

Interview with Elouise Roberts

**INTERVIEWER:**

Interviewee(s): Elouise Roberts, Unknown Speaker

Year of Birth:

Location of Interview: Panama

Language of Interview: English, Spanish

Date of Interview: October 15, 2008

**INTERVIEWER:** Elouise Roberts, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008. (speaks Spanish)

**ROBERTS:** Spanish?

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah or you prefer in English? I can do either one, or we can do a little bit of both, if you...

**ROBERTS:** Okay.

**INTERVIEWER:** (laughs) I'll just start the introduction in Spanish, and then, we'll continue. (speaks Spanish). Now, let's, we'll go ahead and start with the first question.

**ROBERTS:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Perfect. Now, I'll start with the first question. Okay, tell me about your place of birth and what was going on there while you were growing up. Where were you born?

**ROBERTS:** I was born in, what's it called—Marañón, in English my grandmother said it's what you called it. (speaks Spanish)

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay at home. So, you had a partera your mother had a partera.

**ROBERTS:** Yes, Ms. Iris. Actually still alive when I grow up.

**INTERVIEWER:** What else do you remember about Ms. Iris?

**ROBERTS:** She was a sharp lady come from Jamaica, and she was a midwife, and she was like, like, not, she wasn't work in a house because you know she was a midwife for, what she, she came from Jamaica with the, the, schooling and so forth, and she was midwife since, you know, anybody that call her, she was there to deliver.

**INTERVIEWER:** Were there many midwives around when you were growing up? Do you know of many women

**ROBERTS:** Yes, yes, but know them personal, I don't, but I know this one person. I grow up, and when I had my first child, and I know I took her to her for her to see her. So, you must know all that was, she die after.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. How was your childhood? What would be some of your most precious memories from your childhood?

**ROBERTS:** I, I don't really, I can't remember them. Them was rough. Some was easy, some wasn't easy because I was living, my mother and my father separate, and I was living with my mother's mother, and I went to live with my father's mother, and that was the way it was, but it was okay. It was okay.

**INTERVIEWER:** All right, and who were your best friends and where were, who were your best friends, and where were their parents from? Were they West Indian? Were they Panamanians, Spanish?

**ROBERTS:** Two, two, my best friend was Nama Padmore, Jeri Yearwood, but she raised in Colon and I used to take ... her and I never much friends in Panama.

**INTERVIEWER:** So More and Jeri, that's who you mentioned. Are you still in touch with them?

**ROBERTS:** Well, Nama died oh forty years ago. I, sometime I kept in touch with her daughter, when she live in Miami, Martis. And Jeri's in Colon. Those when I was coming up, but I have some friends now also. I have Michelle German, she lives in 19<sup>th</sup> Street Labo, I have Myrna, she live in, by Moran. I don't have much friends.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, tell me about your parents and your grandparents. Where were they from and how did they get to Panama? So, first of all, where was your father from?

**ROBERTS:** Barbados.

**INTERVIEWER:** And your mother?

**ROBERTS:** Panamanian.

**INTERVIEWER:** And where was your father's father from, your paternal grandfather from? And the grandmother as well?

**ROBERTS:** Right.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. And your mother's family? Was your mother's mother from Panama also, or—

**ROBERTS:** It's from, no my mother mother come from Jamaica.

**INTERVIEWER:** And how about your mother's father?

**ROBERTS:** Barbados.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. How did they come to Panama? How did they, how did your parents

**ROBERTS:** They came through the when they were building in the canal.

**INTERVIEWER:** What did they do at the canal?

**ROBERTS:** I know them was working. I don't know if them was carrying water or they was, you know, but they came in that time.

**INTERVIEWER:** I'm gonna ask you a little bit of more specific about the professions. What profession, what profession did your father have? What did he work in?

**ROBERTS:** He was a cook.

**INTERVIEWER:** And your mother?

**ROBERTS:** Well she, she, she was a dressmaker and plus she was a domestic worker. When she not sewing, she was washing or ironing for someone.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you learn dressmaking from her or no?

**ROBERTS:** No, I learn it from my second daughter.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay.

**ROBERTS:** Cause I still got the machine that she buy all so many years ago... Six...years.

**INTERVIEWER:** What about your grandparents? Do you know the profession of your father's parents? Your grandfather and grandmother from your father's side?

**ROBERTS:** Well, he came to—

**INTERVIEWER:** The canal? And your father's mother?

**ROBERTS:** I think she was a maid.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what about your mother's side? What did your mother's father

**ROBERTS:** Same thing with the one come from Jamaica, one from Barbados.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, canal worker and maid?

**ROBERTS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Who were your, who were the friends of your parents and grandparents, and do you remember visiting them or them visiting you at your home, and what do you remember

them doing, eating, drinking, or talking about during those visits? Let's say when your parents had their friends over, what, what did they talk about a lot?

**ROBERTS:** Well, you see they already had like close friends, my grandfather used to drink plenty and he used to go and play dominos. My grandmother stay home when she not working in the quarters, you know like in home like... she get along with the neighbors. So, I don't know about any close friends.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. Well, with the neighbors, what did she do with the neighbors? Did they ever get along? Hang out?

**ROBERTS:** Some and some don't. My grandmother never done anything, she's so good.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now, let's talk about school. How was school? Who were your teachers? Where were they from? And what things do you remember about school time?

**ROBERTS:** My first grade teacher was a lady named Carmentina Aralla, in Venezuela. And my English teacher was named Ms.—, I can never remember her first name, or her last name, but I remember her first name was teacher Miss something, and we was wanting to know what after the Miss, and she said that's what, she didn't come from Jamaica, so I can't remember her last name. I remember that she had an accent...

**INTERVIEWER:** So, you used to call your teacher Miss and then her name, okay.

**ROBERTS:** No, her name, that was her name, but I can't remember her last name, and we were used to wanting to know why, and she said well that's what her parents name her. Like Paulina, Miss!

**INTERVIEWER:** Now what about, what was the racial background of your classmates and your teachers? Were your classmates West Indian, Panamanian, Latin, and what about your teachers?

**ROBERTS:** It was, I only remember one teacher Carmentina Aralla, she was very, very nice. That was in Venezuelan school, and it was mixed because, you know, we were going to learn Spanish while they were going...I said no we're going to get lice in our head. (laughs) So, when you go to sometimes school 7 in the morning `til 12, and then, you're going from 1 to 4. When you go 7 in the morning, come home 12, then wash your hair, dry it (laughs) and get back up, and when you come home for, gotta to wash it again. So, that is, that is, but my school, they was all right. I had some friend in school, I can't remember her first name. Was it Da—? her last name was Mingo, you know, we used to go school together, you know.

**INTERVIEWER:** What else would you do together? Would you play games together?

**ROBERTS:** Sometimes we play *Gap*, and then we play ball, and we play jumping, you know, what these children right now doesn't do, you make a circle.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, what was your favorite music when you were growing up? Like what were your favorite singers? What kinda songs did you like?

**ROBERTS:** One was Calypso and one was Menoly...I used to like, with Panama, plenty Calypso ... and then, I used to like the Sparrow, and then I start music, I used to like The Platters and, and definitely girls know that one that named in Midtown. The Supremes, you know and Sam Cooke. And I uh, he was good.

**INTERVIEWER:** Hmm hmm. Salso, salso.

**ROBERTS:** Spanish it was salsa. (laughs) Spanish it was more, and DeSanto and you know...it was. Everything...Mora, then we had, we had on Armando Busa, you know, and then we had Boa.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you remember any of their songs? Can you, do you wanna sing a small part of one of those songs that you used to like to listen to?

**ROBERTS:** I hardly can't remember it, but I know...it was calypso, it had a couple of one, can't remember the words of it. The one it was *Demtri*, and then there was one that I was...really remember all the songs we singing back then.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now what music do you listen to today? Are they the same as before or are there new songs that you like today and the music that's playing?

**ROBERTS:** Well, I like my old and good because all the old...I have, I put them in DVD. So, I play them, and I mostly am sung them, or sometimes I play nothing but church music.

**INTERVIEWER:** It's a good thing this guy was able to transfer the cassettes to DVDs.

**ROBERTS:** Yeah, you're right, yes and also they're long, longer. I have all...I have all of them oldies but goodies, Let it Be Me and you know, I have all of them in there. Sometime I play them, you know, get tired of watching TV. Don't give nothing, I put `em in, and I play them, you know. I used to like one of them, the thing I remember singing Me and Mrs. Jones. I play that.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you like to eat and what are your favorite foods?

**ROBERTS:** No, I don't eat much anymore cause of high cholesterol but I like fish, white rice. I like spaghetti, meatballs, and I like soup but with everything in it... jams, all the works and dumplings, dumplings in the soup.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you like to cook as well?

**ROBERTS:** I like to cook. I like to bake. I like to iron. I don't like to wash, but most of all, I love to bake. I bake anything you bring, any foods whether it's mango, whether it's papaya, whether it's any fruit. So, with any food, I love to make eat.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, could you share with us one of your recipes for one of the things you bake and how would you make one of your favorite pies or cakes that you bake?

**ROBERTS:** Well, I, which one of the cakes?

**INTERVIEWER:** You pick, which is your favorite?

**ROBERTS:** I can't, I can't.

**INTERVIEWER:** Let's say how would you make the chocolate, that one?

**ROBERTS:** You bake it regular, and you know, you take the sauce off when you beat it, but my favorite is either carrot or chocolate.

**INTERVIEWER:** How do you make those?

**ROBERTS:** The chocolate, you get, you buy the chocolate. You don't buy it in a box, I never buy it in a box. You buy the chocolate, and Hershey's chocolate, and you put like two pieces, like take a quarter cup of, you take one, one cup and a third of flour, one cup and a third full, you put one, one and a half teaspoon of baking powder, one and a half teaspoon of baking soda, you put a cup and three fourth sugar in it, but the baking powder and soda, you sieve it, and you and then, you put the, the sugar, you put a cup of solid rice that don't carry, a cup of solid rice and two eggs. Then you mix the flour and everything together, not that this one like the recipe, no. You mix all of them together, and then, you have, you put on your water to warm, make it hot. You need a cup of water and a cup of milk. And then, you throw it in, and then you throw in the egg one by one, and you use a good eye. And then, you beat it up, add a good sip of vanilla and then, you beat everything. This is not, this chocolate cake is not the kind that you know, you have to make the butter and the sugar melt. No, this you mix everything together, and you throw in some milk, throw in the solid rice, you break the egg and you beat it, throw in the water, and you throw in the rest of milk, and you beat it until it gets soft, and you bake it for 35 minutes. You grease the pan you throw it in. You can use two loaf pans, bake it one hour.

**INTERVIEWER:** Thanks. All right, now what are your favorite sayings and where did you hear them or learn them for the first time? These are sayings that maybe your mother or your grandmother used to say to you, or sayings that you said to your children.

**ROBERTS:** I said this to my grandmother and she...

**UNKNOWN SPEAKER:** Give her an hour and a half, an hour and a half....

**ROBERTS:** "I tell you not to do that." They don't want to hear you. I'll tell you...I cuss him. "And if you run from me, well, I'm gonna beat you. And I have to run you down, you'll get triple." Me grandmother has some mark on her foot and the next big one has some mark, is still believing this.

**INTERVIEWER:** Wow. All right. Okay. Another question about music. Have you ever heard about Louise Bennett, have you ever heard that name before?

**ROBERTS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** What do you know about her? What, what comes to mind when you hear her name? Have you ever seen her perform?

**ROBERTS:** No.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what do you remember

**ROBERTS:** I hear about her.

**INTERVIEWER:** Here in Panama?

**ROBERTS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, who did you hear talking about her? Was it like your mother, or family, or friends?

**ROBERTS:** A friend of mine...Got a great voice.

**INTERVIEWER:** And have you heard about the Mighty Sparrow?

**ROBERTS:** I have him, I have all of him.

**INTERVIEWER:** Tell me more about it. Have you seen him perform?

**ROBERTS:** Oh yes, when he used to come to Panama. Oh I see him perform in...down by the bridge where the Burger King is right now, we had a stage, and we had seen him, and any time he comes, we right there. I like his songs. So, I have them much, I have them in DVD, I mean, video. Yes, I've have it in video. I like his songs, every one of them. So, I can't tell you which it was, I like every one of them.

**INTERVIEWER:** What, what lyrics do you, can you share with me maybe one of the lyrics from a song that you like? You were telling me about the Mighty Sparrow.

**ROBERTS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you remember any, I know you like all of his songs, all of phrases, but are there any particular lyrics or is it a particular song that stands out you wanna share with us?

**ROBERTS:** No, everything. It didn't matter what—It don't make a difference.

**INTERVIEWER:** A lot of people say that one (laughs). Now, what religion are you, and if you're a Christian, what particular denomination?

**ROBERTS:** I am a revivalist, spiritual revival. I was ordained as a reverend three, four, five, five years ago.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what would you say is the main role of religion in your life? You were ordained as a reverend.

**ROBERTS:** Mm-hmm.

**INTERVIEWER:** Are you still practice or what, what would be your main role now?

**ROBERTS:** Go and pray, go to the, the, the what do you call it? The home (speaks Spanish) and then, we have charity givers to do side of you and when we need the papers and the soup and all of that, that our charity givers to help us give to the poor, you know (speaks Spanish) go to, and first we go out and pray, and if you need help, we try and yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now what would you say is the favorite part of the church service for you?

**ROBERTS:** I don't have no special part, but preach if you have to, sing, and you give encouraging word.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, you like everything

**ROBERTS:** Yes, it's a party.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you practice sports when you were a kid? If so, which sports?

**ROBERTS:** Ball, baseball.

**INTERVIEWER:** How long did you do that? From what age to what age, play ball?

**ROBERTS:** Couple of years, I'd say about from about 8 to 9.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now, do you, do you watch baseball on TV nowadays? Do you still enjoy watching a game?

**ROBERTS:** Yes, my team losing, the Dodgers. They lose already. So—

**INTERVIEWER:** You said you played baseball 8 to 9 years totally, for 8, for 8 to 9 years, right?

**ROBERTS:** Mm-hmm.

**INTERVIEWER:** How old were you when you started playing?



**ROBERTS:** I was about 8.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, so you played at age 8.

**ROBERTS:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Not for eight years. Did you have any contact with American culture during your youth, and what do you remember about that, any aspect of American culture?

**ROBERTS:** I don't understand.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you have any c-, any contact with things that came from the United States, music, foods, I don't know, products, you know, American products that were maybe sold in Panama, things like that

**ROBERTS:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** When you were growing up? Like what? What would be something you found?

**ROBERTS:** Vitamins, Centrum.

**INTERVIEWER:** Remember, you mentioned a lot of the music, a lot of the music you heard was from the United States?

**ROBERTS:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Anything else like that?

**ROBERTS:** Not that I remember.

**INTERVIEWER:** The food you ate, were any of them American?

**ROBERTS:** It's pretty near the same thing as Panama, chicken, pork chop, but their fish is different from our own, and catfish, them catfish different than my own, you know, but I tried and, you know.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you grow up eating potato salad?

**ROBERTS:** We didn't have eat it in Panama.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, that's American.

**ROBERTS:** Yes. Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** That's truly American.

**ROBERTS:** Potato salad.

**INTERVIEWER:** (laughs)

**ROBERTS:** I thought it came from my granny.

**INTERVIEWER:** I know, everybody thinks that. You go to Jamaica, everybody eats potato salad. (laughs) That's what I thought, too, but then, amazing trend, yeah.

**ROBERTS:** And the coleslaw, that comes from over there too?

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah.

**ROBERTS:** I love it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Both of those made, Jamaican products? Yeah, that's American.

**ROBERTS:** Okay.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now, tell me about your view of your West Indian ancestry. How do you think of your West Indian background?

**ROBERTS:** I think it's very, very good. It's just that there aren't anybody to know a thing as all the old people die off, they don't have anybody to really teach you about it, but if you get to really know about it, it is something wonderful, you know, to know about your background, your ancient background, where your mother comes from, where your father, your grandparents, where you're from. But they don't have anybody here at; they have a group name AnciAfricanum, right? All of `em sit around, and eats, and drink, and, but I don't see them teaching you anything. Nothing. So, if there were only people to really teach, you know, you know, because I grow up, well, I, it's Panama at the same time, but I can't tell you anything about my father, my grandmother, my great-grandmother, I don't know anything, and unless I may read something cause I don't know.

**INTERVIEWER:** What would be the first word that comes to mind when someone says West Indian? If you could think of one word that comes to mind, as soon as someone says West Indian, what would that be?

**ROBERTS:** Black. No, what? Black. Black.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now what qualities, cultural behaviors, or other things do you associate with being West Indian? What are those key characteristics of West Indian?

**ROBERTS:** What kind of character?

**INTERVIEWER:** Cultural behaviors, things that we tend to do that it be typically West Indian, can't be anyone else.

**ROBERTS:** Nothing even come to mind.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, well, I might come back to that one. We'll think about that one. Do you think people in Panama have ever treated you different based on your race or based on being West Indian?

**ROBERTS:** Oh yes, them treat you different.

**INTERVIEWER:** How?

**ROBERTS:** Very different.

**INTERVIEWER:** Have you had any particular experiences where people have called you trumble or other things

**ROBERTS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Can you tell us a little bit about it?

**ROBERTS:** Because if you in a group or you're going someplace, you know, an—, and there is Panama—, well, them white then, cause not all of them is Panamanian, and you in the front, they would like to get to the front, and them say, "Trumble!" (speaks Spanish) You know what I mean?

**INTERVIEWER:** Does this happen still today or did this happen before?

**ROBERTS:** It's still happening today. I know they're trying to be better when that amount of learning but it's still happening today.

**INTERVIEWER:** Have you ever lived outside of Panama? Like for more than six months? Have you ever lived in the US or in some other country?

**ROBERTS:** No. I visit there, the United States, but I never live, I live in Colon for about a year.

**INTERVIEWER:** How has knowing or not knowing English affected you whether positively or English, you know English, so how has that affected you, either positively or negatively?

**ROBERTS:** It, it never affect me negative, never did, cause I grow up knowing English, went English school before I decide to go to a Spanish school cause of the...So, the hardest was learning Spanish.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now, are you married, I know, yes. My question is how did you meet your husband?

**ROBERTS:** Mister Robert, that's your grandchild, so I'm not gonna say nothing. Your wife is there?

**UNKNOWN SPEAKER:** I don't know.

**ROBERTS:** I meet you in a bar, that's what you said when I went to call my Nano. Huh? No, we was living up a tree, where about, we um, I knew him, I knew his first wife, we were friends, and she didn't have any children. So, I had seven, and she used to call me up say, "Elouise send my f-ing children downstairs to me." You know, and then, he knew her from Colon so, when I, when he hear that she was there and went up there looking for her, and she, he asked her to marry then on that day, and she tell him, "Yes, and marry me and my seven children," and he said, "Seven children?" She said, "Yes, go in there and come here and show you," (laughs) In Nigeria, and he said, "How about, you have seven children?" She said, "Yes, them is my seven children," and he really had loved my children and her, he married her with these seven children, and I told him I was gonna plan the move, and afterward, she moved me near to her on 15<sup>th</sup> street with her children, and when we was up there, and she ran in to set everybody... September, I didn't have time to going anywhere, she called, "Send my f-ing children to me," and I would call her with her neighbor, and we say, "Elouise, put on the phone, look down the hill," her mother and all the rest of her family, and then, woman coming up the steps with me. So, when they came here, I lived, I didn't even know she was living here, but they knew, and then, she died '94, no? She died '94, and then he asked me to marry him. I said, "Not me, I don't have time for you," and then he was, and... Not me, not me. And I came here, and then he said, "You're not married" And I said no, and he picked up the phone, and suddenly, I hear her mother on the phone. "Why not marry Mr. Robert? Mr. Robert is a good man. Mr. Robert does take care of us." So, I didn't know that his wife had all of them phone number. And then I yell to my big daughter, and I yell to Juanita, am I... and so, that's why I married.

**INTERVIEWER:** Quite a story.

**ROBERTS:** And up 'til now, him never do nothing wrong.

**INTERVIEWER:** What a model.

**ROBERTS:** Him don't do things wrong, and if them call him, "Elouise..." This one used to be when she used to come after him, "Him never do nothing wrong," I always the wrong one. And so, I married him, and I tell him, "You want to marry me, you have to stop drink rum," and he must've really loved me because he stop drink the rum (laughs), and until now... and this is his nephew that came up to live in Panama. I thank God you know because he don't have to, first of all, but he did, so actually he comes, if he going toward Debella, he going all the time, he believed his own culture, you know, he taking so he can go more places so, I thank God for him, you know, because he could come Panama and that's his only uncle, and he don't look, he don't have other aunt, and he don't really looking for the aunt, and he look for his uncle. So, as that is not a coincidence, it's what God wants, you know.

**INTERVIEWER:** Tell me about your children. How many children do you have and just tell me a little bit about what they do and what their lives are

**ROBERTS:** Well, Eleanor well, have picture, she live in the Unites States over on the...she have three children, a twin and a girl, and she works in a bank. And one of the girl work in a store, the other one retired as a master sergeant I think from the army, and the guy is not in here. But that one is of her mother left here in `96, and she told Juanita the United States, the United States and she have three and her three there. And Anora..., she went over think in '86 and she had five, and she live in Warner Robbins, Georgia, and she's there with her kids, and then, Toni, which is number four, she works by Target as a supervisor, she has three kids, two boy and a girl, one of the boys is in North Carolina, one is in New York, and the girl live in New York also, and then I have Laureta, she live in Rich—, not Port Virginia, she have three also, and I think one is still in the army as a nurse, the guy live in Mia-, southern Miami, and the other one was in the marines, she moved, and then, I have Donita, she lives in North—, Richmond, Virginia, and she, she's a supervisor and her and her daughter live in Alabama, yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** All right. Now do they consider themselves—

**ROBERTS:** Oh and Jimmy, he works in radio continental...yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh so he's in Panama.

**ROBERTS:** Yeah, he will be 62.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do your children consider themselves Panamanian, West Indian, American, or all three things?

**ROBERTS:** Panamanian.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do they all speak English?

**ROBERTS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** And grandchildren, do they all speak English?

**ROBERTS:** Well, the grandchildren, most speak Spanish, I speak to them in English though.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, they understand English?

**ROBERTS:** Oh yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Why do you think it is that your children speak English and grandchildren speak Spanish, and have you ever talked to them about their language choices and so forth?

**ROBERTS:** Because it's that they went to Spanish schools. None of them ever go to English schools, but I speak in English, you know, and then they try reading it and learning it. So, that's why.

**INTERVIEWER:** I know you said you have family that lives in the United States, let's see if we can go through—

**ROBERTS:** My children.

**INTERVIEWER:** All your, all your children except Jimmy?

**ROBERTS:** That's right.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, when they visit Panama, do you think other Panamanians also see them as Panamanian, or do they look at them as if they're more American?

**ROBERTS:** I really don't know about that...when her mother comes, she's from church, or a seminar right because she's different from the rest. When the rest comes, them in, any baby not seen mother, so, but they, they, they are family. When them comes, you may know, well not "I didn't see you last year," or, "You didn't come last year," or like that, but them, them don't talk down their nose, and them...

**INTERVIEWER:** Now, you told me you visited some places in the, outside of Panama?

**ROBERTS:** Bocas Del Toro.

**INTERVIEWER:** Well, mainly in Panama. How about outside of Panama? Have you visited the US or Costa Rica.

**ROBERTS:** Yes I used to go every year. Yes, I visit Costa Rica. That's a beautiful city.

**INTERVIEWER:** Where else?

**ROBERTS:** Beside Costa Rica?

**INTERVIEWER:** Where in Costa Rica did you go?

**ROBERTS:** I, in the city.

**INTERVIEWER:** San Jose?

**ROBERTS:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** How was your experience in the US and in Costa Rica, in general, but also, how was your experience in terms of what you felt people knew about Panamanians or West Indian Panamanians? Did you feel people knew about Panama when you went to the US?

**ROBERTS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** And did they know about West Indians?

**ROBERTS:** Most of all they know about the canal. They know about the canal. Some people don't even know that you really have people living here. They only think it's about the canal, you know? You tell them, "I live in Panama." "By the canal?" "No, I don't live in the canal." "I thought it was only a canal."

**INTERVIEWER:** How about Costa Rica? Was that the same experience as far as what they know about Panama?

**ROBERTS:** No, because Costa Rica is near. So, you know, from there we go over and them come over. So, them know that this is a city where people live and not only the canal with water.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now, we're almost done. Is there a specific message you would like to communicate to the younger generations, younger West Indians or younger Panamanians in general?

**ROBERTS:** What I would like to tell them is stop the violence in Panama. So much killing, and try to live in peace, and, you know, look to the *mana* for both, you know, cause if you have a peace of mind, you know, and try to understand, you know, you need to understand me for me to understand you. And I would like very much for the younger group that's coming up, you know, to live in peace and try to understand each and every one, even the older people, try to understand them. Maybe this would be able to be a better world.

**INTERVIEWER:** Are you part of any particular group or community organization, and what role do you play in them?

**ROBERTS:** I, well, that's a group. That group is not in the church, that group's outside the church.

**INTERVIEWER:** What is the name of the group again?

**ROBERTS:** Traveling for a group of Jesus, I'll give you a card. I'll give you this.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what do you do with this group?

**ROBERTS:** Just like that, we go and pray. Like today, we're going and pray, and *Maryna* will teach the service and I give the word.

**INTERVIEWER:** You go to the...right?

**ROBERTS:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Or you go to other places too?

**ROBERTS:** Yeah, we go to all the...and if you know of a sick and need prayer, you call us, and we maybe all nine don't go. There's about four of us would go and pray. If you can't clean your place, and we can, we go and we clean it. We don't charge to do any work that God tell us to do.

**INTERVIEWER:** Is there anything else that we have no included or we have not asked you that you would like to add to the interview?

**ROBERTS:** No.

**INTERVIEWER:** No? Well, then we're done. I'm just gonna thank you again for participating and feel free to contact us if you have any questions or if there's anything in your interview you'd like to change, take out, or add (laughs). Well, we are finished. So, thank you again Mrs. Roberts.





Interview with Eloise Roberts

INTERVIEWER:

Interviewee(s): Eloise Roberts, Unknown Speaker

Year of Birth:

Location of Interview: Panama

Language of Interview: English, Spanish

Date of Interview: October 15, 2008

**INTERVIEWER:** Eloise Roberts, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Eh voy a hacer la entrevista en español ¿eh?

**ROBERTS:** Spanish?

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah or you prefer in English? I can do it either one, or we can do a little bit of both, if you...

**ROBERTS:** Okay.

**INTERVIEWER:** (laughs) I'll just start the introduction in Spanish, and then, we'll continue. (speaks Spanish). Now, let's, we'll go ahead and start with the first question.

**INTERVIEWER:** Muchas gracias por haber aceptado participar en este proyecto ciertamente beneficiara a la comunidad ahora y en el futuro. El propósito de este cuestionario es producir una narrativa de su historia lo más detallada y coherente posible. En vista de esto le animo a sentirse libre de preocupación por proveer una respuesta muy minuciosas. Eso es lo que queremos, o sea que puede hablar tanto quiera. Tengo presente que ya firmo el formulario de consentimiento la vez pasada que estuvimos aquí pero también quiero que sepa que puede sentirse en libertad de decirnos si hay algunas cosas que menciona que le gustaría mantener fuera de los materiales educativos y expositivos que estamos creando en base a la entrevista.

**ROBERTS:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Perfect. Now, I'll start with the first question. Okay, tell me about your place of birth and what was going on there while you were growing up. Where were you born?

**ROBERTS:** I was born in Wachicali—Marañón, in English my grandmother said Wachicali, calle 12 de octubre casa 2328, eh. (speaks English)

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay at home. So, you had a partera your mother had a partera.

**ROBERTS:** Yes, Ms. Iris. Actually she was still alive when I grow up.

**INTERVIEWER:** What else do you remember about Ms. Iris?



**ROBERTS:** She was a sharp lady come from Jamaica, and she was a midwife, and she was like, like, not she wasn't work in a house because you know she was a midwife for, what she, she came from Jamaica with the, the, schooling and so forth, and she was a midwife since, you know, anybody that call her, she was there to deliver.

**INTERVIEWER:** Were there many midwives around when you were growing up? Do you know of many women?

**ROBERTS:** Yes, yes, but know them personal, I don't, but I know this one person. Because I grow up, and when I had my first child, I took her to her for her to see him So, she must know how he was, she die after that.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. How was your childhood? What would be some of your most precious memories from your childhood?

**ROBERTS:** I, I don't really, I can't remember them. Them was rough. Some was easy, some wasn't easy because I was living, my mother and my father separate, and I was living with my mother's mother, and I went to live with my father's mother, and that is the way it was, but it was okay. It was okay.

**INTERVIEWER:** All right, and who were your best friends and where were, who were your best friends, and where were their parents from? Were they West Indian? Were they Panamanians, Spanish?

**ROBERTS:** Two, two, my best friend was Nama Padmore, Jeri Yearwood, but she raised in Colon and I used to take ... her and I never had much friends in Panama.

**INTERVIEWER:** So More and Jeri, that's who you mentioned. Are you still in touch with them?

**ROBERTS:** Well, Nama died oh forty years ago. I, sometimes I kept in touch with her daughter, which she lives in Miami, Martis. And Jeri's in Colon. Those when I was coming up, but I have some friends now also. I have Michelle German, she lives in 19<sup>th</sup> Street Labo, I have Myrna, she live in, in...by Moran. I don't have much friends.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, tell me about your parents and your grandparents. Where were they from and how did they get to Panama? So, first of all, where was your father from?

**ROBERTS:** Barbados.

**INTERVIEWER:** And your mother?

**ROBERTS:** Panamanian.



**INTERVIEWER:** And where was your father's father from, your paternal grandfather from? And the grandmother as well?

**ROBERTS:** Right.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. And your mother's family? Was your mother's mother from Panama also, or—

**ROBERTS:** It's from, no my mother mother come from Jamaica.

**INTERVIEWER:** And how about your mother's father?

**ROBERTS:** Barbados.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. How did they come to Panama? How did they, how did your parents

**ROBERTS:** They came through the when they were building in the canal.

**INTERVIEWER:** What did they do at the canal?

**ROBERTS:** I know them was working. I don't know if them was carrying water or they was, you know, but they came in that time.

**INTERVIEWER:** I'm gonna ask you a little bit of more specific about the professions. What profession, what profession did your father have? What did he work in?

**ROBERTS:** He was a cook.

**INTERVIEWER:** And your mother?

**ROBERTS:** Well she, she, she was a dressmaker and plus she was a domestic worker. When she not sewing, she was washing and ironing for someone.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you learn dressmaking from her at all?

**ROBERTS:** No, I learn it from my second daughter.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay.

**ROBERTS:** Cause I still got the machine that she buy after so many years ago... Six...twelve years.

**INTERVIEWER:** What about your grandparents? Do you know the profession of your father's parents? Your grandfather and grandmother from your father's side?

**ROBERTS:** Well, he came to—



**INTERVIEWER:** The canal? And your father's mother?

**ROBERTS:** I think she was a maid.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what about your mother's side? What did your mother's father

**ROBERTS:** Same thing with the one come from Jamaica, one from Barbados.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, canal worker and maid?

**ROBERTS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Who were your, who were the friends of your parents and grandparents, and do you remember visiting them or them visiting you at your home, and what do you remember them doing, eating, drinking, or talking about during those visits? Let's say when your parents had their friends over, what, what did they talk about a lot?

**ROBERTS:** Well, you see they already had like close friends, my grandfather used to drink plenty and he used to go and play dominos. My grandmother stay home when she not working in the quarters, you know like in home like... she get along with the neighbors. So, I don't know about any close friends.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. Well, with the neighbors, what did she do with the neighbors? Did they ever get along? Hang out?

**ROBERTS:** Some and some don't. My grandmother never done anything, she's so good.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now, let's talk about school. How was school? Who were your teachers? Where were they from? And what things do you remember about school time?

**ROBERTS:** My first grade teacher was a lady named Clementina Herrera, in Venezuela. And my English teacher was named Miss.—, I can never remember her first name, or her last name, but I remember her first name was teacher Miss something, and we was wanting to know what after the Miss, and she said that's what, she come from Jamaica, so I can't remember her last name. I remember that she had an accent...

**INTERVIEWER:** So, you used to call your teacher Miss and then her name, okay.

**ROBERTS:** No, her name, that was her name, but I can't remember her last name, and we were used to wanting to know why, and she said well that's what her parents name her. Like Paulina, Miss!

**INTERVIEWER:** Now what about, what was the racial background of your classmates and your teachers? Were your classmates West Indian, Panamanian, Latin, and what about your teachers?



**ROBERTS:** It was, I only remember one teacher Clementina Herrera, she was very, very nice. That was in Venezuelan school, and it was mixed because, you know, we were going to learn Spanish while they were going...I said no we're going to get lice in our head. (laughs) So, when you go to sometimes school at 7 in the morning 'til 12, and then, you're going from 1 to 4. When you go 7 in the morning, come home 12, then wash your hair, dry it (laughs) and get back up, and when you come home for, gotta to wash it again. So, that is, that is, but my school, day was all right. I had some friend in school, I can't remember her first name. Was it Da—? her last name was Mingo... you know, we used to go school together, you know.

**INTERVIEWER:** What else would you do together? Would you play games together?

**ROBERTS:** Sometimes we play *Gap*, and then we play ball, and we play jumping, you know, what these children right now doesn't do, you make a circle.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, what was your favorite music when you were growing up? Like what were your favorite singers? What kinda songs did you like?

**ROBERTS:** One was Calypso and one was Melody...I used to like, with Panama, plenty Calypso, Panama ... and then, I used to like the Sparrow, and then I start music, I used to like eh...The Platters and, and definitely girls know that one that named in Midtown. The Supremes, you know and Sam Cooke. And I uh, he was good.

**INTERVIEWER:** Hmm hmm (undistinguishable)

**ROBERTS:** Spanish it was salsa. (laughs) Spanish it was Beni More, and DeSanto and you know...it was. Everything...Beni More, then we had, we had on Armando Bota, you know, and then we had Boa.

**INTERVIEWER:** Great. Do you remember any of their songs? Can you, do you want sing a small part of one of those songs that you used to like to listen to?

**ROBERTS:** I hardly can't remember it, but I know...it was the calypso, and... it had a couple of (sings) "one", can't remember the words of it. And then.. the one that it was (undistinguishable) , and then there was one that I was...really remember all the songs we singing back then.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now what music do you listen to today? Are they the same as before or are there new songs that you like today and the music that's playing?

**ROBERTS:** Well, I like my old and good because all the old cassettes ...I have, I put them in DVD. So, I play them, and I mostly am sung them, or sometimes I play nothing but church music.

**INTERVIEWER:** It's a good thing this guy was able to transfer the cassettes to the DVDs.



**ROBERTS:** Yeah, you're right, yes and also they're long, longer. I have all...I have all of them oldies but goodies, (undistinguishable names) Let it Be Me and you know, I have all of them in there. Sometime I play them, you know, get tired of watching TV. Don't give nothing, I put 'em in, and I play them, you know. I used to like one of them, the thing I remember singing Me and Mrs. Jones. I play that.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you like to eat and what are your favorite foods?

**ROBERTS:** No, I don't eat much anymore because of high cholesterol but I like fish, white rice. I like spaghetti, meatballs, and I like soup but with everything in it (undistinguishable)... jams, all the works and dumplings, dumplings in the soup.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you like to cook as well?

**ROBERTS:** I like to cook. I like to bake. I like to iron. I don't like to wash, but most of all, I love to bake. I bake anything you bring, any foods whether it's mango, whether it's papaya, whether it's any fruit. So, with any food, I love to make eat.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, could you share with us one of your recipes for one of the things you bake and how would you make one of your favorite pies or cakes that you bake?

**ROBERTS:** Well, I, which one of the cakes?

**INTERVIEWER:** You pick, which is your favorite?

**ROBERTS:** I can't, I can't.

**INTERVIEWER:** Let's say how would you make the chocolate, that one?

**ROBERTS:** You bake it regular, and you know, you take the sauce off when you beat it, but my favorite is either carrot or chocolate.

**INTERVIEWER:** How do you make those?

**ROBERTS:** The chocolate, you get, you buy the chocolate. You don't buy it in a box, I never buy it in a box. You buy the chocolate, and Hershey's chocolate, and you put like two pieces, like take a quarter cup of, you take one, one cup and a third of flour, one cup and a third full, you put one, one and a half teaspoon of baking powder, one and a half teaspoon of baking soda, you put a cup and three fourth sugar in it, but the baking powder and soda, you sieve it, and you and then, you put the, the sugar, you put a cup of solid rice that don't carry, a cup of solid rice and two eggs. Then you mix the flour and everything together, not that this one like the recipe, no. You mix all of them together, and then, you have, you put on your water to warm, make it hot. You need a cup of water and a cup of milk. And then, you throw it in, and then you throw in the egg one by one, and you use a good eye. And then, you beat it up, add a good sip of vanilla and then, you beat everything. This is not, this chocolate cake is not the kind that you know, you have to make the butter and the sugar melt. No, this you mix everything together, and you throw in some



milk, throw in the solid rice, you break the egg and you beat it, throw in the water, and you throw in the rest of milk, and you beat it until it gets soft, and you bake it for 35 minutes. You grease the pan you throw it in. You can use two loaf pans, bake it one hour.

**INTERVIEWER:** Thanks. All right, now what are your favorite sayings and where did you hear them or learn them for the first time? These are sayings that maybe your mother or your grandmother used to say to you, or sayings that you said to your children.

**ROBERTS:** I said this to my grandmother and she...(undistinguishable)

**UNKNOWN SPEAKER:** Give her an hour and a half, an hour and a half....

**ROBERTS:** (laughs) “Son of a bitch I tell you not to do that.” They don’t want to hear you. I’ll tell you...when I am ready I...I curse you”. “And if you run from me, well, I’m gonna beat you. And I have to run you down, you’ll get triple.” (undistinguishable )My grandmother has some mark on her foot and the next big one has some mark, I still believing this.

**INTERVIEWER:** Wow. All right. Okay. Another question about music. Have you ever heard about Louise Bennett, have you ever heard that name before?

**ROBERTS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** What do you know about her? What, what comes to mind when you hear her name? Have you ever seen her perform?

**ROBERTS:** No.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what do you remember

**ROBERTS:** I hear about her.

**INTERVIEWER:** Here in Panama?

**ROBERTS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, who did you hear talking about her? Was it like your mother, or family, or friends?

**ROBERTS:** A friend of mine...Got a great voice.

**INTERVIEWER:** And have you heard about the Mighty Sparrow?

**ROBERTS:** I have him, I have all of him.

**INTERVIEWER:** Tell me more about it. Have you seen him perform?



**ROBERTS:** Oh yes, when he used to come to Panama. Oh I see him perform in...down by the bridge where the Burger King is right now, we had a stage, and we had seen him, and any time he comes, we right there. I like his songs. So, I have them much, I have them in DVD, I mean, video. Yes, I've have it in video. I like his songs, every one of them. So, I can't tell you which it was, I like every one of them.

**INTERVIEWER:** What, what lyrics do you, can you share with me maybe one of the lyrics from a song that you like? You were telling me about the Mighty Sparrow.

**Phone rings a men answers undistinguishable conversation between a man and Roberts. Son of Roberts arrives. People chatting and laughing. Conversation goes on between the new person that arrived and the interviewer about the interviews and the project.**

**ROBERTS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** O.K We were talking about Mighty Sparrow. Do you remember any, I know you like all of his songs, all of phrases, but are there any particular lyrics or is it a particular song that stands out you want share with us?

**ROBERTS:** No, everything. It didn't matter what—It don't make a difference.

**INTERVIEWER:** A lot of people say that one (laughs). Now, what religion are you, and if you're a Christian, what particular denomination?

**ROBERTS:** I am a revival, spiritual revival. I was ordained as a reverend three, four, five, five years ago.

**INTERVIEWER:** O.k excellent. And what would you say is the main role of religion in your life? You were ordained as a reverend.

**ROBERTS:** Mm-hmm.

**INTERVIEWER:** Are you still practice or what, what would be your main role now?

**ROBERTS:** Go and pray, go to the, the, the what do you call it? The home (speaks Spanish) and then, we have charity givers to do side of you and when we need the papers and the soup and all of that, that our charity givers to help us give to the poor, you know (speaks Spanish) go to, and first we go out and pray, and if you need help, we try and yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now what would you say is the favorite part of the church service for you?

**ROBERTS:** I don't have no special part, but preach if you have to, sing, and you give encouraging words.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, you like everything.





**ROBERTS:** Yes, it's a party.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you practice sports when you were a kid? If so, which sports?

**ROBERTS:** Ball, baseball.

**INTERVIEWER:** How long did you do that? From what age to what age, did you play ball?

**ROBERTS:** Couple of years, I'd say about from about 8 to 9.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now, do you, do you watch baseball on TV nowadays? Do you still enjoy watching a game?

**ROBERTS:** Yes, my team losing, the Dodgers. ....They lose already. So—

**INTERVIEWER:** You said you played baseball 8 to 9 years totally, for 8, for 8 to 9 years, right?

**ROBERTS:** Mm-hmm.

**INTERVIEWER:** How old were you when you started playing?

**ROBERTS:** I was about 8.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, so you played at age 8.

**ROBERTS:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Not for eight years. Did you have any contact with American culture during your youth, and what do you remember about that, any aspect of American culture?

**ROBERTS:** I don't understand.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you have any c-, any contact with things that came from the United States, music, foods, I don't know, products, you know, American products that were maybe sold in Panama, things like that

**ROBERTS:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** When you were growing up? Like what? What would say? What would be something you found?

**ROBERTS:** Vitamins, Centrum.

**INTERVIEWER:** Remember, you mentioned a lot of the music, a lot of the music you heard was from the United States?



**ROBERTS:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Anything else like that?

**ROBERTS:** Not that I remember.

**INTERVIEWER:** The food you ate, were any of them American?

**ROBERTS:** It's pretty near the same thing as Panama, chicken, pork chop, but them fish is different from our own, and catfish, them catfish is different than my own, you know, but I tried and, you know.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you grow up eating potato salad?

**ROBERTS:** We have that in Panama.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, that's American.

**ROBERTS:** Yes. Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** That's truly American.

**ROBERTS:** Potato salad.

**INTERVIEWER:** (laughs)

**ROBERTS:** I thought it came from my granny.

**INTERVIEWER:** I know, everybody thinks that. You go to Jamaica, everybody eats potato salad. (laughs) That's what I thought, too, but then, amazing trend, yeah.

**ROBERTS:** And the coleslaw, that comes from over there too?

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah.

**ROBERTS:** I love it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Both of those made, Jamaican products? Yeah, that's American.

**ROBERTS:** Okay.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now, tell me about your view of your West Indian ancestry. How do you think of your West Indian background?

**ROBERTS:** I think it's very, very good. It's just that there aren't anybody to know a thing as all the old people die off, they don't have anybody to really teach you about it, but if you get to



really know about it, it is something wonderful, you know, to know about your background, your ancient background, where your mother comes from, where your father, your grandparents, where you're from. But they don't have anybody here at; they have a group name Anciana, right? All of 'em sit around, and eat, and drink, and, but I don't see them teaching you anything. Nothing. So, if there were only had people to really teach, you know, you know, because I grow up, well, I, it's Panama at the same time, but I can't tell you anything about my father, my grandmother, my great-grandmother, I don't know anything, and unless I may read something cause I don't know nothing.

**INTERVIEWER:** What would be the first word that comes to mind when someone says West Indian? If you could think of one word that comes to mind, as soon as someone says West Indian, what would that be?

**ROBERTS:** Black. (other male voices) No, what? Black. Black.

(Some chatting undistinguishable)

**INTERVIEWER:** Now what qualities, cultural behaviors, or other things do you associate with being West Indian? What are those key characteristics of West Indian?

**ROBERTS:** What kind of character?

**INTERVIEWER:** Cultural behaviors, things that we tend to do that it be typically West Indian, can't be anybody else.

**ROBERTS:** Nothing even come to mind.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, well, I might come back to that one. We'll think about that one. Do you think people in Panama have ever treated you different based on your race or based on being West Indian?

**ROBERTS:** Oh yes, them treat you different. Chombo..very different.

**INTERVIEWER:** How?

**ROBERTS:** Very different.

**INTERVIEWER:** Have you had any particular experiences where people have called you chombo or other things?

**ROBERTS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Can you tell us a little bit about it?

**ROBERTS:** Because if you in a group or you're going someplace, you know, an—, and there is Panama—, well, them white then, cause not all of them is Panamanian, and you in the front,



they would like to get to the front, and them say, “Chombo! quitate de ahi tu no naciste aqui! “  
You know what I mean?

**INTERVIEWER:** Does this happen still today or did this happen before?

**ROBERTS:** It’s still happening today. I know they’re trying to be better when that amount of learning but it’s still happening today.

**INTERVIEWER:** Have you ever lived outside of Panama? Like for more than six months? Have you ever lived in the US or in some other country?

**ROBERTS:** No. I visit there, the United States, but I never live, I live in Colon for about a year.

**INTERVIEWER:** Alright... Have you ever been affected.. oh well How has knowing or not knowing English affected you whether positively or English, you know English, so how has that affected you, either positively or negatively?

**ROBERTS:** It, it never affected me negative, never did, cause I grow up knowing English, went English school before I decide to go to a Spanish school cause of the... So, the hardest was learning Spanish.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now, are you married, I know, yes. My question is how did you meet your husband?

**ROBERTS:** (laughs) Mister Robert, that’s your grandchild, so I’m not gonna say nothing. Your wife is there? (Speaks with another person that is there).

**UNKNOWN SPEAKER:** I don’t know.

**ROBERTS:** I meet you in a bar, that’s what you said when I went to call my Nano. Huh? No, we was living up a tree, where about, we um, I knew him, I knew his first wife, we were friends, and she didn’t have any children. So, I had seven, and she used to call me up say, “Elouise send my f-ing children downstairs to me.” You know, and then, he knew her from Colon so, when I, when he hear that she was there and went up there looking for her, and she, he asked her to marry then on that day, and she tell him, “Yes, and marry me and my seven children,” and he said, “Seven children?” She said, “Yes, go in there and come here and show you,” (laughs) In Nigeria, and he said, “How about, you have seven children?” She said, “Yes, them is my seven children,” and he really had loved my children and her, he married her with these seven children, and I told him I was gonna plan the move, and afterward, she moved me near to her on 15<sup>th</sup> street with her children, and when we was up there, and she ran in to set everybody... September, I didn’t have time to going anywhere, she called, “Send my f-ing children to me,” and I would call her with her neighbor, and we say, “Elouise, put on the phone, look down the hill,” her mother and all the rest of her family, and then, woman coming up the steps with me. So, when they came here, I lived, I didn’t even know she was living here, but they knew, and then, she died `94, no? She died `94, and then he asked me to marry him. I said, “Not me, I don’t have time for you,” and then he was, and... Not me, not me. And I came here, and then he said, “You’re not



married” And I said no, and he picked up the phone, and suddenly, I hear her mother on the phone. “Why not marry Mr. Robert? Mr. Robert is a good man. Mr. Robert does take care of us.” So, I didn’t know that his wife had all of them phone number. And then I yell to my big daughter, and I yell to Juanita, am I...and so, that’s why I married.

**INTERVIEWER:** Wow. Quite a story.

**ROBERTS:** And up ‘til now, him never do nothing wrong.

**INTERVIEWER:** What a model.

**ROBERTS:** Him don’t do things wrong, and if them call him, “Elouise...” This one used to be when she used to come after him, “Him never do nothing wrong,” I always the wrong one. And so, I married him, and I tell him, “You want to marry me, you have to stop drink rum,” and he must’ve really loved me because he stop drink the rum (laughs), and until now...and this is his nephew that came up to live in Panama. I thank God you know because he don’t have to, first of all, but he did, so actually he comes, if he going toward Debella, he going all the time, he believed his own culture, you know, he taking so he can go more places so, I thank God for him, you know, because he could come Panama and that’s his only uncle, and he don’t look, he don’t have other aunt, and he don’t really looking for the aunt, and he look for his uncle. So, as that is not a coincidence, it’s what God wants, you know.

**INTERVIEWER:** Tell me about your children. How many children do you have and just tell me a little bit about what they do and what their lives are

**ROBERTS:** Well, Eleanor well, have picture, she live in the Unites States over on the....she have three children, a twin and a girl, and she works in a bank. And one of the girl work in a store, the other one retired as a master sergeant I think from the army, and the guy is not in here. But that one is of her mother left here in ‘96, and she told Juanita the United States, the United States and she have three and her three there. And Anora..., she went over think in ‘86 and she had five, and she live in Warner Robbins, Georgia, and she’s there with her kids, and then, Toni, which is number four, she works by Target as a supervisor, she has three kids, two boy and a girl, one of the boys live in North Carolina, one live in New York, and the girl live in New York also, and then I have Laureta, she live in Rich—, not Port Virginia, she have three also, and I think one is still in the army as a nurse, the guy live in Mia-, southern Miami, and the other one was in the marines, she moved, and then, I have Donita, she lives in North—, Richmond, Virginia, and she, she’s a supervisor and her and her daughter live in Alabama, yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** All right. Now do they consider themselves—

**ROBERTS:** Oh and Jimmy, he works in radio continental...yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh so he’s in Panama.

**ROBERTS:** Yeah, he will be 62.



**INTERVIEWER:** Do your children consider themselves Panamanian, West Indian, American, or all three things?

**ROBERTS:** Panamanian.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do they all speak English?

**ROBERTS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** And grandchildren, do they all speak English?

**ROBERTS:** Well, the grandchildren, most speak Spanish, I speak to them in English though.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, they understand English?

**ROBERTS:** Oh yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Why do you think it is that your children speak English and grandchildren speak Spanish, and have you ever talked to them about their language choices and so forth?

**ROBERTS:** Because it's that they went to Spanish schools. None of them ever go to English schools, but I speak in English, you know, and then they try reading it and learning it. So, that's why.

**INTERVIEWER:** I know you said you have family that lives in the United States, let's see if we can go through—

**ROBERTS:** My children.

**INTERVIEWER:** All your, all your children except Jimmy?

**ROBERTS:** That's right.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, when they visit Panama, do you think other Panamanians also see them as Panamanian, or do they look at them as if they're more American?

**ROBERTS:** I really don't know about that... (undistinguishable speech) When her mother comes, she's from church, or a seminar right because she's different from the rest. When the rest comes, them in, any baby not seen mother, so, but they, they, they are family. When them comes, you may know, well not "I didn't see you last year," or, "You didn't come last year," or like that, but them, them don't talk down their nose, and them...they (undistinguishable speech)

**INTERVIEWER:** Now, you told me you visited some places in the, outside of Panama?

**ROBERTS:** Bocas Del Toro.



**INTERVIEWER:** Well, mainly in Panama. How about outside of Panama? Have you visited the US or Costa Rica.

**ROBERTS:** Yes I used to go every year. Yes, I visit Costa Rica. That's a beautiful city.

**INTERVIEWER:** Where else?

**ROBERTS:** Beside Costa Rica?

**INTERVIEWER:** Mmm. Where in Costa Rica did you go?

**ROBERTS:** I, in the city.

**INTERVIEWER:** San Jose?

**ROBERTS:** Yeah.

People talking.

**INTERVIEWER:** How was your experience in the US and in Costa Rica, in general, but also, how was your experience in terms of what you felt people knew about Panamanians or West Indian Panamanians? Did you feel people knew about Panama when you went to the US?

**ROBERTS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** And did they know about West Indians?

**ROBERTS:** Most of all they know about the canal. They know about the canal. Some people don't even know that you really have people living here. They only think it's about the canal, you know? You tell them, "I live in Panama." "By the canal?" "No, I don't live in the canal." "I thought it was only a canal."

**INTERVIEWER:** How about Costa Rica? Was that the same experience as far as what they know about Panama?

**ROBERTS:** No, because Costa Rica is near. So, you know, from there we go over and then come over. So, then they know that this is a city where people live and not only the canal with water.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now, we're almost done. Is there a specific message you would like to communicate to the younger generations, younger West Indians or younger Panamanians in general?

**ROBERTS:** What I would like to tell them is stop the violence in Panama. So much killing, and try to live in peace, and, you know, look to the *mana* for both, you know, cause if you have a peace of mind, you know, and try to understand, you know, you need to understand me for me to understand you. And I would like very much for the younger group that's coming up, you know,



to live in peace and try to understand each and every one, even the older people, try to understand them. Maybe this would be able to be a better world.

**INTERVIEWER:** Are you part of any particular group or community organization, and what role do you play in them?

**ROBERTS:** I, well, that's a group. That group is not in the church, that group's outside the church.

**INTERVIEWER:** What is the name of the group again?

**ROBERTS:** Traveling for a group of Jesus, I'll give you a card. I'll give you this.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what do you do with this group?

**ROBERTS:** Just like that, we go and pray. Like today, we're going and pray, and *Maryna* will teach the service and I give the word.

**INTERVIEWER:** You go to the asilos...right?

**ROBERTS:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Or you go to other places too?

**ROBERTS:** Yeah, we go to all the...and if you know of a sick and need prayer, you call us, and we maybe all nine don't go. There's about four of us would go and pray. If you can't clean your place, and we can, we go and we clean it. We don't charge to do any work that God tell us to do.

**INTERVIEWER:** Is there anything else that we have no included or we have not asked you that you would like to add to the interview?

**ROBERTS:** No.

**INTERVIEWER:** No? Well, then we're done. I'm just gonna thank you again for participating and feel free to contact us if you have any questions or if there's anything in your interview you'd like to change, take out, or add (laughs). Well, we are finished. So, thank you again Mrs. Roberts.