

Community Conversations: NJ's COVID-19 Storytelling Project

Participant 198: Maribel

Interview conducted by Y.K. November 2020

Transcribed by C.C. on February 15, 2021

[00:00 - 0:39]

I: Umm, I can take that back, the pen as well. Oh man, Maribel, how are you doing this morning?

P: I'm doing fine. It's kind of chilly. My hands are cold, yeah.

I: It's kind of chilly. [Laughs]

P: Oh yes.

I: Alright, it's freezing out here.

P: Yeah, that's nothing, wait till the snowstorm comes.

I: [Laughs]

P: Yeah, got to wait.

I: Ah, the winter is—it's getting brutal.

P: Leave it in the Lord's hands, he knows why we here .

I: Uh huh. [Laughs]

P: Yes, definitely.

I: I hear you. You--do you wait out here? Is this your morning spot?

P: No.

I: No? What--

P: I come here to come and check for my mail.

I: Okay.

P: [Organization] is also helping me with my birth certificate.

I: Yeah.

P: A lot of things, because I've been homeless for three years.

[0:39- 1:31]

I: For three years.

P: So now, right now I just—God is so good, I've been blessed with my voucher for section 8.

I: Yeah, y—oh, that's amazing.

P: It just came, that's why I didn't have time to go over there and come back to find out that my social worker has it.

I: Yeah.

P: The younger lady that you was talking to.

I: Uh-huh.

P: She's like, 'Wait, wait!' I see, I had to give it time.

I: Yup.

P: So, I was like trying to hurry up, finish doing this, you know, everything. So, I was like--I said, 'I'm coming back, I'm coming back.' And I came back to talk to you.

I: Yeah.

P: [Inaudible 01:09-01:10] They do their job.

I: Uh-huh.

P: People will always criticize, but they do their job.

I: What is--what is like, what do you mean, like what--

P: They job to help you with your social security. If you need housing, section 8. Anything that you really need, you just ask and they will do their best.

I: Uh-huh.

P: Like with food. They'll help you with food. Clothing.

I: Food, clothing.

[1:31- 2:17]

P: Shelter.

I: Shelter.

P: Anything.

I: Yeah.

P: Anything that you need, if they can help you, they do it. If they cannot help you, they send you to [street] and stuff like this, so that somebody else is always out here to help.

I: Uh-huh.

P: Yes, that's how it be . That's how my help been .

I: That's been you experience?

P: Yeah, yeah. Now I just got to pray to God, and hopefully get me an apartment and I'll be so well.

I: Yeah.

P: And it took me less than a month to get my--the paperwork, everything.

I: That's incredible.

P: And everything was done in November the 3rd and I was shocked.

I: November the 3rd?

P: Yeah. I was--did the interview through the phone. I was doing the interview here, and the same day I made a phone call, and I called them back, and she did the interview through the phone, and--

I: Yeah.

P: Now I got the voucher.

I: And you got the voucher.

P: I just got to pick it up.

[2:18- 3:15]

I: Can you--

P: Goin' to look for an apartment.

I: [Laughs] That's amazing. Can you describe kind of--the experience to finding out that you got the voucher?

P: Wow! It's so exciting, it makes me want to just drop a tear.

I: Yeah.

P: It's dumb, like--and I'm just thanking God, like wow. I've been homeless going on four years. Like wow, it's so amazing, I can be in my own apartment, go to sleep, do what I want to do in my own home. Don't gotta worry about the fools out here.

I: Uh-huh.

P: Don't gotta worry about this, what I'm gonna eat, where I'm gonna sleep, or somebody blessing me with something all the time. I don't got to worry about those things anymore.

I: Yeah, yeah.

P: It is really hard for me to trust out here too for a whole while, 'cause I've been sick.

I: You've been sick?

P: And sick, like that. From the flu, at the station. The police officer--I told her thank you, 'cause she made sure I got in the ambulance. And they took me to the hospital.

I: Oh, uh-uh.

P: And then the guy told me, 'Do you know where you're at?'

I: Uh-huh.

P: I said, 'No.' They said, "You're at [redacted] hospital." I was shocked.

I: You were shocked, you didn't even know that you—

P: No.

[3:16- 4:02]

I: You had been transported there?

P: I was gone, I didn't even know that.

I: Uh-huh.

P: I'm like, wow. It's so amazing the way--plus, God is the one that brought me here and life, so many times. If it wasn't for him I wouldn't be here. He has me here for a reason, that's how I did, and God blessed me with three boys, now I'm--

I: Three boys?

P: Yea, thank God for that.

I: Oh, like you have three--

P: Boys.

I: That's amazing. How old are they?

P: Twenty-six, Twenty-one, and Twenty-one.

I: Twenty-one, and Twenty-one, are they twins?

P: Yeah. They really triplets, but they're twins.

I: Uh-huh.

P: They are, but one of them passed.

I: Okay, I'm sorry about that.

P: It's okay, it happens.

I: Yeah.

P: My stomach was too small to carry three eggs, so it happens.

I: Sure.

P: Everyone is not blessed, but I still—I got two more grandsons. Yeah, and my son is legally married.

[4:03- 4:52]

I: Yeah.

P: I told him, don't play with--don't play with women.

I: Uh-huh.

P: Something like if she hit you, you tell her, 'Babe we don't play that.' If she become really aggressive or violent, you walk away.

I: Yeah, yeah.

P: Just press charges, do what you got to do.

I: Yep. Absolutely.

P: But don't put your hands on no woman. Because you gotta realize, I'm your mother, and you wouldn't want nobody to put their hands on me like that. Now he got a daughter and son, and called me--

I: Yeah.

P: And he told me, 'Ma, you know I got good news.' I'm like, 'What?' He said, 'You sure you ready?' I said, 'Yeah.' He said, 'It's a boy!'

I: Yeah--[Laughs]

P: I was like, wow! I just dropped a tear.

I: Yeah.

P: He said, 'Ma, don't cry.'

I: Yeah.

P: I said, 'How you know I'm crying?'

I: [Laughs]

P: He said, 'I know you Ma.' Like, how you know I'm crying? My sons graduated, they never been to jail. They don't do drugs, they don't do nothing. I got good boys. God blessed me with three blessed boys.

[4:53- 5:58]

I: Yeah.

P: And I got one more, he's disabled. [inaudible 4:56-4:57] through college and he wants to be a fireman. And I tell him, don't tell--don't go by what people say, whatever you want to be you do it. There's no such thing as you can't, you got to do it, keep on moving.

I: Uh-huh.

P: 'Cause if you say you can't, it will never happen.

I: Yup.

P: You gotta do it. I did it, I kept on coming to [organization]. They help me with everything. After I get this, now they got another part, my social security, my birth certificate.

I: Your birth certificate.

P: Yea, 'cause I was born in Puerto Rico. That's the only problem.

I: Yeah.

P: Puerto Rico had a storm. That's the only thing that messed everything up, then Corona came out.

I: Yeah.

P: It's always something, but it's okay.

I: Yeah.

P: I feel more—I'm still going to go—like, as [person] says, his performance, he's a pastor. I know its [person's]--something. And so, I'm blessed, but he's good.

I: Yea.

P: I listen to his words every day, I listen to the word of God everyday now. Everyday, when I wake up I thank God for blessing me with life, everything. Any other questions you wanna ask me?

I: Yup.

P: Cause I'm like, yappity-yap, yappity-yap, yappity-yap, yappity-yap. [laughs]

[5:59- 6:42]

I: Nah, you're good, you're good. Let's see, you mentioned, you mentioned like a second ago that the Coronavirus came about.

P: Yea.

I: What's that been like for you?

P: [sighs] Trouble.

I: Trouble.

P: Like, like even before I got the voucher approved, before I even got a [inaudible 6:14] I still was looking for an apartment. But how because of Corona, now nobody wanna give us an apartment.

I: Yea, okay.

P: You laughing like, I think you want to test me like I don't care. We can go through all those testing for an apartment.

I: So—so it's been--

P: Just 'cause somebody has it doesn't mean that everybody has it.

I: Uh-huh.

P: And we all deserve a chance.

I: Yeah.

P: It's tough. So, that's how it be.

I: So it's been harder to find an apartment since--

P: --Yeah. Yeah--

I: --Since coronavirus.

P: Yea, but I only [inaudible 6:38] gonna come. [Agency] is gonna help me with an apartment.

I: Yup.

[6:43- 7:16]

P: As soon as she get a one bedroom, they—they're gonna get it. I'm gonna get—whatever I could get, I don't care. Because I know I got to stay in Newark.

I: Yup.

P: Cause the vouchers they gave you say, stay in Newark.

I: Yup.

P: If I go to Elizabeth, I got to start all over.

I: That's a whole other thing.

P: Then if you go to Belleville, Nutley, it's a whole thing.

I: A whole different thing.

P: Newark, Newark.

I: Newark, Newark.

P: Irvington, Irvington. That's how it's going.

I: Uh-huh, so the voucher that you got is for Newark?

P: Yes.

I: Okay.

P: Yeah, 'cause that's how I did it on my processing, Newark.

I: Yeah.

P: And I'm just gonna keep on doing it.

I: Yea.

P: And me and my boyfriend, we were taking about it today. By being blessed by God. Don't ever hide where you be blessed by from, just talk about it. So he can bless others, don't be ashamed of yourself or by God, cause if it wasn't for him we wouldn't even be here.

[7:32-8:13]

I: Ohh.

P: He brought blessing to everyone. We come from a woman's womb.

I: Yea.

P: That's how it be.

I: [sigh] Oh, Amen [laughing] Nah, I hear you.

[both talking 7:38-7:40]

I: Nah, I hear you. I hear you. [laughing]. Do you know anybody whose gotten sick with COVID, with coronavirus?

P: Umm, my cousin she got sick at [location redacted] and stuff but they release her.

I: They released her?

P: But then two days later she died.

I: Your cousin died?

P: Yes, from corona.

I: I'm so sorry.

P: From [location redacted].

I: From [location redacted], I'm so sorry to hear that.

P: It's okay. I didn't get into—my sister went to the funeral, I didn't. I found out everything last minute.

I: Yeah.

P: Plus, I'm homeless, and I wouldn't want to go through that.

[8:14- 8:58]

I: Absolutely. And so, it sounds like you said that she was in the hospital.

P: She was, she was.

I: She was released.

P: She was released.

I: And two days later she died?

P: Yeah.

I: Why do you think she was released?

P: Because for them, probably [location redacted] felt that she probably really didn't have corona.

I: Okay, okay.

P: They said she had corona, then don't got corona. It's really hard to trust out here.

I: Yea.

P: Especially in the hospital and stuff like that. The Doctors, everybody got to do they job, point blank.

I: Uh-huh.

P: No matter what. And the way I look at it for myself, when God is ready for me, I'm ready. I'm not going to run from God. You can't. You can't run from the main man.

I: Can't run from the main man?

P: No, no. He's the main man.

I: [laughing]

P: He brought everybody here for a reason.

I: Yeah.

P: And probably we--just like a battle.

[8:59-10:02]

I: Yea.

P: Probably we here for a battle, to see how strong we can be as human beings. Who cares? I look at it like that and my kids could do it--they could do it too. Get into service, they're fighting for us. That's it.

I: Yeah. You said two of them are in the Marines?

P: Yea, I got my older son, he is twenty-six now, and my baby boy. The Marines.

I: Yeah.

P: Yeah.

I: Beautiful. Where are they stationed?

P: California.

I: California.

P: And he got a house and everything, and his wife's from Marines too. So that's my—got marines who's family to me.

I: Yea.

P: My son's a Marine, my sister's daughter is the Army, and that's a different story. But they got to battle. Army to service, I don't understand those parts.

I: [laughing]

P: Like why we got to fight?

I: Yea.

P: If your daughter is in the Army that's fine. My son is in the Marines, but don't become a battle, 'cause no matter what they gonna still cousins, they still related.

I: Yup.

P: [inaudible 9:58] Alright now that's [inaudible 10:01]

[10:03-11:21]

I: [laughing] I hear you, nah I hear you, I hear you. Now what's--umm I guess like, I mean it sounds like you got a lot kinda to look forward to in terms of, in terms of the section 8, in terms of the birth certificate. Especially with, you know, kind of coronavirus come--like is there anything, is there anything you feel just kind of like fearful about, or--?

P: I'm fearful for God blessing me with life.

I: Uh-hun.

P: And the blessing that I can get from people. Like right now, you out here you make time for yourself for us out here. You listen to our words, and by you listening to my words, you can bless somebody else.

I: Yea.

P: It's like looking out for the people.

I: I hear you.

P: That's what you're doing.

I: Yea.

P: Not for yourself, but others.

I: Looking out for others. And what are ways, what are ways to look out for others amidst all this?

P: The same thing that you doing now. You coming out here, you cold and everything like I am and stuff. But—so your words could be a blessing for someone else. You looking out, no matter what. Your words could mean a lot for a person, and they can learn by your words.

I: To learn.

P: Yeah. It's a learning process.

I: It's a learning process?

P: Yes.

I: I hear you. I hear you. What's something that you've feel like you've learned?

[11:22- 12:47]

P: Ooh. Don't try to be homeless again. [Laughs]

I: Don't try to be homeless again?

P: [laughing] Don't trust.

I: Don't trust.

P: Trust only the person that you—the only person I trust right now 100% would be God. Because I trusted a female friend of mine, and she gave me cigarette and I was in a coma for three months. I was dead, so—I'm here. I look at it right now and I've been dying and coming back to life, but there is a reason I'm here. Probably I could do the same thing that you're doing as a job, but I couldn't cause my job--I can never have my job.

I: Yeah.

P: 'Cause in my records, I'm an alcoholic, and I'm a crackhead. I don't do drugs, I don't—plus, I can't even afford crack. That crack cost too much money for me, and my rent was \$1,250.00. I was a home health aid. I wouldn't want nobody doing drugs taking care of my mother, or my kids. Stuff like that, no. And at that time you would get a check up every month, to see if you got any type of drugs in your system. Nah, no drugs in my system, only thing you probably find in my system is vitamins, no, wait--Tylenol PM [laughing]

I: Tylenol PM.

P: [inaudible 12:30-12:32] Yeah, that.

I: Uh-huh

P: That's it, that's it. Other than that, no.

I: Yea.

P: No drugs.

I: Yeah.

P: Nah. And that's the only reason I cannot have a job back, but I can still fight it. Because as long as I have my system, my spleen and everything, you still could fight it.

I: Yeah.

[12:48-13:44]

P: But like now, I became disabled because of my leg. I have like a tumor in my leg.

I: Uh-huh.

P: So. But I'm not gonna let that stop me.

I: Do you have.

P: As long a God got me out here walking, he has me here for a reason.

I: Yeah.

P: If I can do it, somebody else can do it too. It's just watching a battle. Okay?

I: Yea, I hear you, I hear you, I hear you. Do you have a doctor like do you have a--?

P: Nah, the only place I go to is [hospital].

I: Is [hospital].

P: That's it.

I: How do they treat you over there?

P: I like the way they treat me, like if [inaudible 13:22] if I go in a ambulance I go straight to the room. They take your temperature, right there, quick. But I don't know how it is right now because of corona.

I: Yea, corona is—have you--have you been--you know, like, any of the--any of like corona stuff like have you been, have you been tested?

P: No, I've been tested. Oh no.

I: You've gotten tested. Cool.

P: And I got tested like twice already. Like, no.

I: Yea.

P: I don't play that.

[13:45- 14:51]

I: You don't—what if they

P: No.

I: And we're hoping there is going to be a vaccine soon, when it comes out you gonna take it?

P: Yes.

I: Cool.

[Both laughing]

P: Definite. I'm not scared just got to close my eyes and--

I: Just gonna close your eyes. [laughing] Totally.

P: Ooh, I don't like needles.

I: Uh-hun, I hear you. Uhh, what's one thing you're hopeful about especially kinda with your section 8 coming through, birth certificate coming through.

P: Oh, what I would be told, like--oh that I would get the opportunity to have my kids back home.

I: The opportunity to have your kids back home?

P: Yea, they could come from California whenever they got time, like vacation or anything, they could come home and they could sleep in the house.

I: Yea.

P: And we could get, just like the pillows, the blankets on the floor like in the old days we could be--and then we could be in the living room, watch T.V., cartoons, VCR, play games, anything. And we could—I could go in the kitchen and cook like I did.

I: Yea.

P: And [inaudible 14:39- 14:41] but now it's no pork, pork. No pork, and pork. So, like that would be the confusion thing for me. Should I make pork chops or steak?

I: [laughing]

[14:52- 15:43]

I: Umm.

P: Because my son is a Muslim now.

I: Okay.

P: His wife is a Muslim, they can't eat no pork at all.

I: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

P: My other two kids, they eat pork.

I: So that, that--uh-huh.

P: So I be like, okay, just [inaudible 15:02] the pork.

I: [laughing]

P: That's it, that's how I feel.

I: Yea, that sounds like a good problem to have, is whether to do the pork or the steak right?

P: Yea, I be like woah, that be too much work.

I: [laughing]

P: I be like okay, no junk food, cause I got to find out your health, you diabetic or all that. And that's something I wouldn't want to feed my kids, something sweet or--cause stuff will happen to them.

I: Oh gosh. Well Maribel, I mean. Leave it there 'cause, I mean, it's a hopeful thought to you—to imagine, just to imagine.

P: Yes.

I: Just to imagine you just kind of in your space in your apartment with your kids just kinda--

P: Yeah.

I: You know, sleeping there, being able to cook for them.

P: Yeah.

[15:44- 16:32]

I: Deciding what to cook.

P: Yeah.

I: Kind of laughing together.

P: Yea. Rice and corned beef, spaghettis and meatballs, stuff like that.

I: Yea.

P: Just as long as there is no pork in it.

I: [laughing] Nah, that's beautiful.

P: Because when you raise a kid with no pork in they system, when you feed them pork, it could mess them up.

I: Sure.

P: It could get them sick, stuff like that.

I: Yea. No, I hear you. Anything else that you wanna, kind of share, you know?

P: God bless you for your service.

I: Yeah.

P: I appreciate your service, the conversation and talking to you.

I: No, I appreciate you sharing. It's really generous just to kind of like share. Even some of the joy like experiencing right now.

P: Yeah, yeah.

I: I'm really grateful. The world needs some joy right now.

P: Yeah, and it's good to—somebody else can learn. It's something that I did, yes, its gonna take time, it's tough, but like I got God. God said keep walking, keep on walking.

I: Keep on walking.

[16:33- 17:01]

P: You wanna walk, when you was born, you learned how to walk, and kept on walking. That's all you got to do. As we get older, keep on walking, don't stop, there is no such thing as you can't. You put that in your mind you can't, you never going to do it, you could do whatever you put your mind to. That's it.

I: Oh gosh, Maribel, thank you.

P: Okay, you welcome.

I: Alright, I'm gonna—oh gosh, okay I'm gonna stop this.