages there, I only get one.

INTERVIEWER: Mm. Where did they go to school to get two languages?

MYRIE: Canal Zone in English and Panama Spanish.

INTERVIEWER: So first they went in English and then in Spanish?

MYRIE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What school did they go to in English, and what school did they go to in Spanish?

MYRIE: One in English, Canal zone from first to eight, Paraiso and other high school they have in Canal zone... graduate.

INTERVIEWER: So for high school, they went in Spanish. Do you remember what school they went to?

MYRIE: No, Spanish school was trade, Spanish school was trade...

INTERVIEWER: Do all of your children speak English and Spanish?

MYRIE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And do their grandchildren speak English and Spanish?

MYRIE: No, the grandchildren born in America, my grandchildren born in America. Those that born here grow up near the Spanish, but mostly the Americans English huh. They leave here very small.

INTERVIEWER: Now, for the next question I am going to turn back on the tape recorder. Have you ever heard of a lady called Louise Bennett? She's a Jamaican poet. What do you know about her?

MYRIE: I don't know anything about her other than on radio, et cetera. I only hear about her.

INTERVIEWER: But you heard her on the radio?

MYRIE: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: What did you hear her doing? What did she do on the radio?

MYRIE: ... giving jokes in the morning.

INTERVIEWER: You remember any jokes?

MYRIE: Mm-hmm

INTERVIEWER: What jokes do you remember? Do you remember any specific jokes?

MYRIE: A lot of it in broken language, in English huh? But it was very amusing in the mornings to listen to her. I enjoyed it.

INTERVIEWER: What do they call Louise Bennett in Panama?

MYRIE: The same thing. Mm- hmm.

INTERVIEWER: And have you heard of the Mighty Sparrow?

MYRIE: Sparrow, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. What do you know about him? What...

MYRIE: Singing and dancing.

INTERVIEWER: Do you like his music?

MYRIE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What about, why do you like his music?

MYRIE: Because I was young and in that line. [Laughs] I was young...

INTERVIEWER: What kind of music did he sing when you were young?

MYRIE: I can't even remember any of the early song what I like. I don't remember any of his songs right now. Definitely. Don't remember any.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. I'll stop the video for now. Ok, what is your view of Reggaeton music? The Spanish reggae you hear today on the radio.

MYRIE: Spanish. Spanish. Right now we're playing more Spanish programs than English, anything else,... the Spanish right now.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm, do you like the Spanish reggae?

MYRIE: Mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you like it?

MYRIE: Well, the activities, nuh? The dancing and the music... and the singing and the reggae and the music, you know, Spanish music.

INTERVIEWER: You know the reggaeton, specifically, the one they talk about now a lot?

MYRIE: Who?

INTERVIEWER: Reggaeton. Have you heard of that one?

MYRIE: No.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, ok. Almost done.

MYRIE: There is just maybe one or two weeks ago, a Panamanian reggae, reggae, about two weeks ago, they buried him, he got shot...

INTERVIEWER: Dangerman, no? Yeah... What did you hear about that when that happened?

MYRIE: Mm... I don't hear nothing about what caused it or nothing. He was very good.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you say that?

MYRIE: His music. The dancing et cetera you know. The entertainment was very good. Because it have sit down, and siddung... and enjoy the singing and the dancing.

INTERVIEWER: Did you, did you have conversations about him with other people?...Yeah a lot of people were very shocked.

MYRIE: What comes over the TV and so on, because I haven't really read any, any, any papers or anything...

INTERVIEWER: I have another question here. What kind of music did you grow up hearing then? Was it different from the music you hear now?

MYRIE: Music was music, not just the noise. Now it is noise. Now it is just noise...and you know, you don't hear any music but any notes. You know? They not worried about the notes, they just making a lot of noise, that's what it is now.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of your favorite singers back in the day when you were growing up?

MYRIE: When I was growing up? I hated funerals... of Panamanian origin?

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Which ones? You remember?

MYRIE: Payne, Payne as ambassador.

INTERVIEWER: What did he sing?

MYRIE: Music, classic, waltz and so on you know.

INTERVIEWER: Payne and Ambassador. Anybody else?

MYRIE: Don't know anybody else right now but we had a few

INTERVIEWER: What kind of music did the others sing?

MYRIE: Waltz, love song, you know...

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the lyrics of any of the songs you like?

MYRIE: Mmhmm. Yes. You want to me to sing now?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MYRIE: "You're a sweetheart if there ever were one, if ever were one it's you, life without you, is a drink of..., you are every... come true"

INTERVIEWER: Thank you, thank you. You remember who sang that? Who sang that one?

MYRIE: Huh?

INTERVIEWER: That's nice, that's beautiful. One of the love songs, right?

MYRIE: [Laughs] Yes. That was my favorite.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember, what was the name of that song?

MYRIE: "You are a sweetheart, if there ever was one, if there ever was one, it's you. A life without you would be incomplete dreams"...you know.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, and what kind of music do you listen to now?

MYRIE: Reggae, reggae, because that's all they...now is reggae. English and Spanish, same you know...

INTERVIEWER: True. That's all that that's on the radio. That's all that's on the radio right? Very true. Now, you know songs have very nice words, and you just gave some from your favorite. Are there any favorite sayings that you have, either sayings that you heard from your mother or that you said to your children or something like that?

MYRIE: Mmmhmm. My favorite word is be good, try to be good, do the best you when you can, honesty is the best policy, you know, honesty is the best policy, do unto others as you would like them to do onto you, that's...be honest. If you can't be, good, if you can't be perfect, be good, when they go through the door. You know, if you can't be perfect be good. You want more?

INTERVIEWER: If you have more.

MYRIE: [Laughs] You have to test...

INTERVIEWER: If you can't be perfect be good.

MYRIE: Right, try your best. Do good. Don't be bad. You don't, everybody isn't perfect but be good... Because you know good from bad.

INTERVIEWER: Now I am going to ask about foods. What do you like to eat?

MYRIE: I like to eat everything.

INTERVIEWER: Like what?

MYRIE: Everything. I eat chiney. Everything. I like soup. I likes a good soup. I like rice and peas, rice and peas and coconut and chicken, curry chicken.

INTERVIEWER: Do you make curry chicken?

MYRIE: Mm-Hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah? Hmm, what do you put in your soup.

MYRIE: *Pecho*, what we call ribs, you know? Pigtail, peach, yam, yuca, coco, you know, and a lot of vegetables, carrots, chochos, you know things like that, lot of vegetables and peas. And I like soup. I like cowfoot soup, and stew with rice, there's a English deep dishes, I don't like too much rice and spaghetti – those are Italians. We grow up on yam, yucca, coco.

INTERVIEWER: Do you refer to that as food, also?

MYRIE: Mmm?

INTERVIEWER: Do you refer to that as food?

MYRIE: Mmm. Eat that a lot.

INTERVIEWER: Ground food.

MYRIE: Love giving my grandchildren lot of food, ground food.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

MYRIE: When my grandchildren coming from States, the States they ask for *nayga* food. They don't want no spaghetti and...fi eat and French fry. No. they want ground food, *nayga* food. Hmm. That's my grandchildren or children...

INTERVIEWER: Well, now we're almost done. I just want to ask you do you have any message that you want to communicate to the younger children of the future?

MYRIE: Younger children of the future, do the best they can, be honest at all times, be honest at all times, think before you leap, and do the best they can at all times.

INTERVIEWER: Mmm. Ok. Now, I'm just going to get some demographic information. You told me that your year of birth was 19-

MYRIE: 16.

INTERVIEWER: And your last grade of school that you completed?

MYRIE: Eight

INTERVIEWER: Eighth grade. And what is your profession or job?

MYRIE: Well, when I started work, a cashier.

INTERVIEWER: You are retired?

MYRIE: No, not when I retired.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, so when you finished work what were you doing?

MYRIE: After I got married, I don't work no more. Just care children.

INTERVIEWER: Housewife, yeah. Housekeeper. Homemaker. You lived in Panama all this time right, you never moved to the States?

MYRIE: No, I visit the States but I never live in the States. No time. Three months and you know come home. Cause my parents are still here. So, I just have to go and come.

INTERVIEWER: Now, is there any other information you want to include that we have not yet included? Any other stories or anecdotes you would like to share with us then?

MYRIE: I have two granddaughters, four granddaughters and two grandsons, two graduated and are home right now, graduate one from Howard University, and one from Temple, four graduate, two granddaughters... that is from my eldest son...and they got married and everything so they are on their own.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent, excellent. Well...

MYRIE: And one grandson is in the military, one grandson is in the military like that.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you then if there isn't any other thing you'd like to add then I just want to thank you for participating in our interview.

MYRIE: ... because for my age I though I wouldn't remember a lot of things.

INTERVIEWER: But you did very good. Anna recommended you to us and were are very glad that I made it over.

MYRIE: My husband deceased 16 years, now, next week. We lived for forty eight years and ten months.

INTERVIEWER: What did your husband do? What did he work as?

MYRIE: Corazal Hospital.

INTERVIEWER: What did he do at the Corazal hospital?

MYRIE: An attendant.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MYRIE: William H. Myrie.

INTERVIEWER: Corazal Hospital.

MYRIE: He was always...and he was also a...he was always at the Credit Union, Paraiso Credit...

INTERVIEWER: Paraiso Credit Union?

MYRIE: ... he was a... Foundation member of credit union.

INTERVIEWER: So he was a foundation member of the Paraiso Credit Union?

MYRIE: Balboa.

INTERVIEWER: Balboa.

MYRIE: Because you know that was the first one that came out? Then after, the others came after.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. Ok. Well, thank you, I would like to take a photograph if you don't mind.

MYRIE: Of this old lady.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Of course!

MYRIE: I guess you get a lot. I don't know if Anna give you, as much as I give you.

INTERVIEWER: Both of you gave me just about a good amount actually. So let's see, a picture of, one. You want to take another one looking over here? Very nice. Very nice. I'll show it to you. There you go. You look very good.

MYRIE: Yes. [Calls out to Juan] Juan, Come and look at me!

JUAN: Let me put my glasses on.

MYRIE: You younger than me and you worse than me!

JUAN : You see good without your glasses? You look nice.

ANDORA MYRIE: God is very good to me.

JUAN: You look very good, very graceful there. You did a good interview... That's good... Well, years to come, someday somehow, they will see you on TV.

MYRIE: Grand and great grand.

INTERVIEWER: That's right. PowerPoint. For all of us. Actually we're doing, one activity we are going to do with students from Episcopal San Cristobal, where they are actually going to do some interviews for us so that they are also a part of this, you know, process of getting...

MYRIE: Yes. You met Anna, ahm, Anna, what is here name now. She was taught before she got married.

JUAN: You mean this girl mother, the big fat girl what go to...Pastor Rachel church mother...she have ninety-odd, she older than you-

INTERVIEWER: Who is she? What's her name?

JUAN: You know who I talking. Yes, she call you the other day. The big fat girl mother, not here mother, an old lady what...

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INTERVIEWER: Ok. Andora Myrie. Ok, Mrs. Myrie I want to thank you for agreeing to participate with us in this project. Ahm, this will surely benefit the community now and in the future. The goal of the questionnaire is to produce a detailed and coherent narrative of your personal life story. Hm? We encourage you to say as much or as little as you want to. There is no question that is too long, there's no answer that's too long for us, that's for sure. We realize that you have signed a consent form; however, we want to let you know that you can feel free to let us know if there is any particular thing that you have mentioned in the interview that you would like to keep out of, you know, of this work that we're doing. Ahm as you know the work that we're doing will be for educational, exhibition, or presentation materials, you know and it will be based on your interviews as well as the rest of the interviews we've done. So let's start with the first question.

Ok. To start, tell me a little bit about your place of birth and what was going on there as you were growing up. Where were you born?

MYRIE: I was born in Colon, Republic of Panama.

INTERVIEWER: Mhmm. And the year?

MYRIE: In the year 1916, August the 30th.

INTERVIEWER: And how was life there as a kid? What do you remember?

MYRIE: It was good. Yes, my parents were from the island of Jamaica and came here and taught. I grew up in Colon about four, four, five years, took my, came over to Panama and took my educational studies within the Republic of Panama under West Indian, ahm, teachers because in Panama it was more Spaniard in the Republic, mostly Spanish schools, very few English-speaking, you know, schools. One of those private teachers and I came up in, ...cause for too many years. Our parents were common workers. My father was a deckhand so he kind of catch ship through Panama. My mother, ... it was very distressful the parents of that day, because it was just 25 cents an hour for men and, and two dollars a day for a woman, house work, general, which was, but I grew up here at the age of 18, I was homeschooled, was taught uh professionally dressmaking. I did a lot of charitable work at the time too.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. What kind of work did you do?

MYRIE: Hmm? Summer vacation, international girl scouts, mm-hmm, national vocation, that was something that the government, the American government did too. Because all the children over there, were, their parents and grandparents, canal, the diggers and so on. So they were so much *cooler* 3 months vacation. I forgot now, but ... international girl scouts...did eight to nine years charitable work in the parish of Paraiso. With um Gamboa, Pedro Miguel.

INTERVIEWER: And,

MYRIE: There wasn't much buses at the time, but they had electric car, electric car that used to run from La Boca to Santa Ana Cathedral at five cents. You could always go and drive on that. Mmm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Mmhmm. Ok.

MYRIE: Would be five cents.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, well, that's the tram car, eh?

MYRIE: The tram car, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about your childhood a little bit more. What were your fondest memories? Who were your friends? Um

MYRIE: Who was my friends? Oh. Some of them gone home already. I can't even know. I was an Episcopalian, don't know, church member, you know?

INTERVIEWER: Ok. And what did you play? What kind of games did you play as a young child?

MYRIE: Games? I was more on a *hard*, sewing, like that.

INTERVIEWER: From what age did you start sewing?

MYRIE: Sewing? From I was 18, 19.

INTERVIEWER: And before that, what did you do?

MYRIE: In school?

INTERVIEWER: Mmhmm, mmhmm

MYRIE: After getting to the age of um 18 you graduate at school, they put me into 8th grade, you either go to work or a *work* trade, or something like that if they even, allow it. They send you to the Republic Southern a little more, in the Republic.

INTERVIEWER: Where did your friends live?

MYRIE: In Paraiso, Paraiso, Para, ... Paraiso, Boca, but I grew up mostly in La Boca. I grew up more in La Boca... down the street, La Boca... My mother lived there for many, many years and that ...

INTERVIEWER: Um, Of the friendships you had growing up in La Boca, how many have you maintained?

MYRIE: ...Hall, Anna Moore is one, that is Taylor *Rose*, but um, most of them gone home.

INTERVIEWER: Mmhmm. Ok.

MYRIE: *Look, Mira*, I'm a mother, of three boy children, three sons,

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. Ok, well now I'm going to ask you a little bit about your parents and grandparents and for that I will turn on the video camera, ok?

MYRIE: Ask about my Grandchildren?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, well, no, grandparents and parents. Parents and grandparents. Anything you remember about them at all.

MYRIE: Ahm,

INTERVIEWER: Ok, Tell me about your parents and your grandparents, what were they like, where were they from and how did they come to Panama?

MYRIE: They came on a ship to Panama, of early age, while construction of the canal was going on.

INTERVIEWER: So where did they come from?

MYRIE: Jamaica.

INTERVIEWER: Where in Jamaica, do you know?

MYRIE: Mmhmm. Well, St. Thomas.

INTERVIEWER: Both of your parents came from St. Thomas?

MYRIE: No, one from St. Thomas and one from Barbados.

INTERVIEWER: And one is from Barbados. Ok. And what do you remember, what year they came, do you know?

MYRIE: I think I was an early age, nine, ten years old.

INTERVIEWER: What did they do once they got to Panama?

MYRIE: Well there must have done schooling, because there wasn't much pay after that time, was mostly Spanish and they lived in the *colegas*, you know, um, they live across canal motels and, and Silver city was the canal zone town, where lots of people were going to retire from the canal, some went to Paraiso, some went to Gamboa then you know, there, then you know start the second generation, but my children came,

INTERVIEWER: Who were your parents and grandparents' friends?

MYRIE: Friends? As I told you before, the most of them gone home.

INTERVIEWER: Were they people from Jamaica and Barbados?

MYRIE: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember people coming over to the house to visit?

MYRIE: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: What was that like? What kind of things would they talk about?

MYRIE: Well, the difference between the two countries, the life, of living, the costumes, what took place over there, what they eat, and so on.

INTERVIEWER: Like what? Give me an example. Like what they eat. What did they say about that?

MYRIE: The Jamaicans they like ackee and codfish. The Barbadian love coucou and fish.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. (Conversation in the background) Break it for now... Ahm

MYRIE: And the clothes was long those days, the costumes and with lot of lace and big, wide skirt-dresses.

INTERVIEWER: Was that both in Jamaica and Barbados?

MYRIE: Both of them. But the woman dress like they was impressing on behalf, now outdated, it was nicely attired.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Can I ask you another question?

MYRIE: Mmhmm.

INTERVIEWER: What was school like? Who were your teachers? Um, Do you remember any favorite teachers growing up? Were your teachers, I guess they were all English-speaking? Tell me a little bit about all that.

MYRIE: Stan, Stan... and John Thomas. English-speaking teachers. Thomas Lancival Jones.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about them, what was special about them?

MYRIE: English. They was from the West Indies.

INTERVIEWER: And, and, what, how would you characterize them? Describe them to me.

MYRIE: Like, very good, very true, very forward, upright, teach you about honesty, etc.

INTERVIEWER: Ahm, give me an anecdote, do you have any anecdotes from their classes? Something hat may have happened, that you always remember?

MYRIE: Mmhmm, in my own life is about one, a, a son drowned in Gamboa at the age of ten years, ten months and thirteen days in Gamboa. Because there was no pool for colored children, just only the white school had pool but the colored children had the pool on the school ground. That is one thing I did always remember.

INTERVIEWER: Hmm. Wow.

MYRIE: His name was Guillermo *Aperna*

INTERVIEWER: Wow. And that was at the school? Outside of the school?

MYRIE: Outside the school. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: At the lake? Hmm. Wow.

MYRIE: Yeah. And that was because if the school had, the colored schools had no pool.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, I'm not filming anymore for now, gonna leave that off. Here. Uh. Ok. How would you classify yourself in terms of identity, meaning cultural identity, ethnic identity, national identity. How would you?

MYRIE: Medium.

INTERVIEWER: Medium between what, what do you think you are between a combination of different identities?

MYRIE: Mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Which identities would those be?

MYRIE: I try to be honest, cheerful, loyal.

INTERVIEWER: Mmhmm. And what about your cultural background? What would you say is your cultural, ahm, background?

MYRIE: Cultural background is a girl scout. Promise to do your best at all times.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. And what, what country would you identify most as your country? The country that you are from?

MYRIE: Panama.

INTERVIEWER: Mm- hmm. Mmhmm. How do you feel your West Indian background, ahm,

MYRIE: Very good.

INTERVIEWER: How does that form a part of your life?

MYRIE: Very good.

INTERVIEWER: Mm hmm. How? How? What are the things you do that are very specifically West Indian and different from many other things in Panama?

MYRIE: Well, honesty, loyal, loyalty, honesty, you know? Kind, gentle, helpful, cheerful.

INTERVIEWER: Mmhmm. Tell me, what kind of cultural behaviors do you associate with being West Indian? If someone says, oh a West Indians is like this, what would you say that would be?

MYRIE: ... Loyalty, truthful, just, honest, helpful, all those things would be, that's what we were taught.

INTERVIEWER: Taught by whom?

MYRIE: By our parents and grown ups, And then we grew up with it.

INTERVIEWER: And teachers also?

MYRIE: And teachers.

INTERVIEWER: What role do you think the church religion plays in West Indian life in Panama?

MYRIE: I am an Episcopalian...In the old days, you know we have...the Episcopal faith was in Panama and was also in this canal zone. Those other canal zone was white bishop, you know, American bishop, and then it change over into a Panamanian bishop.

INTERVIEWER: Mmm. Yeah. Ok.

MYRIE: Our first Panamanian bishop was *Langdon Eaves Shirley*. Shirley was our first Panamanian bishop.

INTERVIEWER: Of the Episcopal Church?

MYRIE: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I'm going to ask you to tell me a little bit more about your family. You started telling me a little bit before, but let me see if you can tell me more again. Are you married?

MYRIE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Who is your husband?

MYRIE: My, my , my husband, I was married at 25, 26 years old, 1943.

INTERVIEWER: Who were you married to, what was his name?

MYRIE: Vivian Myrie.

INTERVIEWER: Is he alive today?

MYRIE: Yes, our life together for forty-eight years and ten months.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. How did you meet your husband?

MYRIE: Well, he come from Jamaica, come here, and then we met right here. And got married at...Episcopal... had three children.

INTERVIEWER: And uh, where, where exactly did you meet your husband in Panama? What were you doing? Did you meet him in church?

MYRIE: Yeah, church. We both go church.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Ok. What about your children? How many children did you have with Mr. Myrie?

MYRIE: Three. Three boys.

INTERVIEWER: What can you tell me about them?

MYRIE: ...Three boys. One deceased and the other two have three children each in the United States.

INTERVIEWER: But they visit you, no?

MYRIE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: [Laughs]

MYRIE: His youngest son... his youngest son.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. What was their childhood like? Where did your, your sons grow up and what neighborhood did they grow up in, kind of thing?

MYRIE: The Canal zone. Mmmhmm.

INTERVIEWER: Where in the Canal zone?

MYRIE: ...Red Tank, Paraiso, Pedro Miguel, you know?

INTERVIEWER: And how was their school education different from yours?

MYRIE: Very, very good. They get two languages there, I only get one.

INTERVIEWER: Mm. Where did they go to school to get two languages?

MYRIE: Canal Zone in English and Panama Spanish.

INTERVIEWER: So first they went in English and then in Spanish?

MYRIE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What school did they go to in English, and what school did they go to in Spanish?

MYRIE: One in English, Canal zone from first to eight, Paraiso and other high school they have in Canal zone, how graduate.

INTERVIEWER: So for high school, they went in Spanish. Do you remember what school they went to?

MYRIE: No, Spanish school was trade, trade. Spanish school was trade... Panama... trade.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Do all of your children speak English and Spanish?

MYRIE: Mmmhmm. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And do their grandchildren speak English and Spanish?

MYRIE: No, the grandchildren are born in America, my grandchildren born in America. Those that born here grow up near the Spanish, but uh mostly the Americans English huh. ... They leave here very small.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Um, Now, for the next question I am going to turn back on the tape recorder. Have you ever heard of a lady called Louise Bennett? She's a Jamaican poet.

MYRIE: Mmhmm.

INTERVIEWER: What do you know about her?

MYRIE: I don't know anything about her other than on radio, et cetera. I only hear about her.

INTERVIEWER: But you heard her on the radio?

MYRIE: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: What did you hear her doing? What did she do on the radio?

MYRIE: She was giving jokes in the morning.

INTERVIEWER: You remember any jokes?

MYRIE: Mm-hmm

INTERVIEWER: What jokes do you remember?

MYRIE: Hm?

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember any specific jokes?

MYRIE: A lot of it in broken language, in English no? But it was very amusing in the mornings to listen to her. I enjoyed it.

INTERVIEWER: What do they call Louise Bennett in Panama?

MYRIE: The same thing.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah?

MYRIE: Mm- hmm.

INTERVIEWER: And have you heard of the Mighty Sparrow?

MYRIE: Sparrow, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. What do you know about him? What -

MYRIE: Singing and dancing.

INTERVIEWER: Do you like his music?

MYRIE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What about, why do you like his music?

MYRIE: Because I was young and in that line. [Laughs] I was young, to like that,

INTERVIEWER: What kind of music did he sing when you were young?

MYRIE: I can't even remember any of the early song what of I like. I don't remember any of his songs right now. Definitely. Don't remember any.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. I'll stop the video for now. Ok, what is your view of Reggaeton music? The Spanish reggae you hear today on the radio.

MYRIE: Spanish. Spanish. Right now we're playing more Spanish programs than English, anything else, I listen to the Spanish right now.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm, do you like the Spanish reggae?

MYRIE: Mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah? Why do you like it?

MYRIE: Well, the activities, no? The dancing and the music and the dressing and the singing and the reggae and the music, you know, Spanish music.

INTERVIEWER: You know, you know the reggaeton, specifically, the one they talk about now a lot?

MYRIE: Who?

INTERVIEWER: Reggaeton. Have you heard of that one?

MYRIE: No.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, ok. Ok. Almost done.

MYRIE: There is just maybe one or two weeks ago, a Panamanian um, reggae, reggae, about two weeks ago, they buried him, he, he got shot -

INTERVIEWER: Dangerman, no? Yeah. What did you hear about that when that happened?

MYRIE: Mm. I don't hear, I don't hear nothing about what caused it or nothing. He was very good.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you say that?

MYRIE: His music. The dancing et cetera you know.

INTERVIEWER: Mmhmm.

MYRIE: The entertainment was very good. Because it have sit down, and sit down, and enjoy the singing and the dancing.

INTERVIEWER: Did you, did you have conversations about him with other people? When you know. Yeah a lot of people were very shocked.

MYRIE: What comes over the TV and so on, because I haven't really read any, any, any papers or anything, just listen to the radio ...

INTERVIEWER: Um, Ok. I have another question here. What kind of music did you grow up hearing then? Was it, was it different from the music you hear now?

MYRIE: Music was music, not just the noise. Now it is noise. Now it is just noise and base drum, and you know, you don't hear any music but any notes. You know?

VOICE FROM AWAY, POSSIBLY INTERVIEWER: You're right.

MYRIE: They not worried about the notes, they just making a lot of noise, but that's what it is now.

INTERVIEWER: [Laughs] What were some of your favorite singers back in the day when you were growing up?

MYRIE: When I was growing up? I hated funerals... of Panamanian origin?

INTERVIEWER: Mmhmm. Yes. Which ones? You remember?

MYRIE: Payne, Payne, Payne as ambassador.

INTERVIEWER: What did he sing?

MYRIE: Music, classic, waltz and so on you know.

INTERVIEWER: Payne and Ambassador.

MYRIE: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Anybody else?

MYRIE: Don't know anybody what else right now but we had a few.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of music did the others sing?

MYRIE: Waltz, love song, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Any, Do you remember the lyrics of any of the songs you like?

MYRIE: Mmhmm. Yes. You want to me to sing now?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MYRIE: “You’re a sweetheart if there ever were one, if there ever were one it’s you, life without you, is a drink of..., you are every... dream come true”

INTERVIEWER: Thank you, thank you. You remember who sang that? Who sang that one?

MYRIE: Huh?

INTERVIEWER: That’s nice, that’s beautiful. One of the love songs, right?

MYRIE: [Laughs] Yes. That was my favorite.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember, what was the name of that song?

MYRIE: “You are a sweetheart, if there ever was one, if there ever was one, it’s you. A life without you would be incomplete dreams” You know.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, and what kind of music do you listen to now?

MYRIE: Reggae, reggae, because that’s all they have now is reggae. English and Spanish, same you know.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. That’s true. That’s all that that’s on the radio. That’s all that’s on the radio right?

MYRIE: [Laughs]

INTERVIEWER: Very true. Now, you know songs have very nice words, and you just gave some from your favorite. Are there any favorite sayings that you have, either sayings that you heard from your mother or that you said to your children or something like that? Remember?

MYRIE: Mmmhmm. My favorite word is be good, try to be good, do the best you when you can. Honesty is the best policy, you know, honesty is the best policy, do unto others as you would like them to do onto you, that’s the perfect thing to do is be honest. If you can’t be, good, if you can’t be perfect, be good, when they go through the door. You know, if you can’t be perfect be good. Try. You want more?

INTERVIEWER: If you have more. Sure. Yeah. Yeah.

MYRIE: [Laughs] You have to test *things like that*.

INTERVIEWER: If you can't be perfect be good.

MYRIE: Right, try your best. Do good. Don't be bad, bad. You don't, everybody isn't perfect but be good. Because you know good from bad.

INTERVIEWER: Now I am going to ask about foods. What foods do you like to eat?

MYRIE: I like to eat everything.

INTERVIEWER: Like what?

MYRIE: Everything. I eat chiney. Everything. I like soup. I likes a good soup. I like rice and peas, and rice and peas and coconut and chicken, curry chicken.

INTERVIEWER: Mhm. Do you make curry chicken?

MYRIE: Mm-Hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah? Hmm, what do you put in your soup?

MYRIE: *Pecho*, what we call ribs, you know? Pigtail, peach, yam, yuca, coco, you know, and a lot of vegetables, carrots, and chochos, you know things like that, lots of vegetables and peas. And I like soup. I like cowfoot soup, and stew with rice, there's a English deep dishes, I don't like too much rice

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

MYRIE: and spaghetti. Those are Italians. We grow up on yam, yucca, coco.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Yeah. Do you refer to that as food, also?

MYRIE: Mmm?

INTERVIEWER: Do you refer to that as food?

MYRIE: Mmm. Eat that a lot.

INTERVIEWER: Ground food.

MYRIE: Love giving my grandchildren lot of food, ground food.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

MYRIE: When my grandchildren coming from the States, the States they ask for *nayga* food. They don't want no spaghetti and...fi eat and French fry. No. they want ground food, *nayga* food. Hmm. That's my grandchildren or granchildren want that.

INTERVIEWER: Well, now we're almost done. I just want to ask you um do you have any message that you want to communicate to the younger children of the future?

MYRIE: Younger children of the future, do the best they can, be honest at all times, be honest at all times, think before you leap, and do the best they can at all times.

INTERVIEWER: Mmm. Ok. Um, Now, I'm just going to get some demographic information. You told me that your year of birth was 19-

MYRIE: 16.

INTERVIEWER: And your last grade of school that you completed?

MYRIE: Eight

INTERVIEWER: Eighth grade. And what is your profession or job?

MYRIE: Well, when I started work, a cashier.

INTERVIEWER: Yep. You are retired?

MYRIE: No, not when I retired.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, so when you, when you finished work what were you doing?

MYRIE: After I got married, I don't work no more. Just care children.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. Housewife, yeah. Housekeeper. Homemaker. You lived in Panama all this time right, you never moved to the States?

MYRIE: No, no, I visited, I visit the States but I never live in the States. No time. Three months and you know come home. Cause my parents are still here. So, I just have to go and come.

INTERVIEWER: Now, is there any other information you want to include that we have not yet included? Any other stories or anecdotes you would like to share with us then?

MYRIE: I have two granddaughters, four granddaughters and two grandsons, two graduated and are home right now, graduate, graduate one from Howard University, and one from Temple, four graduate, two granddaughters, and that there, that is from my eldest son...and they got married and everything so they are on their own.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent, excellent. Well that --

MYRIE: And one grandson is in the military, one grandson is in the military like that.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you then if there, if there isn't any other thing you'd like to add then I just want to thank you for participating in our interview.

MYRIE: ... because for my age I thought I wouldn't remember a lot of things.

INTERVIEWER: But you did very good. Anna recommended us, you to us and we are very glad that I made it over.

MYRIE: Yeah. My husband deceased 16 years, now, next week. We lived for forty eight years and ten months.

INTERVIEWER: What did your husband do? What did he work as?

MYRIE: Corazal Hospital.

INTERVIEWER: What did he do at the Corazal hospital?

MYRIE: An attendant.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MYRIE: William H. Myrie.

INTERVIEWER: Corazal Hospital.

MYRIE: He was always...and he was also a...he was always at the Credit Union, Paraiso Credit um.

INTERVIEWER: Paraiso Credit Union?

MYRIE: Yeah. Back then, he was a, um, Foundation member of credit union. ...

INTERVIEWER: So he was a foundation member of the Paraiso Credit Union?

MYRIE: Balboa.

INTERVIEWER: Balboa.

MYRIE: Because you know that was the first one that came out? Then after, the others came after.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. Ok. Well, thank you, I would like to take a photograph if you don't mind.

MYRIE: Of this old lady.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Of course!

MYRIE: I guess, I guess you get a lot. I don't know if Anna give you, as much as I give you.

INTERVIEWER: Both of you gave me just about a good amount actually. [Laughs] So let's see, a picture of, one. [Camera noise] You want to take another one looking over here? At me? [Camera noise] Very nice. Very nice. I'll show it to you. There you go.

MYRIE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You look very good.

MYRIE: Yes. [Calls out to Juan] Juan, Come and look at me!

JUAN: Let me put my glasses on.

MYRIE: You younger than me and you worse than me!

JUAN : You see good without your glasses? You look nice.

ANDORA MYRIE: God is very good to me.

JUAN: You look very good, very graceful there... You did a good interview... That's good, That's good ... Well, years to come, someday somehow, they will see you on TV.

MYRIE: Grand and great grand.

INTERVIEWER: That's right. PowerPoint. For all of us. Actually we're doing, one activity we are going to do with students from Episcopal San Cristobal, where they are actually going to do some interviews for us, mmhmm, so that they are also a part of this, you know, process of getting... helping people...

MYRIE: Yes. You met Anna, ahm, Anna, Anna, Anna, what is here name now. She was taught before she got married.

JUAN: You mean this girl mother, the big fat girl what go to... Pastor Rachel church mother....she have ninety-odd, she older than you ...

INTERVIEWER: Who is she? What's her name?

JUAN: You know who I talking. Yes, she call you the other day. The big fat girl mother, not here mother, an old lady what...

