

Interview with Victoria Forcheney, Abraham Forcheney
Interviewer: Nyasha Warren
Interviewee(s): Victoria Forcheney, Abraham Forcheney
Year of Birth: 1926
Location of Interview: Panama
Language of Interview: English, Spanish

INTERVIEWER: The goal of this questionnaire is to produce as coherent a narrative of your story as possible. In light of that, we encourage you to not worry about giving a long answer or a short answer. Just feel free to speak as you see fit. Also, if you feel at any point that you don't want some of what you're saying to be included in our final work, you can just let us know that and that would be perfectly fine. If you're ready to start, the first question is—we would like you to tell us about your place of birth and what was going on there at the time when you were growing up.

VICTORIA FORCHENEY: My place of birth is right in Cativa Hills...

ABRAHAM FORCHENEY: That place was a hill and we lived on top of the hill...

INTERVIEWER: Okay. What kinds of things were going on at that time? What do you remember?

VICTORIA: I remember when I go home—we didn't have lights. We had lamps. We didn't have water. We had to bring our water from the well. When I go and get water, you go and get a pan to put it in—two gallon—and tied a string and we put a rope on it and let it down in the well, bring up the water and put it in the pan. We put it in a five-gallon pan and bring it up. (demonstrates) And you take the pan up. We walked from there to the house. We bring the water and pour it in here—as much as it would hold. When it's dry season and there is no rain, when the rain start to come, we use that rain water to clean and wash and cook—everything. That's what we used to do at those times. My father was a farmer. He go to the ground and he cultivate food—yams, potatoes, banana, cocoa, plantain, and all different kinds of food—plants.

INTERVIEWER: You started to explain about your childhood. What other memories do you have of your childhood?

VICTORIA: When we go here, there were no schools. Just a little place, no school. My mother got somebody to teach us to write and to read. That's all we get, to learn to read and write. After that, a length of time—a year or what—the government sent to have a little school in a building. We started to go there and teachers started to come afterward. I would go there. I remember the gentleman who was the teacher who was teaching us, and we learned to read and write and count and to pronounce. And that's it. After a while ...and we started to go to school. It wasn't a big school. You go in the morning and then you go home and then you go back in the evening.

INTERVIEWER: Who were your best friends?

VICTORIA: The Spanish people. The Spanish girls. The neighbors, anyone—when you would go for water we get together because we are not going alone. It's like we have a little company of four of us, and we walk down the street and go for water, come back and take care of the water and do the housework. You gotta clean up the house. You gotta sweep. In those days, we had no board flooring—it was dirt. The flooring was dirt. My mother used to sweep it clean and it used to—don't get wet. We didn't have a gas stove. We used wood. We had a place made up and then they light it. Then you put wood in here—have to keep pushing the wood when it burned out—then you push and it burned out and then you push—then it finish cook. And then after that, the wood kind of close out in that town. Coal. Then people started to burn coal. The men that would come in and go to the farm and would cut down wood and burn the wood to make coal. And then they light it and it burn. Then they sell the coal and we buy the coal. They sell some iron stove. My mother and father bought that and they put that coal and they light it. They cut up wood and put there and put the coal and they light it. It start to blaze. When all the coal start fire, they put the pot down. (laughs) It was good.

INTERVIEWER: Did the food taste different?

VICTORIA: No, same thing. You know, same food, same thing. They used to raise chicken—we raised chicken—so when they wanted meat and everything and don't have any meat, they used to get a chicken and cut off the neck. Mother would put it in a dishpan of hot boiling water and throw it in it and take off all the feathers and she clean it and she cooked it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember or do you still keep in touch with some of those girls that you would go to get water with?

VICTORIA: Yes, we keep in touch with them. They come and play with us and we go and play with them. Dey come to our house and we go at their house and just like that. We kept in touch together.

INTERVIEWER: Even now? Do you still see them?

VICTORIA: We see—some of them died. Yeah, some of dem died. Who alive, we still see them.

INTERVIEWER: Where are your parents from?

ABRAHAM: Jamaica.

VICTORIA: Manchester, Jamaica. My mother...she was a Jamaican, and my father was a Jamaican.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about your parents and your grandparents?

VICTORIA: I did not have my grandparents because I just had my mother and my father. It was good. My father wasn't so hot, but (laughs)—he was strict. Me couldn't go nowhere. That's the only thing—

ABRAHAM: Not like today.

VICTORIA: No, no, no! If anybody come and invite us and having a party and—no! Mama said go ask your Papa—Papa said ask your Mama—Mama said no—it was one asking another and they would say no. We never used to go nowhere. We stayed home and played with one another. They had a river, and we go to the river and bathe and all those things. We go to the farm because we had farm, and we go to the farm and at the farm they have mango, pear, lime, we plant rice, plant corn, peas, gungo peas—like that—we have to go to pick it and to bring it home. Sometimes what he do—he goes and work the farm—he goes and he digs the yam or the yucca or whatever and they go to the farm and fry them. He go to Colon on Friday. He goes to the farm on Friday and we gotta go with him and climb the tree and pick the lime. He farmed the mango and things like that and put in the bag with the lime, in the bag when it's not the picking time. Peas time, because that's when it was not the corn, it's not all the time. When it's not time, we have to look, go with him for food. We go with him to plant the corn and rice. He'd walk and he'd dig a hole and we'd have to go behind him and put the rice in the hole and plant it. And when you finished that out, we go home and eat and go and bathe and go and sleep and things like that.

INTERVIEWER: So, all of you were farmers?

VICTORIA: (laughs) All of us were farmers, because that's what we, ya know, that's what we do, because we didn't work for nobody we only work for ourself. You gotta bring the load from—ya know, where the school is, if they were coming down from Panama by the school, there are farmers over there and we go there with him and ask them to pick up all these things and bring it home. When we bring it home we put it in bags and Friday, a boat comes out from sea, to the bridge on the river. The boat come right there, no, the boat come on the outside, on the sea. And the river come right to the bridge. So they have a man who take the load in a boat and take it out to the big boat on the outside—the ship—that ship is gonna take the load to Colon. They put it right there in the entrance of Colon, where the call it Folks River. Right there is where the boat—they used to have a dock there. And that's the dock the boats go and [unclear] in the morning and land there. The people go there and get the load, whatever they're selling, and go sit down on the sidewalk in Panama right there, sit there and put their things there and sell it. They sell the lime, the mango, the yucca—everything, they sell it right there, that comes on the load. People will come from outside and they come and buy whatever they want. Whatever they don't sell, well they have to give it away. They never bring it back, they sell it to get rid of it. When he finished selling those things then the man come and buy whatever my mom told him to buy and then he bring back the money to my mother—or if my mother want him to buy things for her with that money—bring those things to my mother.

ABRAHAM: When the boat takes the load over, you have to walk.

VICTORIA: It was so bad when you are going you have to take two shoes. The shoes stink. (laughs)

ABRAHAM: When the boat takes the load over, they have to walk over. While the boat is goin' this way, they are goin' that way. When they are finished in the evening, they have to walk ... Sometime you have to take your shoes and tie them around your neck...

INTERVIEWER: Okay. How did your parents get to Panama from Jamaica?

VICTORIA: Well, my mother say that our aunt was coming to Panama with her husband—our uncle and aunt—and the aunt brought her to Panama. She came to Panama and she was staying in Panama with her aunt, then all of a sudden, one day, a lady arrived and said to come and look for her. She said, “I am your mother and I come for you.” “No, my mother is in Jamaica.” “I am your mother, and I have come to get you.” Asked the aunt and uncle—you go on with them? She said yes. She is my mother and so, okay she go and she get herself ready and when my aunt coming down, she was in school and everything over there in Panama. They call her in and the woman come in and ask her, “You wanna work in Panama with Cativa with your mother?” She said, “Yes.” She said, “You sure it’s your mother?” And she said, “Yes.” “If you go to Cativa and you don’t like the place and they don’t treat you good, you can come back. We will receive you.” She went with them and when she went to Cativa, she came to find out this lady was not her mother. So, they didn’t treat her so hot but she stay with them and they work her and work her and work her and work her. My father came in and had tea with her. They had a friendship. She cannot stay no more with them. It was a problem. They told her she had to get out. He went to the government and the government gave him a little land and tell him he can build a house here. We build a house there, and after he build a house there. And he moved my mother here. They lived here together and then afterward, they start having children—children after children after children and more children. (laughs)

ABRAHAM: You asked what time she came here. She came here in 1908.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so she was a little girl. And how did your father get —?

VICTORIA: I don’t know. That’s one story I don’t know—I know he was a Jamaican but how he come here, I don’t know. He never tell us. Because when you’re children they don’t wanna tell you what it is, they don’t wanna tell you when you born, they don’t wanna tell you nothing like those things. They never tell us. My mother tell us stories, but he never tell us stories. I don’t know year he was born. All I know is his name was Antonio Bay – that was his name. That’s all I know. He was a Jamaican, too.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember when you were younger—your parents’ friends—did they come over to the house?

VICTORIA: Yes, they had some friends that used to come.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about them? Did they have dinners together?

VICTORIA: Yes, they come on Sunday. They come from Colon on Sunday. They come to our house and my mother cook—and when she cook, everybody eat. When they finish eat and everything and time comes, they left and go back to Colon. And anytime he go to Colon—my mother never used to go to Colon. Whenever father go to Colon, he go and visit them. My mother don't go to Colon. My mother had all of us right at that place. There was about ten of us in that house and I was born there, and my mother never been to outside there. She had all her baby inside there, and you don't even know. She only...They call the midwife. The midwife come and you hear, "Ahh, ahh, ahh!" That's it (laughs)—and that's it, nothing more. That lady will come for nine days. She wash and she bathe the baby, and after she bathed the baby, she clean up my mother and everything and take up the dirty clothes and take it to her house. She come back and do the same thing for nine days. I don't know if they pay her. If they pay her or don't pay her, I don't know that part. But she do a nine-day job. She never been to a doctor. To see whether she was in good health or not good health.

INTERVIEWER: You were talking a little bit earlier about school and you said that they didn't have a school, but there was a time when they had a teacher there. Do you remember the teacher or what he was like?

VICTORIA: We had a man teacher. That man teacher came but I don't remember his name. It was a Spanish man, or a Spanish school, a Spanish school with a man teacher.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. What were your teachers and the other students that were there what were their cultural/racial backgrounds? Were they also black or ?

VICTORIA: No, they was all black. All of us were black, no Spanish. No Spanish.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of music did you grow up listening to?

VICTORIA: Congo! (laughs) Pure congo. That's what we had. When it's Carnival season, everybody dress up in the, ya know, they put on the clothes and paint up themselves and look like the devil, and they start to whip, whip, whip. And all they have is the recipe for the Congo. That's all we used to have there is Congo.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have a favorite singer or favorite song – something you can remember?

VICTORIA: They sing nowadays the same thing for Congo and beating the drum and going on and they don't speak like us, they have a different dialect that they speak. Every carnival in March or April, when they have that season, Carnival season, they come out and all night they're there and day they have that song and they dancing and this one go and that one go—they leave from here and go to Colon. The different station. They go

outside and they play outside. That carnival was for three days, that go on for three days. In three days' time, they catching the devil and the devil run all over the place and the place hot and he would finish running. They would catch up to him and carry him to the shop go to where this man had a store, and the man there would pay him some money and they would christen him and everything, and leave him there. And Carnival over. Bands would come from different places and play in Colon. It was for three nights, Saturday, Sunday and Monday. They play three nights—Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, all night they are playing—until the carnival is finished.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, well what music do you listen to now? What kind of music? That you like right now? Do you still listen to the Congo music? Or do you listen to other things?

VICTORIA: I don't bother with the music just in the church. I don't go where they are either. We used to go where they are and I used to play—what I used to follow a lot when I was a child was, the call it the hippy hoppa...the jump up beat. I used to entertain myself because I never used to go to our church. When I was a child, all we had before was Catholic. Then I did go to the Catholic Church. Now, I don't go to the Catholic Church, where they have the procession and things...forward and backward and forward and backward. I go from here and go to the Christian church. I use my church song—that's where I listen.

INTERVIEWER: What about food? What's your favorite food? What kind of food do you like to eat and cook?

VICTORIA: We grew up eating—like yucca and yam—we only eat rice on Sunday.

INTERVIEWER: Other days it was yucca —?

VICTORIA: Yucca, yams, banana, sweet potato and those kind of potato called sweet potato now, the yam, we never had that kind. We have another kind. That's what we used to use. People would go fishing. He would leave the line out and go working and come back. We go together in the morning and sit in a boat and there was no port, but the boat would go up on the side and put your line and fishing on the boat and fishing he catch and I catch. We go there and we go there and we try when we have enough we go home. I clean my fish. I take a knife and I clean my fish. I go home and get my lime and wash it and clean it. My father had a farm and I went and got food.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So you went fishing?

VICTORIA: I went fishing.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have a favorite recipe that you could share with us, your favorite thing that you cook?

VICTORIA: The most thing I used to cook is, um, codfish. Codfish and food. My favorite dish is rice and peas—but red peas—red peas, coconut and chicken. The chicken sometimes would mix with pork. Sometime if anybody bring fish, we buy fish, but we eat that but not so often.

INTERVIEWER: What are some of your favorite things?

VICTORIA: Things? (laughs) My favorite thing. (laughs) I never use expressions, My father never use expressions. My mother never use expressions. They never like it. (laughs) ...Anything that, you know...

INTERVIEWER: I know it's hard to think on the spot, what are these things, sometimes they come to you... All right, what denomination are you in church?

VICTORIA: Pentecostal.

INTERVIEWER: What role does religion play in your life?

VICTORIA: It does a lot of things to me. When I hear the word sometime I sit in church and you hear the word, when the service finish, I think, "Why?" It's hard. What they're saying is what I really I know in my mind. It's what I'm thinking in my mind. The bible say you have to love your enemy. It don't say hate them. And it say do unto others as you will want them to do to you. So, that's what I take down and the denomination—the word—and very much the music. When I think what God had to bear for me, I wouldn't go through it—even though I have my children—I wouldn't have gone one of mine. I don't wanna. I love them so much that I wouldn't give, and he sent him and he die for us and we are so ungrateful that we don't even want to serve him. So I know very much when I get saved I know that there is a God and if it wasn't to him we wouldn't be here today, and he who keeping us alive. He wake me up this morning in my right mind. I sit here with you and speaking to you. He wake me this morning in my right mind. So, that's why I have to love him because he love me first and I love him, too. He keep me in my right mind. A lot of them, the age people, the age I have, and they have to walk in with the walker or they're laying in a bed. I walk, I boat and I do what little work I can do. I be. He give me life. The word of God is life. When I think of the goodness of Jesus and what he has done for me. My soul cries out, "Oh, Hallelujah! Count God for saving me!"

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever play sports as a child?

VICTORIA: I like baseball, football, basketball, but I like the baseball more than others. I go to the baseball game. My husband used to play ball and I used to go with him, go to the stadium, sit down, and watch him play the ball and I go all around. I went to the States and the same thing, to the young people play. I like baseball. I watch all the games. I love baseball. I try to play. (laughs) I could hit the ball. When I go on picnic—when I go to picnic in Panama and it is Fourth of July and then we go to place to spend time—play ball, run up and down, things like that. I like to go to dances in Colon

and in carnival season. I go and I dance and I work, I come home. I do what I have to do and I go to carnival and I stay there all night. Sometimes I leave there and straight to work. Very tiring.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember anything about U.S. culture when you were growing up?

VICTORIA: Uh-uh.

INTERVIEWER: Not really. Can you tell us your views about West Indian ancestry?

VICTORIA: No, what is that?

INTERVIEWER: Okay, just about being West Indian or of being of West Indian descent, your parents coming from Jamaica how do you feel about that?

VICTORIA: Very good. It don't matter to me. I say, I tell the people in my life, I say, "I wouldn't want a Spanish mother or father," because you're with them and you do the best for them. But when they're finished with you, you're still a chumbo. You telling them you is not a chumbo. What they calling you because you're black and you speak English you is a chumbo. They don't like you because you're a chumbo. Any little thing they can tell you, "Go home to your country." Because we used to go and watch a parade in Colon and we're at a parade and the place so full and we ask our mother. "Where you come from? This is not your country." My father (laughs) Why we not come here? My mother was a good woman. We never wanted to go to school. My father don't want us to go nowhere. We have to take care of the farm. We have to feed the chicken. He never want us to go to school. Nobody like him. Only think I liked him for, he brought us up in the right way. He teach us, "Respect the people. Obey."

When we see people, we say "Good morning" or "Good evening." If we did something we gotta take it. If we go home and complain, we are getting another one. I bring up my children—I don't treat them like that—but I train them, anybody give you something, "Thank." You want something, "Please." I'll take them out and tell them to sit down here and they don't move. I like the way he brought us and raise us but certain things, no.

INTERVIEWER: You were talking a little bit about treatment when you were growing up, when you went to the parade and how they would treat you differently because you were West Indian, do you feel that that's still true today? That because of your race, because you're West Indian, people treat you differently?

VICTORIA: Nowadays, these Spanish, they're not so bad like those. The Spanish people, the old-time Spanish people are black and they look just like me but they don't like you because you're here and you're Jamaican. And they'll tell you about it. That's the only thing with them. I like them and I forgive them because they don't know better, you know. But when my mama was in Panama growing up, she used to go to school, that's where she used to go, and they used to call her "cholita" and that's why she never liked them and never get along with them—she try to get along with them. They never

like her. I overlook them because they don't know better. If you know better you do better. You know why they call you so? Because they know you get mad when they call you that, call you a chumbo. You call them a "panya," they don't like it either.

INTERVIEWER: How do you think knowing English affected you—positively or negatively?

VICTORIA: It don't affect me. I may not speak it properly. We don't call the things right. I don't speak English and I don't speak Spanish right. I get kinda embarrassed because I can't speak it properly.

INTERVIEWER: How did you meet your husband?

VICTORIA: (laughs) I will give ya a good story. When I met him, I was living in a building by myself. I was living like here in the building and my mother was living on the other side of the building, not the same building, but the house was close together. And then he started to make love to me and I tell him I don't want to. (laughs) But in Spanish you know? ... One day my sister come and say don't friend with him because his mother don't want you to friend with him. He kept coming and coming and coming... on the 24th of December in 1948, '47... I came in and tell him—I wanna live with him. In those times if you wanna live with a man or marry—you just do what you like. We have a baby, he take responsibility. I don't have no problem with him. I go where I want, I go when I want. Not him asking where I went, who you go with, if I get my money if I spend it—I don't have no problem with him. I used to work and we take the same truck and go to work. He go one side and I go the other side. I never had no problem.

INTERVIEWER: What about your children? Can you tell us a little about your children and their lives?

VICTORIA: The only one give me trouble—our two boy, three boy—I don't have no problem with them. I don't have no problem with them. The two girl in the state, one boy in the state. One here, two here, one is—you know the one here. He is the sixth son. He is the only one that give me problem. He was the only one who wanted to give me problem. He was going to school and his aunt told him she wanted to take him to the states. He wanted to stop and go to the states. He didn't want to continue his school because he wanted to go to the states. At the last minute she tell me she couldn't take him to the state because they want to live in the army and she don't want the country to bother her. When he got the report of that, he get sad and he didn't go back to school. He went to look for a job. I didn't know he was looking at job, and one day I was sitting here and a guy came and asked—they call him "bimbo" ... He was 15 year and he go and to work. I want him to go to school. He can't go to work and go to school. He get a job and started to work and he receiving the money. And the money comin' in. He start to drink, drink, drink and he get turned out. I used to talk to him. I pray a lot. I remember once... his wife tell me she not comin' back and I say why and I start to worry. To me, he really a good person but he just drinking and driving a car and one time they have to call me—as a mother, I start to worry, worry, worry. And I really knew a girlfriend and

she used to come here. One night, I say to him, “When you go to work, go to work and come home.” He say, “Okay, I try.” The girl—they never give me no trouble. Juanita—she never give me no trouble. I never have to be running behind ‘em.... We are not going to uphold it here. When she came to the States, my granddaughter come to me and say, “Granny, I hear when my mother—” ... Get a room in Panama and take her to Panama. The next one do the same thing. I tell her the same thing—he get a room in Panama. They make a mistake and make a mistake.

INTERVIEWER: Do all of the kids consider themselves West Indian or Panamanian or both?

VICTORIA: Well, we never really asked them. One that really don’t interested in Panamanian is Diana. She don’t even want to speak the language. But Juanita she and them is good friends. All of them is good friends with Spanish, the boys and the girls. The youngest one is only one that give me a hard time with it... I still trying.

INTERVIEWER: When did you travel to the U.S. and where did you go?

VICTORIA: I went to New York many times—New York City.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. You only went to visit.

VICTORIA: Visit, yes. Visit. Tourist.

INTERVIEWER: How was your experience there? How did you feel when you were there?

VICTORIA: Well, the hardest thing for me over there was the cold. The cold, that’s the only thing. But I like it because there were different places to go. They used to take me every place to go and I could go and travel and buy if I want anything and things like that. They treat me very good when I go over here. I tell Diana move...Miami. I really like the place because the clothing—the clothing buy. But they still treat me very good. I have no complaint about them. I really like the place.

INTERVIEWER: And the people that found out that Panamanian—did they treat you?

VICTORIA: Yeah, they treat me good. They were friend—they were American—they really treat me good.

INTERVIEWER: All right. If you could send a message to the younger generation in the community, what would you tell them?

VICTORIA: What I would tell them is this—they—I especially encourage the girls, the women, is not everything that glitter is gold, sometimes is silver, sometimes is brass. You have to be careful. If you see a boy coming to you, you have to be careful, check him out. They say, “Is your mama working?” Is not working and he’s wanting to come on

you, you tell him plain, “I will live with my mother. I need a place to live. I want to. I want somebody to help me.” You want somebody who can help – you can’t buy bread, you have a child—what you gonna give it? You can’t even buy it can of milk? You ask me? Study! Education is worth value. Education in my time never buy you nothing education, value, no. If ya have a man and ya don’t want him not treatin’ ya good, ya not gettin’ a good treatment, go and work. You have an education, all you got to do go and work. I tell them wait. You have to see that the guy is very entrusted in you. You have to go out everyday and work and trust him and him sit at home and you work—that can’t work. I tell my granddaughter her, everyday, “Look up, don’t look down.” Put something in your head. You read and you get a job. A job. You have to have a certificate—a university certificate. Diploma. And you get a job. You gotta speak English and Spanish. Certificate. Six-year. University. If you don’t have none, what you gonna live off of? What are you going to live off of? If he try to twist you around, you take it, because you can’t help yourself. But if you put something up here, and you take a thing and he come through the door and ain’t nothing right, make the door hit him in the back. (laughs) I tell them strangers, girls, I tell them –(Spanish)

You should make him do the right thing. Find a place and put you. That’s the first thing he’s supposed to do. If they don’t wanna be married to you but you pay the bill, let him marry to you. Make him find a place and take care of you. Look somebody that will take care of you. Open your eye and think—if you can read, you can write, you get a job. You have to have something here. If not, you can’t get a job... I encourage them to go to school. Go to school! There’s a benefit there... But now, you gotta come with it. And now I try to tell them about English. They don’t wanna hear it. (Spanish)

INTERVIEWER: I don’t know if there’s anything else that you wanted to say?

VICTORIA: I really had a rough time in this place. This Cativa was bush you come here to live. I was living outside. I was working and I wasn’t making enough. (Spanish) He say, “Okay, no problem.” I can work and fix the place and build a house. When I move, I went to pay a gentleman in rent. The gentleman be very good to me to build a house and afterward I can’t pay the rent and I move. And that okay. Not a choice, I had to follow. We came here and we live here and then what I used to do, in morning, I get up early—do what I have to do—cook and everything. I have my sister living over here and I put out my clothes and they nice and dry. I go to bed. The place around here is finished, but those times was like, “No! You gonna put up a piece of board or put up a piece of something and make a door and live.” You have to build a lock so it keep them coming in. First time we live here we don’t know about lock. Because you close the door and they gone. You can’t do that now. We lock the door. Everybody, they—the people selling the medication there—we don’t have no more drugstore near and we no have nobody to disturb us... I get so nervous... And we have to get them outta here. We don’t have that problem now.

ABRAHAM: There was no house. Over there... I stay over here. She used to complain, but these people started now up to the hill. It’s all over. She just appreciate now all the things.

INTERVIEWER: You built this house?

ABRAHAM: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And it's still here!

VICTORIA: We don't got a problem or nothing.

ABRAHAM: When we come here, when it's raining, sometime the water leak. Sometime the water reach our knee—just the other day. We come and cross the bridge here. I have no problem. Just a little piece of paper... When we come in here it was a house, no road, no nothing. Sometime you put on a sneaker and then you have your shoes and you go down. But gradually they come in and they build a road...

INTERVIEWER: Okay. What was your year of birth? What year were you born?

VICTORIA: In 1926.

INTERVIEWER: The last level of school that you did?

VICTORIA: Third grade.

INTERVIEWER: You said you were working at some point. Where did you work? What was your job?

VICTORIA: My work was domestic.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. When you did work, who did you work for? What was the family like?

VICTORIA: It was American. Soldiers. Puerto Rican.

INTERVIEWER: How did they treat you?

VICTORIA: Good. I have no complaints. They treat me very good.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get that job?

VICTORIA: Walk from house to house. (laughs) "Need a maid?" "No." "Need a maid?" "Yes." "What can you do?" "Wash, iron." And I worked in a laundry, too.

INTERVIEWER: Were their soldiers just around?

VICTORIA: No, the American soldiers live on the base who employed me. So I did a job. I wash and iron and clean, sweep maybe, polish. When I was washing and working

in the laundry—a big laundry—I used to iron and deliver clothes. I went to a friend and she found me a job there. I went there and worked one year with the people and they give me a reduction, the place started layin' of people and they lay me off so I didn't work no more no maid work.

INTERVIEWER: What's the name of that base?

VICTORIA: What did they call it? Oh um, Coco Solito they call it. (Spanish) I work in Coco Solito...

INTERVIEWER: You said your father was very strict. Did he beat you, too?

VICTORIA: Yes. You get beat by your papa .. Bad, bad bad bad, bad, bad—my mother never beat us. My father beat us.

INTERVIEWER: Did all the other neighbors used to beat their children, too?

VICTORIA: No. There were some neighbors that—they never used to sit and beat them. I really never see. I took a passport to my mother because I wanted to take her and my sister wanted to go to New York. She never want to go. I wanted to take her and when I come back with the passport and I go to get a passport and the visa to go, she said she not going and I want her to go and she won't go.

INTERVIEWER: What year was that?

VICTORIA: That was in 1985 or what?

INTERVIEWER: That was your first trip?

VICTORIA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How many times have you gone since?

VICTORIA: Three or four times. I went to New York two times. I went to Miami once. I go to New Jersey, too, one time—I went to Jersey twice. I went from Miami to Jersey. I stay in Jersey but in the same year I travel from one doctor to another doctor. And I went to, I think the place I went to was Jersey.

INTERVIEWER: What did you think of New Jersey?

VICTORIA: Well, I didn't like it so much because it's too cold. I really can't take the cold. And the next thing I learn is they too selfish.

INTERVIEWER: They're too selfish.

VICTORIA: They don't seem all right. I don't like it. I don't think I ever see anybody, if you don't have a car, don't go there. There no bus. The only bus I see is the school bus. It come in the morning and took the children there and come back in the evening to bring 'em back home. No like Jersey. You take a car and you leave it some places—you take the train and leave your car and go to the doctor and come back and take the train. You can't do in Jersey.

INTERVIEWER: What did you think about the Atlanta?

VICTORIA: For me, the worst place.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

VICTORIA: You don't get no bus to take you no where and no taxi to take you no where. If you don't have your own car, you cannot move. You have to have a car, that's the only thing. You don't have nobody to take you in the morning or the evening. The houses are separated far from each other. No, the houses aren't so far. My daughter live there, one here, one here. You have to go so far to the store. You have to go so far.

INTERVIEWER: So, what did you think about the plane? The experience of being on the plane?

VICTORIA: I took a plane, too. I never had no problem on the plane. I had no problem on the plane. No problem. I never have that problem with the ears.

INTERVIEWER: Do you dress up to go on the plane?

VICTORIA: No.

INTERVIEWER: You have a picture getting on a plane.

VICTORIA: (laughs) That picture when I was going to in New York. Then at the airport, they had the man who would come out and take your picture when you're getting on the plane. That's our first trip when I made that. I like it over there, I like it in New York. I go to work and I come out and I lock my door and when I go out and know the places and I go to the store—it's good for me because I had my granddaughter there, and I had my friend from here lived there. And they lived close to one another. My daughter lived here and so, I leave from here and I go there and I leave from that one and see her. I love it... The first time I go there in 1975. I love it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you want to go back there?

VICTORIA: He don't like to go there. It's the cold.

ABRAHAM: I have a problem with the train. I travel in '88, travel in '89, '94, then I travel in '95. But this time in '95, I leave here in October and I fly from here to Miami

and from Miami to Memphis, Tennessee. I went to the convocation for the church. That's cold. This year. So after we finish we go back to New York and they want me to stay for December. I'm cold, I'm getting cold. And one day, on the 17th of December we went out walking and while we was we took the subway and when we came out snow came down.

INTERVIEWER: That was it!

ABRAHAM: I said, "I feel the cold coming up through the pants! I had on long johnnies. I feel it up to my bones!" So I went home. I didn't say anything to my daughter. I tell the husband, "I'm leaving tomorrow. Call the airline. Don't tell my daughter. Call the airline. It's cold." And there was only one space and I took it. So when she came home from work her husband tell her, "Your father leaving tomorrow!" She come over, "You can't do this to me!" I say, "I'm leaving this place! I have a pain in my knee and I don't wanna be here. I want my t-shirt on I want my shorts and I'm still cold and I want to be home! I ain't coming back!"

VICTORIA: I'll go other times. In summer it's not freezing.

ABRAHAM: I go for the church and the convocation is in November. It's cold to me. So, I leave it alone. We leave in morning, drive the whole day, whole night, whole day. We leave New York at 10:00 in the morning and travel all day in one of these long buses. We travel all night. We came out to a place where snow was falling. I didn't want to come out of the bus. They say, "Come out and stretch your foot." Everywhere we stopped, people would eat, eat, eat. People can eat in America! They eat! Ok I came out and try myself at a place... They don't fry nothing, bake everything. People treat you very good and it's familiar. I reach in 4:00 in the evening; they didn't have any space for me. They put up in one of these Holiday Inns. I didn't have to pay for that, they put me up. I just don't wanna go back. When I came off on pension in '88, I came off on December '88. In '89 I went over. I was traveling. The church don't pay you to travel. You have delegates from Africa and from Jamaica and from Haiti. They have different delegates to get the reforms. Jamaica don't get the reforms - me and the bishop from Jamaica are very good friends. What he does, he go to the states now and preach in churches and some of the churches when you go there, they take \$300 or \$400 and give. I go to several churches in the states in New York. Sometimes I go, one time I go to and preach at two churches... And I'm not against it but I don't like it. I have a lot of friends who go to states maybe twice a year or so to get some money. But not me.

INTERVIEWER: What's the name of the church?

ABRAHAM: Church of God and Christ. The section—you turn at your right, that's where we are here. We are on Central and just about 200 to 400, 500 feet from there on the right, we have one in Buena Vista and we have one in ... and when you turn from that side, we have one on Corvair – Corvair is place where when you walk from the stone place, you will walk one hour and go into the jungle. We have a church inside. When I

go there I spend a week because you can't go and come back. There's no sense. It's too tiresome. We leave Monday take 9:00 bus. Bus maybe reach there, 12: 00. We come out, then, some of them go the shop and buy soda. Our luggage and whatever we take on the bus we have walking. We gotta go twice a year. I go in March and I go in September. When I go in September, I can't go in this shoes. I have to buy a sneaker when I go down then. I got some jeans there, I roll them up. They come up to here.

INTERVIEWER: When you played baseball, did you ever play outside of Panama? Outside of the country?

ABRAHAM: I used to play baseball – I started play on a young league. I used to play in Colon there. I represented the city. I represented the city for about twelve years. I never live in Colon, but I live in Cativa. I was an international player. We go to Mexico, they leave me to carry delegate. I was very discouraged. I wanted to go to Mexico. They leave me. The team lose. The next year, we go to Puerto Rico and Cuba. So, I wasn't so interested but I was practicing and practicing. Friend of mine was very good player. But when he was practicing, he practiced like he was playing. When I practicing, you see me practicing, you say, "Well, he not that good." But when they get to start and I'm the pitcher, you can put your pot on the fire because if we're in Colon, we're gonna win the game. For 12 years, I never lose a game out of the city of Colon—from Panama City, we go up to Cherokee. We go der twice. We win the trophy and everything. So, we went to Cuba. We were gonna go to the stadium and practice. Boy, did we practice! I throw the ball 90 miles an hour or what it is. I don't give up. The recruiters are there—if you're timid you can't make it. You need to have courage. So, when they come now they're going to Cuba. I go up. They say, "Unfortunately, we can't take you because in practice, he have a faster pitch," he look at the watch and the watch pick up the speed of the ball and register it—so, he had a percentage over me in the practicing. But I don't care. I say, "Okay. This is what happen. You all take him. You gonna be sorry you leave me." But at the same time, I was selected to play in the Brooklyn Farm Team that same year. Okay. They in Cuba. I stayed there listening to the game, the opening of the game... The first one, the fellow hit a home run. The second one hit a double. The third one hit a triple. The fourth ball put the mitt and the ball and the mound—they walk him! They say they sorry they leave me—it's too late! They spoke to me, "I'm getting ready to go to the farm team in Brooklyn." So, when the contract came down, my boss told me—which was the white man—he liked the sport. Every time I go practice and play, he lived in Margarita and would go to the game. He told me, he said, "If you gonna go and play for the Brooklyn Farm Team, I can give you a vacation for six months without pay but security that you have a job." If I go and I don't like it, I can come back and have my job. So, I say, "Okay." We started practicing and getting ready. They send me out in the right field. The manager, in the practicing, said to us, "If you fail in the pitching, you can play outfield." When I was out there, a man said, "I want you to leave this game and serve me." I look back, and the manager said, if the ball come to the center to the right, I have to go and grab that ball. When it was the next man's turn and I stand still, I heard a voice again to me when I was in the field, "I want you to leave this game because this game is of the world, and I want you to serve me." I become conscious that the lord is speaking to me. When they finished with the center field, they call me in and they put me

to pitch. I throw the ball at a straight 90. They saw it on their watch. In curve, I would throw 80, sometimes 79. Change of pace, I can bring it down sometime 60 miles. I was standing 60 feet out from the bottom. I throw that ball without my speed. I throw the ball easy like that. So the man swing and the ball was still there. I was good. But when I go to pitch now, I find that I'm timid. I don't wanna pitch the ball with that speed because I fear I might hit the person. So I miss outside. The manger tell me, "What happened? I want you to throw fast ball like 90!" The ball don't develop the speed. I don't feel right. He said to me, "Come on! What's wrong with you?" I said, "Nothing. I don't know." He said, "Run 100 feet. Take it five times. Then you come back and you get up and fire the ball." I did it. I come back. When I pitch, I can't throw the ball. He said, "Listen, man!" That's what the manager said. "Pitch it, man!" One time, she was in the stadium and the game was almost tied. I believe the game was tied. A fellow come up to bat and I can't strike him out. He very good. And I call the catcher and I tell him, let's take him out of the game. That was all right. There's a way you can throw a ball that you can hit him. And I did! And we won the game. I won the game. I took him out of the game. So, the manager said to me, "Okay, go back there. What's wrong with you?" I said, "Nothing, I don't know." When I was waiting in the right field, I run and catch a few balls. I heard a voice say to me again, "I told you to leave this game. I want you to serve me." I already was in the church—baptized and everything. I told everybody in church that I'm gonna play ball, so I go and play ball. "Leave this game right now!" I walked in. So, the manger said, "What happened?" I said, "I not going to play. I not going to sign the contract to play." I started to walk away. Lots of spectators go to practice. I show them how to hold certain ball and throw it and so on. So I started to take off my uniform. I say to a friend of mine, "You want my uniform?" He say, "What wrong with you?" I say, "I ain't going to sign the contract." He say, "But I have the contract here for you to sign because by next week you supposed to leave here. And after this practice today, you sign the contract and you get a check for \$5,000 so you can leave some money for your wife and you can take a little with you" I say, "I ain't going, I ain't signing up. I take off my clothes" I give away this uniform. I give away me shoes. I take off my sweat socks and sweatshirt and give it away. The hat, I give it away. I give away me mitt. They say I was crazy. They say, "You gone crazy!" I walk out of the stadium and go in the shower. I come out with me clothes on. "What you gonna do?" I say, "I'm gonna serve the lord." Two months – three months – to come back. You go to the farm and you have to practice for two months. I ain't going. Your mother say, "Boy, you gone crazy! We lose one of the best" or whatever. I gone to serve the lord. Was about six of us—I went. I believe two die in accidents. When you go over there you get money and everything. So, I began to serve the lord. We didn't have my church here like in Colon. After I remain there, the old man was sick. Everybody leave. Sometime in the church, it's only me and him. Sometime on Sunday there were two old lady. The old man—we had to put him in a home. He died. The one who take over the church get a piece of land over here for the church. The bishop gone to the states to work in the states. Me and him didn't have a problem. But some of these people come from the states. They would see you with your work and say, "A man like you? I will give you my church. You can run my church!" We don't take that. You suffer to build a church and you give it to a stranger you don't know? They came down from the states—Bishop Washington, he died. Bishop Robinson, he died, too. Bishop Hayes he died, too. Other bishop came

down and promising church and he leave now. He leave his son in charge. He the administrator. He gone said they gonna give him a church over there. When he went there, nobody gave him no church. A lady get a basement—one of the basements—and they start a little work there, and when the time come, with winter and so on they catch pneumonia, they don't know what happen and get sick in the winter season when the son come back one week after his father died, he suffer with leukemia and he gone through the winter without carry on his uniform. See, when you go from here to here, you don't feel the cold but when you have a weakness, you know what it is. Because the body knows what the hotness feels like. He went and he buried his father and he came back. When he came back he had a cold but he stay home—cold, cold, cold, cough, cough, cough. Til at last... When they took him to the hospital, the doctor said, “Why you bring this man here now? He's almost died! From the time he been coughing, you should bring him!” “We tried but he gone because the cold covered his lungs and then he suffered with leukemia making it worse.” He responsible for all the churches. He died. I went to look for him like last night and when I reach here the phone ring, Bishop Moody come over. We buried him. They have to put someone in charge of the work. But in my service, the lord told me one day—he said listen, we going to stay in this church, and we going to have two churches—Colon and Cativa. Then we have a mission over there. A lady from the Jehovah Witness raise a problem with the army and us because she living on this side, she wanted to open a Jehovah Witnesses because some of the soldiers were without church. So, they would go over to our church because they was living over here. So, when Bishop Moody come around, I would go every second Sunday and I would preach, you know. They call a meeting with all the big shots, he asked me, “Who is the school superintendent?” I was acting at that time. I say, “I am the person who is acting at the time,” then “Who is the man who we put as administrator?” I say, “Oh no, not me. I don't have that marriage and I'm going to the states because my family's over there.” The Shepherd, he a young man and he was a Sunday School superintendent. “Tell that shepherd get up now!” I say, “I'm not qualified!” He said I am the best person. Everybody said I am the person. I have been here and I have been here and I am the person. That's it. I have the knowledge. I've been here and I've been here. Bishop Moody made it. That's how I come to be in the church.

INTERVIEWER: And leave the baseball behind.

ABRAHAM: They come here to beg me to train and all that.

INTERVIEWER: But you had a more important job.

ABRAHAM: Yeah. I've been traveling and so on.

INTERVIEWER: How many years of being a pastor?

ABRAHAM: It gonna be about—I believe it about '65—I came in the church in '62 and the old man get sick in '63. Then I work here with him—I believe he die in '64. And then they appoint me here to be pastor here in '64. So, ya know, '64 and 44 is just 2008. That's how it is. But I never say how much I have in the world. When I baptize, I say, “I

have one day more than you that is baptized today.” God can pick up a child and speak to him. So, I’m very glad I’m here to be with you all and hear my wife and give our testimony. I’m pleased. When I came here—I came here in 1940—and we have a big plantation up on the other side of ...we used to go out on that side... Some of the things she speaks of I’d like to speak of too. My father was not Panamanian, but my father didn’t raise me. My father was from this place here, this island—Nassau. My father become so terrible. He drinking and drinking. That’s why I didn’t drink. My father used to come in and start to drink. I have to get out. My mother leave him and took a next man who was a Jamaican. He’s who raised me. In 1940, we came here. And I was about 12 years old.

INTERVIEWER: I want to come back. I want to interview with you...