

Interview with Gwendolyn Campbell
Interviewer: Nyasha Warren
Interviewee(s): Gwendolyn Campbell, Pauline
Year of Birth: 1907
Location of Interview: Panama
Language of Interview: English, Spanish

INTERVIEWER: First of all thank you for participating in this project. We're sure that this project is going to benefit both the community, now and also for future generations to come. The goal is to produce a detailed and comprehensive narrative of your story so feel free to speak as long as you need to give a complete answer. Don't worry about time; we're not rushing at all. Now although you have signed a consent form, if at any point during the interview you feel like you don't want us to include certain information that's perfectly fine. Ok, so you'll just let me know about that. Can you say your name for the record?

CAMPBELL: Gwendolyn Campbell.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, would you mind telling me your year of birth?

CAMPBELL: ...1907?

INTERVIEWER: And what was the last grade of school that you completed?

CAMPBELL: What was that?

INTERVIEWER: Grade at school.

CAMPBELL: Third grade.

INTERVIEWER: Third grade.

CAMPBELL: ...everything that was to get was down the drain, but God help me in hand.

INTERVIEWER: What was your profession or job?

CAMPBELL: Well my profession is cooking, eh Pauline? ...what you'd call that?

PAULINE: Because she can't hear so good.

INTERVIEWER: ...right, babysitter...

CAMPBELL: Lots of boys went out in the ...sister Campbell take care of them. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: Ok, what city and state of Panama do you live in?

CAMPBELL: ...Panama...

INTERVIEWER: And the name of your neighborhood? Can you tell us about your place of birth and what was going on there when you were growing up?

CAMPBELL: Place of birth was Pereira...1907.

INTERVIEWER: And what do you remember about it?

CAMPBELL: Well I don't really remember because I was quite small.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

CAMPBELL: Can't say I remember...told that my parents that we were in ...Culebra...I really don't remember nothing.

INTERVIEWER: What about your childhood when you were a little bit older? What memories do you remember?

CAMPBELL: Oh boy. (Laughs).

INTERVIEWER: What are your fondest memories? The ones that are always in your mind?

CAMPBELL: I like friends. I had many friends. Plenty, plenty friends when I was young. Plenty friends. Nice friends. School days. School friends and after school days, growing up as a young one, I had a lot of friends, and we lived good. We lived good.

INTERVIEWER: Did your friends live near you—

CAMPBELL: When them get married I—

PAULINE: ...One neighborhood...

INTERVIEWER: And, what were their families like, your friends' families?

CAMPBELL: Well, what I know, they were nice people, who they was again Pauline?

PAULINE: I wasn't around that time. (laughs)

CAMPBELL: I remember them...they were nice to me.

PAULINE: In those days, children were *regalada*; children were what do you call it golden...your neighbor, not like now. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: Right. Do you still keep in touch with some of those friends?

CAMPBELL: Well, most of those friends gone on. Some in United States, some pass away. George in the United States.

INTERVIEWER: And before they passed away, did you get together every now and then, or....?

CAMPBELL: Well, yes as young people we used to get together in our own way.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

CAMPBELL: After everybody married out, and their parents left and travel and they themselves travel...what you would call it? Put it together.

INTERVIEWER: And what kinds of things did you do when you got together with your friends?

CAMPBELL: Oooh, we did a lot of things! (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

CAMPBELL: Every Sunday every one of us had to study and get to church, after that, the whole world in your hand. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: Like the song, huh?

CAMPBELL: But we get along good. We get along together, friends, we were friends for years...friends...friends for years.

INTERVIEWER: So tell me a little bit about your parents and grandparents. Where were, what were they like, where did they come from, how did they get to Panama if they were—

CAMPBELL: My parents was Barbadian, they never come to Panama, they never come to Panama. Barbados people. They never come to Panama.

INTERVIEWER: So your parents are from Barbados.

CAMPBELL: Barbados, yes mother and father from Barbados. I had sisters, I don't know them, I know one, I go to Barbados and I met one of my sister then, and they did take me where my grandfather was buried, the corner stone where he name and others was on it. I had the privilege of seeing that. He was a minister of the gospel, was a minister of the gospel, name was Federation Bowen. His children, grandchildren follow his footsteps. Most of my grandchildren and children follow his footsteps. Most of them.

He was a wonderful man! And they gave him the name Federation Bowen. Great man... I am from Barbados.

INTERVIEWER: And so, how was it that, your parents never came to Panama but you did?

CAMPBELL: Yes, my parents came. I was born in Panama.

INTERVIEWER: They came for the construction?

CAMPBELL: Yes, construction days. I was born in Panama.

PAULINE: Her sisters were left behind with the aunt. They came over here. My grandmother came over here with my grandfather...that's why she didn't know about them until—

INTERVIEWER: Until she went back to visit.

CAMPBELL: Yes, man.

INTERVIEWER: And did you know anything about your parents' and grandparents' friends?

CAMPBELL: I had an uncle, and a cousin—what his name again—Cyril. Only two that I can remember those two were in Panama anyway so I know them by now.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever, did your parents or grandparents have people come over the house for any family gatherings, or friends?

CAMPBELL: Tell you something. Not gathering, no. Or if they do that, I would be, you know, very small cause they were in a place like Barbados, you know, I didn't born in Barbados. I born in Panama.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what they ate, like the food they ate or drank, or—?

CAMPBELL: Well, I had a cousin by the name of Cyril and he used to drink, but I don't remember my uncle drinking, he used to drink...

PAULINE: She want to know what kind of food they used to eat, cook.

CAMPBELL: Oh, yeah, my yucca, rice and peas, ground food, kallaloo fish, saltfish, coucou, wild fish, soup, gungo peas soup, sorrel, ginger beer, like gungo peas and rice and coconut eat good.

PAULINE: What you had at Easter time? West Indians.

CAMPBELL: Oh, cooked chicken man, cooked chicken, turkey, friend chicken, turkey.

PAULINE: Turkey was for Christmas dinner. Oil fish and coucou, Good Friday, chips and rice, combination, coconut milk, fried plantain. Those days when codfish was ten cents a pound, now four dollars. (laughs)

CAMPBELL: Imagine!

PAULINE: One gentleman used to sell bread, sweet bread in the basket.

CAMPBELL: Yes. You buy you bread, you had to come back (laughs) you buy— yes, a good while. Cause he used to come by with basket on top they head you know, the bread or the basket over their head, and their arm or their hand. Big basket with all sort of bread, coconut.

PAULINE: Coconut Bread, turnover, bread.

CAMPBELL: All sort of bread

PAULINE: Right in the middle of it, what you used to call it...

INTERVIEWER: Turnover or something?

PAULINE: There was one like a cake, almost like a sausage.

CAMPBELL: Yes, yes...

PAULINE: It had a coconut biscuit....the plum sugar...that was the children favorite.

CAMPBELL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Now we don't see that.

PAULINE: No...there was a Chinese shop...he sold that cake, sugar cake or coconut cake.

CAMPBELL: Coconut cake, sugar cake...chip chip, chip chip, coconut, chip chip. And sometimes we're going to school we hide it under the desk. (laughs) Hide it under the desk...Bite it, when we were young it was coconut in the shell...we tried to squeeze it right out the shell.

INTERVIEWER: What was school like for you? What do you remember about school, your teachers?

CAMPBELL: That's a nice time.

INTERVIEWER: You remember any of your teachers?

CAMPBELL: Yes, lady teachers.

INTERVIEWER: You know their names?

CAMPBELL: I gwine tell you something, Pauline; the last time I went to the States, this teacher here that I grow under all of them you know when they came here first, they change their name you know.

PAULINE: Oh you talking bout Phillips.

CAMPBELL: Phillips. Yeah. When I went to, to, um, what you call it...Colon...what West Indian...what you used to call it again? Not Cristobal, the other name. Used to call it...West Indian used to call it, West Indian teacher...most of them dem name was change—

PAULINE: And ahm Silver City?

CAMPBELL: Yes, most of them name was change. Edwards....

PAULINE: ...came from the West Indies, most of them, not all. They were, like my mother she left her children over there and she came here. My father had a name problem. His aunt brought him here; he was a Jamaican and when he was three...and he, his aunt brought him. And when this aunt came to her husband, her sister sent him with her to Panama where they would have a better life than what they would have in the West Indies.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

PAULINE: But then he started to go to the Canal town and to use her married name but when we had a change of government one year, they decided that the children should all come... from West Indian parents, they should bring their sons to school where the...you remember it? He didn't want them to take Panamanian nationality cause they supposed to go back to the West Indies.

CAMPBELL: Yes.

PAULINE: Where they were born. But then, who was in charge...

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. Right.

CAMPBELL: ...And so they used that name right along. I never forget on the sea. He change it to—In order to get their right name. I think it's Joseph.

PAULINE: Yes, I was just telling you about him.

CAMPBELL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So what music did you grow up listening to? Or what were your favorite songs?

CAMPBELL: I grow up listening to the jazz band. Jazz band. A lot of West Indian men. I like nice songs, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

CAMPBELL: I like the ones where—they have dance...Jazz band.

PAULINE: What were, what were the guys that was here again? The ahm, Suzie Q, I used to repeat...to my grandmother. My god mother she used to love the dance, she knew all the dance...all the dance name.

CAMPBELL: Charleston Jazz. Charleston. La la la la. (hums)

INTERVIEWER: So what music do you listen to now?

CAMPBELL: Now we have Spanish music. Don't have no English music again.

PAULINE: The only English music is religious Christian, religious music.

CAMPBELL: What's that?

INTERVIEWER: Religious music.

PAULINE: Gospel music.

CAMPBELL: All sorts of Spanish songs—

PAULINE: ...go to church. Well, most of the churches now are bilingual.

CAMPBELL: What did the local...the old...

PAULINE: ... They translate it.

INTERVIEWER: Right. And are there any musicians that you particularly like? Your favorite musicians, or...?

CAMPBELL: ...

PAULINE: Mama. The band leaders name. Talk about what's Payne.

CAMPBELL: (murmurs)

PAULINE: Payne – Payne, she had a band, orchestra.

CAMPBELL: Yes. Can't remember the name though at all. I come out of that road so long that I forget what it name. Can't remember what it name.

INTERVIEWER: Right. We have another question about food. What are your favorite foods and how did you come to like them?

PAULINE: Foods or fruits?

INTERVIEWER: Foods. Foods. Things that you still like today.

CAMPBELL: I like yucca dumpling, codfish and rice... ooh I love gungo peas and rice, lima beans, wooi!! Baked fish. (laughs) Pigsstail. You have some nice food. Now, the codfish you used to pay 10 cents a pound now is almost four dollars a pound. Four dollars a pound... Everything gone down the drain, boy.

INTERVIEWER: So what are some of the famous sayings that you remember, West Indian sayings? Things that your parents, grandparents used to say all the time.

CAMPBELL: Yes.

PAULINE: You remember mama?

CAMPBELL: Yes.

PAULINE: Some of the things they used to say.

CAMPBELL: I can't remember any of them right now.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

CAMPBELL: Can't really remember them. Can't none at all. They had a lot of phrase too—I can't—none of them would even pass by me. Charleston, Charleston, la la la la la. Charleston, Charleston. (laughs) la la la la. Charleston. Charleston. Those things leave me completely...at all.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever heard of Louise Bennett? The Mighty Sparrow?

CAMPBELL: What?

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever heard of Louise Bennett? The Mighty Sparrow?

CAMPBELL: Yes. I think. Something bout Louise Bennett or so. But I don't remember it at all now. Louise Bennett, Louise Bennett, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever see them perform, or?

CAMPBELL: On the TV.

INTERVIEWER: On the TV. And what do you remember about those performances, anything?

CAMPBELL: (laughs) Most of the time. A lot of good...

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. And what do you think about today's music? Reggaeton?

CAMPBELL: Hmmm—I don't know what to think about them. I really don't. Cause most of them now is Spanish, most of them is Spanish, we don't hear those song sing again so we really don't remember them. My ahm, me have a, some tapes, sometimes when we play them we remember them, those old time songs.

INTERVIEWER: So tell me what is your view of West Indian ancestry. What does it mean to be West Indian in your view?

PAULINE: What do you think about the children who were born in the West Indies in comparison to those who come and raise in Panama?

CAMPBELL: It didn't make any difference to me and thing.

PAULINE: No?

INTERVIEWER: Her parents and her grandparents, some of those traditions probably fell down...

PAULINE: Her father left before she was eight... All she could say, her father was very strict.

INTERVIEWER: Hmm. When somebody says West Indian descent, or West Indian descendant, or West Indian/ Panamanian, they're pretty much talking about the black community here in Panama, what does that mean to you when somebody says that, how do you identify culturally?

CAMPBELL: ...

PAULINE: Just tell her what you mean. You don't really register with it...

CAMPBELL: Yeah. If they don't bother, if they talk to me. Everybody want to speak Spanish, fine. Spanish, Spanish, Spanish. Everybody want to speak Spanish.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever notice anything different at all between the black community and the native Panamanians? Or that didn't really register?

PAULINE: In your days, what we did register was the black and the white. It was really gold and silver.

INTERVIEWER: You said that you were married twice. How did you meet your husband?

CAMPBELL: How did I meet my husband? ... I kind of (laughs) we love each others. Was really in the same vicinity. We always—huh?

PAULINE: On the canal zone.

CAMPBELL: Yes. We always mix together and things like that.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

CAMPBELL: So finally I become his woman and he become...

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

CAMPBELL: That's how it went. So we married but we didn't stay very long.

INTERVIEWER: And your second husband?

CAMPBELL: He died. Who's that? He died.

INTERVIEWER: How did you meet him?

CAMPBELL: I met Mr. Campbell. He was Almiras... my sister met him—met him at a friend. He was very good to us, me. Very good to us. Very good to us. He got...my first daughter. Very good person. Very good. She can tell you about him. Very good person.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

CAMPBELL: Very good person. He really love her... He just give she one sugar cone. Mr. Campbell. He loved this child.

INTERVIEWER: Were either of your husbands West Indian?

CAMPBELL: Yes. (to Pauline) Joe was a Jamaican, right?

PAULINE: Yes.

CAMPBELL: He was, both of them was Jamaican.

INTERVIEWER: Ok.

PAULINE: The family came for the canal...

INTERVIEWER: And how did your families get along?

CAMPBELL: They did good. Very good. Very, very good. But the wives and husbands didn't get along. (laughs) The children and them got along fine, they didn't have no complaints. Wives, wives didn't like those shoes that were worn. They burn too much. You just got to kick it off. Kick it right off. Some young women kill themselves, all that kind of thing. I don't think I could be bothered with that. Not a bit. (laughs) It was here to live not to...

INTERVIEWER: So tell me about your children. I met your daughter already. Do you have other children as well?

CAMPBELL: Yes I have another daughter. Whoo. She's good to herself. She's a ministry now too... Yes, she's the ministry.

INTERVIEWER: And what was their childhood like?

CAMPBELL: Well, you know children, children, children bad. After a time they come with experiences and they change, you know. But while they young and youthful and they don't—Well I can't say nothin' myself eh, cause when I was young and youthful I get down too, myself. After you get to a certain age you settle down. She's a minister now in...the other daughter. She's a missionary...

PAULINE: She's an evangelist.

CAMPBELL: Evangelist. The missionary, yeah a missionary...missionary? Ok, evangelist in the Baptist church. So that's the way they goes, and they still going on and pressing forward, thank God for that.

PAULINE: Going each in a different direction... And we went to church, whichever church was closest to where we were living.

CAMPBELL: (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: And how do you identify yourself. I mean, do you feel I'm West Indian, I'm West Indian descent?

PAULINE: Well I don't pay much attention to it because I don't have to, don't have to—nationality. Never had problem.

INTERVIEWER: And your sister probably still brought up the same.

(phone call)

INTERVIEWER: Do both of your children speak in English? And your grandchildren?

CAMPBELL: Yes...grandchildren...

PAULINE: But they grew up in Spanish-speaking. My sister and I have more English. She...more than I did.

INTERVIEWER: So you speak English and the grandchildren speak Spanish. No English?

PAULINE: Very little, very little English...Grands speak in English to you. You speak to them in English they answer in Spanish.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have an idea how that happened?

PAULINE: Because we speak English in the home. But they refuse to speak it. They know what you want or what you need or what you say to them.

INTERVIEWER: They go outside and they just don't want to.

PAULINE: All the children along the street Spanish. When they get home, between themselves they speak Spanish and English.

INTERVIEWER: And have you ever spoken with them and mentioned anything about the languages, about trying to learn English?

CAMPBELL: Well they, they mix with the children, the Spanish ones they come along, coming along, you'd be surprised...they speak in Spanish, they speak in English... They speak English and they speak Spanish.

PAULINE: Which they speak most?

CAMPBELL: They don't speak much English at all but when they meet—at the church them chat like a parrot. Talk and laugh and—

INTERVIEWER: So, what do you, who do you consider to be your community?

CAMPBELL: Well to me it all depends some people in the community are fine, some are miserable, some can't stand each other. Things like that, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

CAMPBELL: But we have a good community, this community here where we live, we have some good neighbors. Even those that speak Spanish.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. And are there people, are there other groups of people, for example in the church or other places, that, that don't live right here that you also consider to be your community?

CAMPBELL: Oh yes. We meet at market, we laugh, we chat, things like that. I don't...live together.

INTERVIEWER: And what specific message do you want to communicate to the younger people of our community? Meaning current generation and future generation.

CAMPBELL: One of the message that I like to give children, for god so love this world and he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. It's a life, long, ever to live in what you call it. Yes, you know. And sometimes although we live the same way we have Spanish, or English, in the end after time them try to speak English, you know, and the Spanish try to speak English, ahm, the English try to speak Spanish, and they mix, mix, mix, mix and they get to know each other. And they find them speaking English and them speaking Spanish. They not fussing and fighting but the majority of children grow up in this...speak Spanish, up to young people some of them still friendly to each others. Mm-hmm. When they ready to play ball together...

PAULINE: What we having now is a lot of mixed marriages.

CAMPBELL: Yes.

PAULINE: The Panamanian boys with the English, the English Panamanian boys mostly with the Spanish girls. We have Jehovah's Witnesses, we have Catholic, we have Episcopal, we have Salvationist. We have Baptist.

CAMPBELL: And everybody have connection.

PAULINE: We have many cultures. We invite them on special occasion.

INTERVIEWER: And what message would you give to the older people in the community?

CAMPBELL: Well those that live together for years, we almost come like family. We call each other, we talk to each other. They like family. Call me, we chat, and I chat with you and we have jokes over each others and things like that...but if you don't pay them much mind you get along better. Some of dem are miserable, some of them learn to live with West Indians, and West Indians learn to live with them, and some of them become good friends.

PAULINE: We had a lot of prejudice in the early years.

CAMPBELL: Yes.

PAULINE: Plenty of prejudice in the schools, and the shopping areas, but most of that is obsolete now.

INTERVIEWER: To the general population, what message would you like to convey?

CAMPBELL: *Nostros somos hermanos en Cristo. Somos hermanos en Cristo. No importa lo que Somos hermanos en Cristo.* Don't try to encourage them with the fool-fool ting, you know. We try to tell how God loves we all. I don't know what God's plan, but to me today they come across don't have no principles. Spanish doesn't have any. Not a lot of them is coming together, coming. In my mother's days coming up we used to have plenty Spanish and English coming up and they live like family. You know, we live, the Spanish and English live like family. But today the young one them, I don't know what we do them live together. Now we have some young people out there and all young people even they grow up... That's the way life is, always, never be the same. All kinds of things. But I want to tell you something, a great change now in their life, 'til they accept the, accept the Lord Jesus Christ as they personal, they are the most, accept Jesus as their personal guide and savior, walk with him, change, change, a lot of changes now. True there are different missionaries come to Panama, a lot of them you know, more unity with them, my pastor, ahm-

PAULINE: Elwin?

CAMPBELL: Yes. Wooi! A great man...

PAULINE: She living here now?

CAMPBELL: What you know about it...half the Spanish now in the church.

INTERVIEWER: So the very last question is just do you have anything else that you want to include that we haven't talked about?

CAMPBELL: There's so much things that I don't know what to make of now. (laughs) One thing we have to do a lot of praying now for our little children that is getting into some terrible disaster that in the old days, children never get into those disaster. You tink is girl, boy have a gun and the majority that we have to pray, put them down before God and ask God to do the work for us. Likkle, likkle boy, likkle girl today, in our days we never have dat, but today likkle, likkle boy and likkle girl have a gun. Why you tink so, the same authority of the Republic of Panama. A gun. In my day the children ain't fighting for gun, not now.

INTERVIEWER: Well thank you, we appreciate it.

