

The Latinos Project Oral Histories
The Historical Society of Pennsylvania
with the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies

Luisa Cabello Hansel
Interview Date: March 25, 2003

Interviewer: Joseph Gonzales, Project Ethnographer

Interviewer

Okay, this is the interview with Reverend Luisa Cabello Hansel, and it is on March 25,
2003, at the Iglesia _____, at 150 –

Hansel

162.

Interviewer

162 –

Hansel

West Tioga Street.

Interviewer

West Tioga Street, okay.

Hansel

In Philadelphia.

Interviewer

In Philadelphia, okay. So some of the questions start out very simple and then get more
reflexive.

Hansel

Okay.

Interviewer

So, what is your full name and your age?

Hansel

Okay, I am Luisa Cabello Hansel. I'm, I am 49 years old.

Interviewer

The Latinos Project Oral Histories
Luisa Cabello Hansel
March 25, 2003

Forty-nine, so you were born –

Hansel
'53.

Interviewer
'53.

Hansel
Um-hm, and I have a [UNCLEAR].

Interviewer
Wow. You'll have to have a, a, what do they call it? [UNCLEAR]

Hansel
[UNCLEAR]

Interviewer
Yes, yes. How many people are in your immediate family?

Hansel
There's my _____, and my two girls, Nastasia, who is eleven, and Tenia
who is four and a half.

Interviewer
And how, how would you describe the work that you do?

Hansel
I am a pastor at _____ Lutheran Church, and what they do basically is to bring the
word of God and look for the transformation in the lives of those who are here including
myself and the life of our community. And I play a leadership role in, in promoting what
I deliver, the, the, closer to the will of God for our life.

Interviewer
Okay. Where are you originally from?

Hansel
I was born in Santiago in Chile, and I lived there until I was 19, and then I moved to
Mexico. I moved it, I lived in Mexico for 15 years, and in between, I went to Brazil,

Argentina and I went back to Chile, and in 1987, '88, I'm sorry, I came to the United States, and I lived in the Bronx in New York.

Interviewer

Okay. Let's see, what, what were your reasons for, for leaving your home country?

Hansel

I thought, I married a Mexican man and [INTERRUPTION]. What, could you –

Interviewer

What were, what were your reasons for leaving your home country?

Hansel

When I married a Mexican man and I moved to live there, that was a little before the coup in Chile. Even when my marriage was very short-lived, I, we were married less than two years, I didn't come back to Chile because basically I was afraid for the political situation there. Then I continued living, _____ and working in Mexico.

Interviewer

Okay, let's see. Where, when you came to the United States, what was your point of entry? Or where was, where was your destination?

Hansel

Okay. I came to, to New York, and I was going to live in New York, and I came through, through that city.

Interviewer

So you came direct to New York?

Hansel

Um-hm, yeah.

Interviewer

And why did you choose that destination?

Hansel

You know.

Interviewer

Well, I know why, but –

Hansel

Yeah, you know why because now I married the American man. That was interesting. I didn't even think about this that way. Yes, I married Patrick, and he was living, I was living, at that time, I was living in Mexico. He was living in, in the Bronx, and we both were, were serving in the inner city, and we just, we decided to live here instead of there.

Interviewer

Okay.

Hansel

And I moved here to, to be with him, to get married with him.

Interviewer

So how, how specifically did you get to the United States? I mean, how did you come over?

Hansel

Simple airplane, yeah. Yeah. Legally.

Interviewer

Legally, so there was no –

Hansel

I have, I have –

Interviewer

Confusion or?

Hansel

Yeah. I was before in the United States, and I have a permanent Visa, then I have no problem coming here. The problem was to, to stay, of course, then I had to change my, my immigration status.

Interviewer

Um-hm. Are you, are you a citizen now?

Hansel

No, I am not. I am not.

Interviewer

Are you, is that something that you will try to, to do, or?

Hansel

You know what? I am a Mexican citizen, and I didn't want to lose my Latin American citizenship, and I didn't want to, to be, to get a citizenship here, but right now, I can keep both, then I am applying to get the American citizenship and keep also the Mexican one.

Interviewer

So you'll keep your dual –

Hansel

Yeah.

Interviewer

You'll have, so you'll have the dual citizen.

Hansel

Now it is possible.

Interviewer

Okay.

Hansel

Yeah, since a year or a little more ago.

Interviewer

Right.

Hansel

Yeah.

Interviewer

Okay. So how long have you been in, in Philadelphia?

Hansel

Nine years.

Interviewer

Nine years? And what, what brought you to Philadelphia?

Hansel

My husband was called to start this church and there was a, this was an empty building.

It used to be a German church here that closed, and, because the neighborhood changed

radically, became mostly Latin America, Puerto Rican, and the Lutheran church decided to start a new mission here, and they invited us to come here to, to do this work. Then Patrick was a pastor during that time, and we decided to come. While being here, I went to seminary, and I became a pastor in _____.

Interviewer

Okay. Was it, did you go to seminary here in Philadelphia?

Hansel

Yes. Yes.

Interviewer

Okay. Which seminary?

Hansel

It's the, the Philadelphia Lutheran Theological Seminary in Germantown.

Interviewer

Okay, okay. That's interesting that, that this, you see it all over, but that this was a formerly, like you said, a German community, probably German immigrants, and then, but things change.

Hansel

Yes, yes. Yeah.

Interviewer

And that happens all over the city.

Hansel

It does. And now when we go to visit other churches in the suburbs, we always find people who were, who used to be members here or who have someone, some family who was a member of the church, because this used to be actually important, German Lutheran church, like, I suppose, 40 years ago.

Interviewer

Right. Okay. Where, where in Philadelphia do you live?

Hansel

In Olney.

Interviewer

In Olney?

Hansel

Olney, um-hm.

Interviewer

Is that, have you been in that house the entire time or have you lived in other parts of the city?

Hansel

No, we live just in Olney, yeah.

Interviewer

Okay. Why, why did you choose Olney to live in?

Hansel

Because the, the church was near to Olney.

Interviewer

Okay.

Hansel

Yeah.

Interviewer

Okay. How would you describe a typical day in your life in Philadelphia?

Hansel

Well, I don't have many typical days, okay?

Interviewer

Or a given day?

Hansel

A given day. Well, for example, I can start in the morning with a meeting. We have a meeting, pastors meeting every Tuesday where we, we study the Bible lessons for the Sunday, then after that, I come here, I can do some visiting around, paperwork, and at 3:00, children come and they start, the church is full of people coming in and out, and I

have to, for example, look, that they have lunch, have meetings with the staff, see that they, they have what they need, organize this, and after that, I make up a Bible study with adults or something like that.

Interviewer

When you say visiting, like around the neighborhood?

Hansel

Yes.

Interviewer

Visiting community members.

Hansel

Visiting community members, people in the hospital, or, yeah.

Interviewer

So, and then what about home?

Hansel

We divide, my husband and I, divide the activities. It is a very, how do you say, stressful point to be able to, to be in church and at home, because both are very demanding work.

I'm probably busiest _____ in my, in my life because the church can

consume more than 100 of my time – percent, 100% of my time – my home the same.

Interviewer

Right.

Hansel

Then I need to travel in keeping a balance with, between the two.

Interviewer

Okay.

Hansel

Yeah.

Interviewer

Okay. Could you describe a day that you remember, what might be a given day, in your home land? Or, you know, maybe a day that, that you remember most or some memories

of home? I guess for you that would you from being, from when you were young. I mean, you were, you left –

Hansel

I left very young, and, well, I am thinking one big day for me was when my daughter was born, my oldest daughter was born. We adopted my daughter in Chile, and my entire family came together, and we, we were not together for a long time, and that was a, a day of joy and celebration. Going a little further, or a lot farther, I remember before I left Chile when still there was a _____ in power, and going to a demonstration that was just amazing, amazing. Like a million people or more walking in the street and shouting and singing with a lot of joy and hope. I mean still with a lot of innocence about what was coming.

Interviewer

Was it, you were fairly young, I mean you were a teenager then, right?

Hansel

Yes.

Interviewer

Was it typical for people at your age at the time to be political, that politically –

Hansel

Absolutely. Absolutely. Chile was a country that highly politicized. I remember having political discussion when I was seven or eight, yeah.

Interviewer

Wow.

Hansel

Yeah. And I think it was, it's not that I was an unusual child. It's just people in Chile talk so much about politics. It was an everyday discussion, and particularly after the, the, when _____ came to power, it became even more than, but before, you know, Chile had such a wonderful democracy, then we talk a lot about politics.

Interviewer

Okay. What kind of ties do you maintain with, with your home country?

Hansel

With my country?

Interviewer

Um-hm.

Hansel

Well, my entire family, biological family, is in Chile. My parents, both of them, and I have three sisters with married with children, and I have basically my entire family there. And I, I keep in contact with them. I, we call, now we mail all the time, and yeah. And in spite of we are so far physically, we are very close, yeah. We continue just a long conversation, yeah.

Interviewer

So does – uh-huh?

Hansel

Oh, I'm sorry.

Interviewer

No.

Hansel

It's just that I feel that Mexico is also home.

Interviewer

Okay.

Hansel

Yeah. Because I lived there for so many years in my adult life. You know, I went to college there, I started working there, and then I had this job with the communities of Mexico that were so rewarding for me, and I have big ties with Mexico, and I miss Mexico a lot.

Interviewer

Well, and what of, how, what kind of ties do you have with there?

Hansel

People in the community where I worked, you know, women I saw coming out of terrible situations, becoming powerful lovers and loving people. And I know that I have a home there always, no matter what. These are poor people, some of them extremely poor people, and, but I, I know they will be willing to offer me what they can, and I love them dearly. And I miss them.

Interviewer

How do you keep in touch with that community?

Hansel

It is very hard to get in touch with them because even they, the community has not very clear boundaries to send letters or when, I have occasional contact with the people who know them and support, and it, when I go there, unfortunately, I have not been there in many years, but they, I, when, if I go there, I will go to their homes. I know where they live.

Interviewer

Right. Right. It's interesting because that's the way people that come from different parts of the world keep in touch. It's, we don't have the direct, or there's not the direct email or a telephone, and time is different, and the, the way time is measured seems to be different in other places, so it's not, it's not a sign of any kind of neglect or, people know that —

Hansel

Or lack of care. Absolutely.

Interviewer

Or lack of care.

Hansel

Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer

Well, we can, you, we can extend this to both Chile and Mexico. What, what are the things you missed most about each place?

Hansel

Well, about Chile, my family for sure. The mountains. I, I have not, nostalgia?

Interviewer

Nostalgia.

Hansel

Nostalgia for the mountains. They were so part of my life, you know? Every day to see these huge mountains and the ocean. I like people's generosity. People in Chile are so hospitable. I miss my language. The sense of freedom of speaking without thinking twice, you know, what you're going to say. Not translating, but a straight, speaking my language. The smell, the food, of course, _____, [las empinadas], music.

Music, I miss music so much because at this, here you don't hear music from South America. You may hear from Caribbean or, or even Mexico, but you don't hear music from Chile, Argentina, or, what that's really like.

Interviewer

Okay.

Hansel

And for Mexico, I miss people first than anything. But I miss also the beauty of Mexico, the colors. This is that, in Mexico, you can go to any, in any direction, and you are going to have a beautiful place, and you can, you can close or far, and always there is a beautiful place to visit and rich and wonderful. And I miss the, also the language, the music and the people. I love Mexico.

Interviewer

Um-hm, and the food?

Hansel

And the food. Let the, they think _____ Mexican food I have here. It isn't as accessible. And I, I prepare some Mexican food, too.

Interviewer

Let's see. So, Luisa, are there, are there things that you do with your family to stay in touch here, culturally, with either Chile or Mexico? For your daughters mostly?

Hansel

We, well, we, we, we work with Latinos, and we are totally immersed in, in the Latino culture, which is not Mexican or Chilean, but, but is, is still Latino, yeah.

Interviewer

How do you personally maintain your culture or your roots, if, if there's, if anything?

Hansel

Well, my sense of the, of identity, I think it hasn't changed with my experience of life because I left Chile when I was so young and, and I experienced this loss of my Chilean identity, and that was really scary, actually, and difficult. But then, I came to realize that, especially when I came to the United States, that my identity is more like a Latin American person. I feel very clear about that. I am very proud. But I, it seems to me in some way that I really don't belong to Chile anymore, and I don't belong to one specific place, but I, I am very clear about my Latin American identity.

Interviewer

Right. So, I don't, I don't, that might make this next question irrelevant. Are there aspects of your daily life or rituals or anything that you do that keep you connected to, you know, either Chile or Mexico, or like you said, your whole sense of your Latin American, Latino-Americano, identity?

Hansel

That's interesting because I, in spite of so many years away from Chile, I keep coming to the same breakfast every single morning. It's just coffee with bread with cheese – the

same thing. And _____ is really important in terms of keeping our identity, I believe. I, I cook sometimes Chilean or Mexican food. We go out to, to eat, you know, to _____ Colombiano or _____. We go sometimes to celebrations, you know, the Mexican Days in Penn's Landing.

Interviewer

Right, right.

Hansel

Then, I don't know if I have other kinds of rituals. I am thinking.

Interviewer

Or practices.

Hansel

Yeah.

Interviewer

Okay.

Hansel

Well, do you know what? Something important, actually, is, I was thinking during Christmas. We do the [posatas], which is something that is Mexican, and it is, it really, I feel that it keep me kind of close to, to that _____, we celebrate three kings. You know, it's a big celebration here in church, and we give gifts to the kids which is something in Mexico and Puerto Rico also that people give a lot of importance. But we sing every Sunday music here in the church that is Latin American, you know, from all countries in Latin America.

Interviewer

Okay. That's, so you sort of answered the next question already, and it was are there places, is, are there any places in Philadelphia where someone could experience any kind of aspects of your Chilean culture or, that you know of?

Hansel

Unfortunately, for example, there is no restaurant from Chile in Philadelphia. I really don't, I don't, I have a few Chilean friends, but no.

Interviewer

I think that there are some Chileans that I do not know personally but that work with the universities, there might be a musician or writers, but I don't know either of any particular –

Hansel

No, I don't –

Interviewer

Cultural center or events or, I don't know.

Hansel

I went once to, to a celebration of the Chilean Day of Independence, and it was, it was really nice, but I didn't make more kind of people connections there with other people.

Interviewer

Right. In what ways, if any, do you feel you've moved away from, from your culture? Or your, your home identity?

Hansel

You know what? I, I think I suffered this fear of losing my identity when I was in Mexico. For example, when I, I felt that I was losing my Chilean accent, that was, that was difficult. I, when I came here, I have already 14 years here, 14 years here, I felt sometimes that I was losing my Spanish, you know? When you don't remember a word. "How do you say this in Spanish?" And that was also scary, but basically, I think I am the kind of person who is willing all the time to learn something new, and I love to, to know people from other places. It's, and I like to be transformed by the experience of meeting other people. I think it makes us more what is the human race meant to be, and then one thing I love about this country and I love about New York is that you can find

people from all over the world. I think it's so rich and so wonderful. And then it seemed to me that I am not afraid of losing anything at this point of my life. I am more willing to, to receive, and I am not concerned about losing.

Interviewer

Okay.

Hansel

It seems, I never thought about this, but it is, it's basically what I feel.

Interviewer

Okay. That's a good answer. Are there concerns you have about, at this point, about your home country or, or friends and family back home?

Hansel

You know what? Always politics is a concern, you know? I feel that Chile right now is, is an example for the entire world in terms of coming back to democracy after so many years of this terrible dictatorship, and I am really amazed how things can be, can turn around, but I also realize that because of the coup, I lost my innocence in the sense that things are not permanent, and you have to be careful. But the economics is always a concern because right now, for example, with the war, I know that this economical situation in Chile which is already fragile can become very damaged. In relation with Mexico, I feel always, but particularly now, knowing that the, the economical situation is really bad, deep concern for people I know and, because I, in some way, I was closer to the communities in Mexico than in Chile. I am, I would say even more concerned about the poverty. I know that there are people who don't eat, you know, have no food, and I am always thinking that this, it's just painful just to think, you know? And feeling somehow impotent not to be able to, to be a source of, of support for people.

Interviewer

Right. Yeah. What, yeah, you just, I'll just, I, you made me think about, especially when, you know, we live in a country like this, you know, how, sometimes we wish that there was more servitude that we could offer around –

Hansel
Absolutely.

Interviewer
You know, the world.

Hansel
Absolutely.

Interviewer
Or places like that.

Hansel
And you know one thing that is terrible, disturbing for me is the _____ in this country. I experienced poverty in my life, and I know what poverty is in other people's lives, and when I see how much is wasted here, it's, it's painful. It's so, and also make me angry to see that the, there is such a blindness about how what actions are, affect others.

Interviewer
Right.

Hansel
You know, they waste, we waste energy. We waste paper. We waste so many things, yeah.

Interviewer
Right. We don't see, a lot of times, we don't see consequences very clearly.

Hansel
Absolutely not. And I, I feel that the consequences are kind of growing and growing like a huge hill, but we don't see it until who knows, that something terrible happens suddenly, yeah.

Interviewer

Right.

Hansel

It's like the other thing is we don't see the consequences because I believe that other people who are in Mexico and Chile or other places are paying for the consequences.

Interviewer

Right, right.

Hansel

Then we are unaware. We are protected, you know, of the consequences of our own actions.

Interviewer

Okay. This is a much lighter question. Do you, do you have a favorite Holiday here to observe or celebrate?

Hansel

Christmas is, I would say, is the favorite time for me, yeah. It is, I don't know, I feel that, as a Christian, is such a, such a soft, loving way that we can see God coming as a baby, you know, and you just cannot stop smiling to a baby, and at the other, and that is just wonderful, but at the other side, I feel that our, our celebration is so much below in terms of the sellings and that it's gross.

Interviewer

Yeah, the consumerism that you talked about.

Hansel

If we can, it's just so, and it's taking something that is so sacred for a, for Christians, to make it a business, you know? The lesson last week, on Sunday, was about Jesus going to the temple and it's _____, taking away the, no, driving away, the _____ they were selling animals and they're changing money in the temple,

and in some ways, like a society, have brought the market to the temple. You know, make it a business.

Interviewer

Right. Make a business out of the sacred.

Hansel

Yeah. But to me, that is a time of hope and also personally, it is a time of [mierpos], a [mierpos] of good, you know? Helping, serving, and loving others.

Interviewer

Right. Okay, I'm going to switch the tape side now. [END OF SIDE A] Well, is Philadelphia now home for you?

Hansel

It is, it is home. It's very, what makes home, makes a place home for me is people. And I have people here now that I love and they are so close, and it feels like I am in a very big family, you know? With my _____ and my church, and it's _____, but I have homes in other places, too. In, in, yeah, my life, my heart is divided unfortunately, and I believe, I strongly believe that heaven is to be together. That it's a place where we are going to be together and not be away from my family or [UNCLEAR]. That's heaven, yeah.

Interviewer

When, when did, when did Philly start to feel like one of your homes?

Hansel

Probably when I walked the streets around here and I was not afraid. When I first came here, I remember the _____ through the community, and I was crying just to think that my husband was going to be around walking and visiting a place that we didn't know, people we didn't know, and that was scary. But once we start working around, we felt no fear. I felt no fear. That, that was good.

Interviewer

Um-hm. And how, when did _____ a year, after, or –

Hansel

Oh, I think later than that, later than that. I can mention one experience that for me, I suppose it was informing. We were, we came here in September of '93, and, that Christmas, but _____ activities that we have in church. And we were setting, my husband and I, were setting the tree, the Christmas Tree, and both of us were very upset because the tree was falling, our little girl that was 2-1/2 was running, taking things and so forth, and suddenly, we, we heard in the door, somebody knocking the door, and we went to open, and there were three or four little kids and say, "We live at the corner. Can we help you?" And that was, to me, well, I feel, I felt first they were angels, to be, to, later on I realized they were not angels. They were –

Interviewer

They were just children.

Hansel

Kids, but loving kids, and they became the first people who came to this church, and they made home right away.

Interviewer

Wow.

Hansel

Yeah.

Interviewer

That's nice. As much as you know, do you, do you plan to stay in Philadelphia or?

Hansel

Yes, for now. You know, pastors can be, we can go to different places. Always I would like to go, my husband and I, actually, would like to go to Latin America and live there, but, you know what? Life is so short, that we realize that we don't have many more years

left to work, and we have to decide realistically. Then, at least for now, we plan to be here basically because of the church. I want to be here. We will be here as long as we are serving in a church.

Interviewer

Right. And when you say church, that extends to community?

Hansel

Community, yes, yes. Basically.

Interviewer

Yeah, you're not talking about –

Hansel

This little group of people.

Interviewer

Physical, a physical place.

Hansel

No, no, no.

Interviewer

You're talking about what you –

Hansel

People.

Interviewer

Yeah, the people.

Hansel

Basically. Yeah, it's not walls. It's people, you know? People, yeah. And the same with homes, you know? To make home is people. Yeah.

Interviewer

So how, how do you describe yourself here in the U.S.? Like if I say what are you? Or if somebody, you meet a stranger, what, what are you?

Hansel

Oh, God. I am a, I, as I said before, I am a Latin American woman who lives in this country and is giving some kind of different flavor to this country, and I think I am, I don't know how to say it – giving something good to this country and helping for others, helping others who have their voices here in terms of giving their good also.

Interviewer

Right.

Hansel

I believe in some way I am also like a connection between different groups, racial groups, like in terms of being a Latin American woman married with a white man who, who can go to, from both places with some level of freedom. Even the African American community, the African American community, because, you know, my baby is African American and, and I did my internship in an African American community. I believe that I am in some way like a bridge between different groups, can be also social groups, economically and social, socioeconomical groups. I think I can go, I can go in different directions kind of easily.

Interviewer

Right. If somebody asks you, you know, like when we fill out the census or, you know, when you have to mark in one word or one phrase “what are you?” What do you prefer to be in, in terms of the category?

Hansel

You know what? I, I don't know, and I think this is personal. I like the word Latin American. I normally put Hispanic, but Hispanic is a new word for me, you know? It doesn't exist in, in Mexico or Chile. You don't call yourself Hispanic. Then, and it, Hispanic talks to me about language. Latin American is more heart, but it's a very personal thing to say, you know?

Interviewer

Yeah, definitely. Because there's Latino, some people still will call themselves Spanish –

Hansel

That's right.

Interviewer

Here.

Hansel

Yeah.

Interviewer

A lot of Puerto Ricans that I've run into –

Hansel

I don't feel, because Spanish, I associate the Spanish with being from Spain, and I feel I am not from Spain, then I don't know.

Interviewer

Right. And some people prefer Hispanic. Some think that Latino is too politicized –

Hansel

Really?

Interviewer

We have the same issue between Mexican Americans and Chicanos.

Hansel

Yeah, but to me, you know, you can be Latin, Latin American and be born in here, like a Chicano, a Latin American, then it's more inclusive, but I know it's not that there is a clear definition.

Interviewer

Right, right.

Hansel

Other people understand in differing ways.

Interviewer

Oh, yeah. There's no agreement –

Hansel

But I like the sense of, of inclusiveness that I feel is in the Latin American description. I don't know.

Interviewer

Yeah. So what does, what does that mean, what does being, then, Latin American mean to you in this country as, as an identity?

Hansel

Well, first it gives me a sense of belonging-ness and like a reference. I think we need references.

Interviewer

I guess a better way to ask this is, how do you act or what are examples of your, of your Latin American-ness in this, in this setting in the United States?

Hansel

You know, I, I feel that my life is dedicated to serve Latin American people. This is one way, very concrete way, you know? How I praise my Latin and my, my identity, my background.

Interviewer

That's a very difficult question. I should read, I should think about that because, you know, a lot, we are, you know? We don't necessarily think about, you know, you know, what makes me Latino or Latina or –

Hansel

Yeah, it is so much in yourselves that –

Interviewer

And in, in a lot of ways, the things that we're talking about are expressions of that.

Hansel

Yeah.

Interviewer

So this just might not be a good –

Hansel

I, I just – the use of the language, you know?

Interviewer

Well, what about, what does the term, you, you touched about this, the term Latina mean to you? Latino/Latina?

Hansel

It's, you know, to me, it's the mix of Argentineans and Chileans and what, what they marry, and some Mexicans and Chicanos and this is what I see, like, like a, the mix, this diversity that is very much alive and changing and it's _____ and rich.

Interviewer

And then Hispanic you mentioned, that means more, like reference to the, a common language, like a root language?

Hansel

I think, yeah. It is for me, yeah. I, I, I hear it more like related to the language.

Interviewer

Um-hm. And I ask that just to get a sense of what different people think about these because there's no agreement, and it's just interesting to hear, to record the diversity.

Hansel

You know, I do, I believe it is very interesting to hear for you because if you are born in this country, and you hear, you heard all the time Hispanic, that has a meaning for you.

Interviewer

Right.

Hansel

For me, that word came when I moved to this country, and it's very, in some ways, foreign to me, than I actually get something that is given to us, that is, that it doesn't come from us.

Interviewer

Right.

Hansel

Yeah. Then, and, yeah, but this is what I say. It's very personal the way you, you assume that word, no?

Interviewer

Um-hm. Oh, definitely.

Hansel

Yeah.

Interviewer

Definitely. How, do you, do you feel similar or, or different to Latinos that, that you work with, with different backgrounds?

Hansel

I feel similar and different, you know? Because I believe we are so unique as a Chicano and, or Mexican. We have such a history behind and we are very unique. At the same time, we are very similar and I think in our concerns, it's in our struggles, in our hopes, then I think it's both.

Interviewer

What do you feel Latinos or Latin Americans have to offer Philadelphia?

Hansel

You know, I was thinking when I moved from Chile to Mexico, I was so delighted, so impressed with the sense of color of Mexico, and for me, it was such a gift from Mexico, to receive, to receive that, that opening, you know, to light and color, and I think this is something that Mexico has to give, you know? That's, it's unique to Mexico. It's not that other countries don't have colors, but coming from Chile, where we are very kind of to the dark side of the scale of colors, you know, that was such a discovery for me. And, but I believe that as Latin Americans in general, we have the sense of family that is very powerful and I think it is rich, a life-saver, that we can offer to this community. I believe also that it's not that, it's not perfect, you know? We fail in that also, but there is some

richness there, that some sense of humanity that this country needs. I mean, we can give some kind of balance in being individuals and being a group. Our language, the beauty of our language, you know, the poetry of our language, just the diversity of colors of our skins and all of our _____, I think it's, it's, it's a tremendous gift for this country, the, our young people, you know? We have so many children that each one of them is a gift. I can, I suppose if I, I can say more things, but probably if we go place by place, we can, the sense of music, you know? The musical richness of all of our countries. You know, it's, I am thinking of Bolivia, you know? The [cana] or where, wherever you hear this deep, deep sound of the mountains, you know? The solitude of the mountains and, then, it's like wherever you, you go, you, you can, you have so much good, good to give, and we bring that. We balance. I believe also that we, we bring a lot of intelligence in the sense of how many professionals from our countries come to this country and this is a really, it is unfortunate for our countries because we lose sometimes people who have been educated there, even myself, no? I went to college, and all my basic education in Chile and Mexico, and then I am here now, and that is unfair. I know that, I know for a fact that one of the ways that our countries lose resources is through education of their people.

Interviewer

Right.

Hansel

Because of the, they, they leave. They don't want to come back, and that is, we suffer –

Interviewer

Human resources.

Hansel

Absolutely. And if you count that in terms of money, it is tremendous, tremendously meaningful, and it is the same dilemma that we have in our poor communities here, where people who become more successful tend to leave instead of coming back and investing themselves to return to their community. Then, I don't know if I –

Interviewer

It's a similar model. No, no. This is very similar to, what would you like people to know, who are not familiar with your community here, to know?

Hansel

Well, I think the first thing is to know that there are so many good people here. You know, people who can be an example for any family in the entire world. You know, that this neighborhood is called the Badlands, and we have been fighting that because it is so diminishing for our people, and I believe that when you come here and you really look people from closer, you are going to discovery that there are so much beauty and so much good, and it's just, it's unfair, you know, to be, to be treated in that way.

Interviewer

Right. People forget that the universal part of humanity, you know –

Hansel

Absolutely, and how much people here are victims of the violence, but in part, that violence sometimes comes from outside, too, in the sense that we don't have the same resources, you know, to, for example, cleaning. We are very dispossessed in relation with more affluent communities, and even in more gross ways that when sometimes we know people from other places come and deposit garbage here, you know, to use this area as a garbage –

Interviewer

Or come here to buy garbage.

Hansel

Or buy garbage, absolutely. Absolutely, yeah.

Interviewer

Well, what are the, what are the greatest adversities in the community?

Hansel

You know what? I believe that when we realize that we have value in ourselves, that we have power in ourselves, and we are able to give, and I feel that sometimes we swallow this idea that we have no value, that we, we are a, we are powerless, and to me, that is the, the, the deeper damage that we can have because if we are able to give to each other, we are healthy and we are sufficient.

Interviewer

Right. Do you think that, because that, that seems to be present in a lot of Latino communities in the United States, is that, do you think that part of that gets brought over and part of it gets fostered here? Or do you think it just happens here? That sort of low sense of value? That low esteem?

Hansel

I believe that it is, it is all over, but this phenomenon that happens here when you come, that I believe puts you at risk, highly at risk of being low in terms of self esteem and low in terms of your possibilities to give, and I can tell you my own experience that I believe it is, is the experience of many people who come here. When I moved to this country, I had in Mexico, before I have in Mexico a really fulfilling position in terms of the working and having, feeling that I was, I have a meaning in life and I was a, accepted and love and had a, a great support system. I moved to this country without the English, without friends, without knowing the community, and it was scary, deeply scary, and I felt so low in my own esteem. I took the fact that I couldn't communicate with people as a, my defect, you know, lack of intelligence than more than lack of knowledge or

something. Then coming back, of course, the position that I had also was totally different while I worked in Mexico with the, a couple of hundred people, here I was not able to work with ten, and then coming out of that place, it's, it's very hard work. And it, it made me _____, you know? Starting for learning the language, getting familiar with the, the surroundings, and creating your support system, and do whatever, educating yourself sometimes to do the very same thing that you are, you were doing in your place. It takes a lot of work, physical, intellectual, emotional work, to come back to a place that this, a new place, but where you are comfortable and where you can provide and give what you have. I believe that a lot of our people are not able and don't, or don't have the chances to, to come back to that place, and they stay there and it kind of, in a lower position, and wasting their own talents, their own lives, and then in that sense, I think this, this country provides like a new challenge. If you are able to come out of that place successfully, I believe that you are in a much better situation than you were before, but not always. You have the opportunities to do that. I was a privileged person in the sense that I came here with documents, I have a husband who provides for me, I have a home, then I can, I, it's difficult even for me to imagine what this, for a woman who comes here alone or with children and with no home, with no job, with no English, with no money, with no support system, how can you come out of that hole? It is, it's challenging in that, in that special way.

Interviewer

I think you explained that very, very clearly.

Hansel

A part of, do you know what? They didn't mention about all this stigma that exists around, you know? Immigrants and, and people who come here as a, you become a

delinquent here, you know? You give them _____, you become a delinquent when you can be the best person in your country. Yeah.

Interviewer

Right. This is similar to that. Have you personally had struggles here that have come from being an immigrant or Latino or Latina?

Hansel

You know, it may be something subtle, but I think – subtle?

Interviewer

Um-hm.

Hansel

But, well, of course, learning the language, and that's a big, big thing. The other thing is more subtle is going to store and people looking, thinking that you are going to steal. That is, is very, it, it makes me upset and makes me also feel kind of sad, and I know, there is kind of that sense of being an outsider, that this, you know, it's, it's, I guess I always see things, I believe that things get good and have bad things, you know? And in some way, being an outsider is, is good, too. It's challenging and, and you learn and you become better, hopefully. But it is, to be always an outsider is not also so comfortable.

Interviewer

Yeah. What do you think marks you as an outsider? I mean, and that shifts. Sometimes when you're in the community, you're not an outsider because we have –

Hansel

We are it. I believe that we are outsider community here, you know? Like we are among outsiders, and, but what it marks me as an outsider, well, do you know, I remember, for example, going to the, to a celebration of a friend of mine with my children and being the only Latina person with my Latina girl and my African American little one. Then I was very much a different person to the entire community there, and I was, I clearly, and with

accents, you know, and my talk and so forth, and it was very evident that I was an outsider there.

Interviewer

What do you consider your greatest success or triumphs to be, as, as a person?

Hansel

To have a, a sense of purpose and meaning in life, yeah.

Interviewer

What about in terms of accomplishments here in Philadelphia, or throughout your life? It doesn't have to be here.

Hansel

Well, through my, my life, I was personally able, to be able to have a marriage that is, is healthy, not because it is perfect, but because we are able to build with issues, having a family, two wonderful girls, to be productive in the sense of giving something to others. To me, that is so important. It's kind of being alive. And to, to be willing to be _____, you know, it's kind of, it's staying young, that always you can learn something, and I am curious about life, and I am curious about people. I love people, and I want to know their stories. I am, I really have curiosity and I delight when I learn people, and I, I know people and I learn about their lives. It seems to me that life is like a miracle, everything a miracle, and when you see somebody tell you their stories, it's, it's holy ground. It's such a privilege. Then I am surrounded by people and this is the, a place of great, I don't know, I call richness, you know? I just see so much.

Interviewer

Let's see. This is similar, but what, what's the biggest, greatest adjustment coming to the U.S. that you had to make?

Hansel

Well, the, the language has been a big thing. Big one. You know, I was, I was, I was in Mexico very young, then in some way, I experienced there the adjustment, the adjustment of not being in my country and being an outsider, which is a big thing. When I came to the United States, I had to adjust to the diversity of being, not being Anglo, but also to adjust and to learn about parts of Latin American culture that were totally different than mine, you know? Caribbean people who are different, our Chileans are, or Mexicans are, and, then that was a big adjustment for me because I came with the delusion that we were, because we spoke the same language, we were similar.

Interviewer

Right.

Hansel

And I realized that we can be so tremendously diverse and probably that was one of the big _____ for me to do. You know, to open up to new, new –

Interviewer

And you were there in New York, the, you know, like Miami and L.A., the biggest centers for that –

Hansel

Yeah.

Interviewer

That kind of Latino diversity. Wow. Have you ever felt or experienced discrimination or alienation because you are Latina or Latin American? You mentioned one experience of being looked, watched in the store –

Hansel

Absolutely, yeah. That is something that really is, is very clear to me. There is something that is not probably being Latina, that is more related with social class, that you go to a store around here, and they check your bags and, and they check your ticket

and so forth, which they don't do in other neighborhoods, and I feel deeply discriminated for that, because of that. A part of that, it was, you know, when I just came here, I was working with, with an organization that was, and a small community organization that, and through that, I had to be part of other, bigger organizations, and I felt very much like a minority. Minority, even a minority among other minorities. That was, yeah. It's, it's not, it was not _____.

Interviewer

Okay. Are there specific people or organizations that have helped you or your [END OF TAPE 1] The, the question is are there, are there specific people or organizations that have helped you or your family adjust?

Hansel

There was, well, the church. I was mentioning the Lutheran Church. That was the one who called us here and where we, we start all relationships. But I remember, for example, I worked in a Hunting Park community development, I felt very much welcome and appreciated, and now, after I, I left there, they closed. They closed. Another thing was United Way gave us a training for Latino leaders, and it was really, really good, when I just moved here. I guess I felt part of this group of people that was larger than what I thought. I suppose, yeah.

Interviewer

Yeah, that's, are there experiences or things that have happened to, in your life in Philadelphia that, that would not have been possible at home? In, either in Chile or Mexico?

Hansel

Basically to be a pastor because, well, I went, actually, went to Bible Institute and, with other denominations, but they never considered the women can be leaders, pastors, and

this is an opportunity that I believe that, it has been given to me, first by my husband, who has been a tremendous support, and then by the church and the seminary, and this country. And this is something that is specially, and there are other things, you know, that I like. We were talking about this before, but I like, for example, how, I don't know how to say this. This sense of individuality that we were talking about how children have been more respected than what I, what I experienced as a child. I think we are more, we use here more current understanding of development and so forth, and I believe this is, I appreciate that very much.

Interviewer

Okay. What are your aspirations at this point for yourself and your family?

Hansel

You know, the first thing I wanted for my children is to be happy. That's my, before they were born, I thought I want children who are happy. I would like my kids to have the opportunity to, to develop their, all their potential in all directions, you know? Artistic, intellectual, and physically and so forth, and, but not just for my kids, you know? I, here is where come my, my personal life kind of come together with my professional life, which is bigger than my own family. In some way what I want in the church is to provide the same opportunities for the other kids who have even less opportunity than I am given. To, to get more, to get those opportunities, to, to be what, to reach the maximum of their potential. And I suppose in myself, it is the same with myself, you know? I want to, there are so many things I would like to learn, but I would like to be able to continue learning. I would like to, I believe the goal of my life has been to be more integral person, and I think it has been the motivation in my going here and there, I think, and I still, I keep that as a goal. And to grow in faith, you know? My relationship

with God is, is, is center, the core of my life, and I want to grow, continuing growing, spiritually.

Interviewer

Okay. Are there resources or businesses or organizations that, that you think people, that you would like for people to know about that, that serve the Latino community? Any that you would like to like point out?

Hansel

That –

Interviewer

That serve the Latino community?

Hansel

Like the organization that I would like?

Interviewer

No, that, that you would like for people to know about?

Hansel

Oh. But you know what? I believe that the institution I represent, which is the church, to me is, is so essential for the transformation of our, of our life and communities. It's a, I, I would, I can, I can talk about other organizations that provide services that are, are wonderful, but I, it seems to me that the, the church is the place where people can become more complete, more fulfilled, more able to, to be what, what they are meant to be, more free, more, it's just, I think of this like, how do you say the _____, to be positive, to be good for society, for yourself and for society, and I really wish that people looked for, for churches, for faith, for a, a relationship with God and make us better and more free.

Interviewer

Like spiritual health in a, in a sense, or?

Hansel

If this is spiritual health, but you know what? I believe that I live in my understanding, and when I talk about being more integral, I believe that it's also emotional health. It is physical health, but it, they go together, and this is what I see to be more integral in the sense of being healthy and emotionally not be guided by fears, not to be guided by hatred or, or negative things, you know? To be healed inside, and there is a word that I love, it's Shalom, which means peace, and it's the kind of peace that comes from God, you know? That it passes every aspect of our lives, and make us better people for ourselves and for others. Then I believe that this is in the heart of what church is meant to be, and this is what I believe, that Christ died for us.

Interviewer

Okay. You and I were talking earlier before the interview a little bit, we, we were kind of trading stories about when we were young and, and having experienced poverty in a different place than here. But it made me think a little bit, and I didn't ask you a little bit, about your childhood. Could you describe a little bit, like what, I don't know anything about your parents, what they did or, or, just a little bit about them.

Hansel

Sure, absolutely. Yeah. Well, both my parents were born in the country in Chile, in small towns. They emigrated to Santiago when they were very young. When they were, when they were very young, like 14, _____ along because they came from very poor families –

Interviewer

Large – were they large families?

Hansel

Large families, and my mother was, had a, her mother died when she was two, then she was kind of very isolated child, I suppose. Then they went, they emigrated to the city,

and they start working there really hard, like maybe immigrants who come here, you know, serving and doing the most basic jobs. And then they met, they married, and we have, we were four women, and my parents for some reason, had, they, they were kind of advanced for their, for their time, and I believe for the socioeconomical [ambiente]?

Interviewer

Class or –

Hansel

Class, sort of, yeah. Because they, they also thought, they always instigated in _____ start and going to college, you know, which they went to secondary school with the third grade in secondary school. That was the highest that my parents reached, and actually as, as adults, because my father went to school even when I was in, in high school, and they really, they, they gave us also, us women, you know, the sense that women can do the same thing that every person can do. It's not women go to, to wash dishes and clothing for their lives.

Interviewer

Or become nuns or –

Hansel

That's right. They were very, interesting to me not that, not discriminated in the sense that we were women, then we, we reached what they expected, actually. We, four or, four of us, the four of us are professionals, and we, we reached what, it was a dream for our parents. Now we live in a, in a very kind of poor and it's a poor situation, but more than poor, I think it was a, my parents were so afraid of life because of their history, I think coming by themselves to the big city was so scary for them, that they were really afraid of life. In some way, they were kind of outcast in society.

Interviewer

Do you think that they –

Hansel

And I, I receive a lot of that.

Interviewer

Do you think that they had trauma? Like that that was –

Hansel

Absolutely. Yeah.

Interviewer

Trauma for them?

Hansel

Trauma, I believe, yeah. I believe that they lived with a deep trauma of being, well, my mother was basically a _____ when she was so little and abused later by a step mother and so forth, I call it a step mother. And my father grew up also with relatives, his parents were not near. And then they had really difficult lives. I mean they, they brought that, they grew up with that sense of abandonment and fear, and they gave that to my sisters and I. But at the other side, there was this sense of hope, you know, that we can go farther than where they, what they reached, and I suppose it was, it was a life saver in some ways, you know?

Interviewer

Do you, what, are your parents still living?

Hansel

Yes, both of them.

Interviewer

Are they retired?

Hansel

You know what? In Latin America, you don't retire. And also my parents were, my father was a shoemaker, yeah. Then it was always _____ his little store, you know, 5:30 he was very modest in what he did. And then he still worked, tried to work,

at least tried to work, and my mother became, after years of helping my father, they separated actually, and she became, how do you say [comerciente]?

Interviewer

A store –

Hansel

A store –

Interviewer

Shop, shop –

Hansel

Well, she started selling little things, and then became, he, she had a store that she loves –

Interviewer

Like a vendor.

Hansel

And she lost the store after the coup, actually. Yeah, they lost all, my mother lost all the income because of that.

Interviewer

Do, do you and your sisters help support your parents now?

Hansel

Now, yeah, well, you know, I, yes, and some how. My parents are now working now, and they have not, they have not retired, and they live for, with the, with my sisters actually, yeah.

Interviewer

Okay. Yeah, I don't know how, if there's a system in Chile to, if they have –

Hansel

They get, they, kind of –

Interviewer

Pension?

Hansel

Pension or something which is extremely modest. You know, you cannot live with that, actually. But they do get something, yeah.

Interviewer

So, did, would you say that you had a, a rough childhood or?

Hansel

I had a rough childhood, yeah. I don't know rough, yeah, that's what they consider rough, yeah.

Interviewer

Was the neighborhood you grew up in like a, what we would consider here, you know, what we call a ghetto or barrio with the –

Hansel

Do you know what? It is interesting because I lived in a neighborhood in Santiago that was like all houses with the most poor people, but it was no a sense of ghetto. But now when I look back, there was a lot of the symptoms of a ghetto, like, for example, I remember a family next door who had, who practiced prostitution. Then it wasn't, it was what you would say ghetto, but at the other side, it was, it's just it's such, so different.

Interviewer

Right.

Hansel

It was not that it was this house, all houses, solid built, solid and then it's not what you say ghetto. I see ghetto –

Interviewer

In retrospect.

Hansel

More like a new – yeah. Yeah. But with a lot of symptoms of social illness, you know?

Interviewer

Right, right. Poverty, I mean, that poverty brings to communities.

Hansel

Yeah.

Interviewer

Well, is there anything that you want to add? We're, we're finished.

Hansel

No. No. Well, I just, I, I want to thank you because this is wonderful.

Interviewer

Thank you.

Hansel

And also it is great to know you and talk with you.

Interviewer

I, I mean, this is, just like you were saying earlier, the privilege of being able to talk to people and share their stories, hear their stories, you know?

Hansel

Isn't it great?

Interviewer

You know, it's a privilege, and I feel like I grow every time, you know, in a way that I learn and, and I feel humility and all that.

Hansel

Yeah. That's great. Yeah. But you are wonderful in this job. I can see that you enjoy and, yeah. You have real curiosity.

Interviewer

Yeah. Okay.

Hansel

Ciao.

Interviewer

Ciao.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Interviewees

Giovana Guevara (Panama)

Description: Giovana is a twenty-three year old singer, musician and music teacher from Colón, Panama. She is the youngest of 10 children. She has been in the U.S. for three and a half years. She came to Philly after having little luck finding work in Dallas. She was inspired to move to the U.S. by a dream she had. In Philly, she met and married Josh Robinson, also a musician. Together they run workshops and teach music through their own business, Universal Rhythms.

Residence: South Philly

Sra. Rosa Goldstein (Cuba)

Description: Sra. Goldstein is an older Polish-Cuban Jewish woman who came to Philadelphia with her husband in 1964, five years after the Cuban Revolution. Her parents and brothers came in 1961 and 1962. She works at the Beth Shalom Synagogue in Jenkinstown. Her family owned a bakery in La Habana, Cuba. Her family supported the revolution but could not cope with the government's seizure of private businesses. She and her husband are part of a small Jewish Cuban community in Philadelphia and members of the Cuban Community Center at 4982 Rising Sun Ave.

Residence: Jenkinstown but lived and raised her family in the Olney/Logan area

Olga Vega (Puerto Rico)

Description: Olga moved to New Jersey at age nine with her parents and 11 brothers & sisters from Fajardo, Puerto Rico in 1975. She is a 37 year old single mother and grandmother with five children who manages her own domestic cleaning and organizing service. She moved to North Philly in 1980 after her parents separated. Her mother did not want the responsibility of raising the six remaining children so she put them with people she knew. At age 12, Olga's formal education stopped because she became the live-in servant of the family she lived with. She did this for two years and went out on her own, was homeless, and has gone through many other trials. She has been robbed, had a child stolen from her, and in the 1980's her brother, Pedro, shot a Philadelphia police officer. Her aspirations are to get her children educated and then go on to get her own college degree. She remains strong and hopeful.

Residence: South Philly

Jorge Lopez (Uruguay)

Description: Jorge and his family have moved here in the past three years. He lives with his wife and father-and-law who are Chilean. He is currently working with Raices Culturales. He and his wife perform traditional Gaucho dances for schools and other community events. They are members of a North

Philadelphia Mormon church which has just started their first Spanish language services.

Residence: North Philly

Ricardina "Rica" Iwanyshyn (Peru)

Description: Rica came to Philadelphia with a one-way ticket in 1966 at the age of 17. Shae came with the intention to work, go to school, save money, and return to Peru. She said it was emotionally difficult to leave because it was just she and her mother. Her aunt, who was already in Philadelphia, found her a job as a nanny. She worked to support her self, her mother, and to put herself through college. She has lived in Olney, Logan, Cheltenham, and Northeast Philadelphia. Now she works as the office manager for the University of Pennsylvania Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety and promotes Peruvian culture in Philly.

Residence: Ben Salem

Reverend Luisa Cabello Hansel (Chile)

Description: Rev. Luisa is the co-director with her husband, Rev. Patrick Cabello Hansel of Inglesia Nueva Creacion and Centro Nueva Creation. She is originally from Chile but has also lived for many years in Mexico. She has also worked in the Bronx. The reverends have two daughters, one who is adopted. They are serving both spiritual and day to day needs of children and adults in West Kensington. Luisa also fundraises to help rural people in her native Chile.

Residence: lower Northeast Philadelphia