

## Community Conversations: NJ's COVID-19 Storytelling Project

Interview with Vitalina Orantes and her son, Adrian [Translation]

October 20, 2020

**Interviewer:** Tell me Adrian, what has the difference been since COVID?

**Adrian:** ...

**Vitalina:** *How does it feel now? Before you felt sad, and now you feel happy, now that you will return to classes.*

**I:** And you, Vitalina. What changed from March to now?

**V:** *Well, it's not easy, for one, to be locked inside. Because of that sickness, I've been stressed. But, what can be done?*

**I:** Have you gotten COVID?

**V:** *Thank God, no.*

**I:** But people who you know have?

**V:** *Yes, for now only 2 people. One guy who I sold food to, told me he got it. [Speaking to Adrian: take this over there.]*

**I:** Wait for us, Adrian. Just a moment, won't take long.

**V:** *My nephew also got it. I visited him.*

**I:** Was he very sick?

**V:** *Yes, very bad. We usually don't have many conversations, but you know in that moment, we sometimes tend to text the person or call them. [Speaking to Adrian: Put that here.] One day in the morning he texted me, "Hello Aunt." It brought me admiration, because, like I said, there isn't much communication between us. Just a call once in a while. I was eating breakfast, and it was about 8AM – 9AM, or 8:30AM – 9AM. I saw the message and I wondered what was happening. I grabbed the phone and called him. He answered me with two or three words. He just said, "Hello, Aunt. How are you? I am sick." And he started to cough. Wow, my God what happened? It must be COVID. So, I picked up the bag where I keep all of my medications. It had a bottle of Amoxicillin and a bottle of a medication I had picked up from the pharmacy, but I can't remember the name. I even put cheese balls and tortillas I had made in the package. I took the package and put it in his front door. When I got back in the taxi to return*

*home, I called him and let him know I left something for him at the door. He said, "Ok, thank you." When I was on my way to him on the taxi, I asked for his address, and he gave it to me. I even gave him a bag of tea and made sure he had limes. I also gave him bicarbonate so he can gargle with lime. Hoping to God it's not COVID. He already knew, but didn't want to tell me. He didn't tell me until 15 days later.*

**I:** Did you have any contact with him?

*V: Yes, but from afar.*

**I:** The information you have gotten about COVID 19, has it been from people you know or television? How have you obtained information of what it is?

*V: Well from the people. I have television, but I don't have cable. I don't watch TV.*

**I:** So through the phone?

*V: Yes.*

**I:** Have you received new information on COVID?

*V: No.*

**I:** So the hardest thing for you has been to see your family members get sick right?

*V: Yes.*

**I:** And you Adrian? Has anything been difficult for you? Has it been difficult to study online, or do you prefer to go to school and study with your friends?

*A: Study with my friends.*

**I:** You like it more?

*A: Yes.*

**I:** How nice. Has anything made you happy during these times?

*V: Well no, nothing. It is not easy to be locked in.*

**I:** Did you work prior to the pandemic?

*V: No, but I went out to walk, or take care of errands. But now, you go out, and you are out being fearful. I use to shop at my favorite stores like The Fernandez. I haven't been to The Fernandez.*

**I:** Why haven't you been to The Fernandez?

*V: Because there are too many people there.*

**I:** They don't distance themselves?

*V: No, everyone is bumping into each other. And it's not that I am scared of COVID. I say in God's name that he protects me from it, because of my son.*

**I:** Moving forward, what other concerns do you have?

*V: Well right now I am worried, because I have children in Guatemala. And right now, to tell you the truth, I have some problems with my daughter.*

[Break in Interview Recording]

**I:** Who's someone that has done you a favor?

*V: This is being recorded?*

*A: I like to help my mom sweep the floors.*

**I:** Oh, how lovely. Yes, help your mother.

*V: I was worried, because he's always moving, but what's there to be done?*

**I:** Do you like to draw Adrian?

*A: Yes.*

**I:** Can I see one of your drawings?

*A: Yes.*

**I:** Be careful with your laptop, it breaks easily.

*A: [Shows the interviewer his painting]*

**I:** Let's see. It's beautiful. You made this for school?

*A: Yes.*

**I:** Yes? Well, let's show the camera. Once we're done I'll take a picture of it. Have any favors been done for you? Like the one you did for your nephew when he was sick?

*V: Well, I give thanks to all the help that is given to me. I have a friend who's my only friend, and we visit each other. Just that. [Speaking to Adrian: Baby, relax.]*

**I:** So you haven't seen a doctor?

*V: No, that's another thing. I haven't been able to go to the clinic, and I take blood sugar medication.*

**I:** You need to go to the hospital to obtain your medication?

*V: Yes, for the moment. I picked up my prescription about 5 days ago, because I called them and made an appointment, but they told me they sent the prescription to the pharmacy.*

**I:** So, you got your prescription?

*V: Yes.*

**I:** It's very important to take care of your health. Is there anything you think the state of New Jersey could have done better during this pandemic?

*V: Yes.*

**I:** Like what?

*V: Well with COVID, but with how things were going, there wasn't much to be done.*

**I:** You think people could have been helped more?

*A: [Playing on his bike] You're recording me?*

**I:** Yes, I'm recording you. Show me what you're doing.

*A: Riding my bike.*

**I:** Yes.

*V: You can see all the mess.*

**I:** So what? What matters is quality.

*V: I get things to send home.*

**I:** To Guatemala?

*V: Yes, you know, there are a lot of people in need.*

**I:** Where do you find these things?

*V: People gift them to me. Like the bikes, they were gifts to Adrian.*

*A: I have more bikes.*

**I:** And you're going to learn how to fix them and put them back together?

**A:** Yes.

**I:** Yes.

**V:** *My friend's husband took the bikes apart.*

**I:** For what?

**V:** *To put them in a bag.*

**I:** In order to ship them?

**V:** Yes.

**I:** If I worked in the movie business, I would hire Adrian.

**V:** *[Laughs]*

**I:** And how are the people of Guatemala doing?

**V:** *Well, thanks to God, there hasn't been any COVID-related problems. Still poor, but the important thing is to still be alive.*

**I:** [Speaking to Adrian] Hey, your bike is almost put together. You can ride it.

**V:** *Yes, we dared ourselves and did what he wanted, which is to take out the front and back tires.*

**I:** Well, he can ride it if someone holds his seat.

**V:** *Well, yes.*

**I:** What else would you want to tell me before we go? What hopes do you have for the future?

**V:** *Life and strength to fight and continue to move forward. What else is there? Also, to take care of my son, because if I don't do it, then who will?*

**I:** Exactly.

**V:** *[Adrian's] father is currently in Guatemala as his mother almost can't speak, she has no voice.*

**I:** Is she sick?

*V: Yes, she's going to be 90 on November 4<sup>th</sup>. It's harsh because he won't have the pleasure of visiting her if he gives his last goodbye while there.*

**I:** That's life, right?

*V: Yes, that's the law of life.*

**I:** How about your daughters over there. Who are they with? Do you have more family over there?

*V: Yes, when my mother passed away, they were together. Then when my mother died my sister came, and she took my eldest daughter. [Inaudible] Now I don't know, because people only look for money. When there's money everything is good and happiness. You know, in our country, that's what people look for. Money. And that's the problem. Since I don't work right now, I can't take care of them. So, I was happy that she was working, but she decided to leave the house, because of a problem she had with another girl. Now she sleeps at my sister's or at another girl's house. Now, I tell her that I can't do anything, what can I do? I've never told you, "I got tired of taking care of you, get a man." "You went and found a man who made you a baby," I told her. "Look, those are the consequences," I told her. I also told her to be careful, because there are sicknesses out there that are really impacting people, it's getting really bad. Be careful with being in the streets.*

**I:** You still go out with your mask?

*V: Yes, of course. I always do.*

**I:** How about your son?

*V: Yes, he does.*

**I:** Adrian, can you sit with your mother for a little so that we can say goodbye, and give you my gratitude?

*V: Maybe it will be helpful?*

**I:** What, the video? Yes.

*V: My son is a lot, right?*

**I:** He's normal.

*V: He loves his bike. I'll take him out so he can play for a while.*

**I:** Yes, since it's so nice outside.

*V: Yes, this week will be good, thank God.*

**I:** What an organized young man. He put everything in order. I want to give thanks for allowing me to ask these questions. If God allows it, we will see each other again.

*V: As it will be, God first.*

**I:** [Speaking to Adrian] Take care, study a lot, and maybe you'll be a bike mechanic and be a cyclist.

*V: Imagine, I don't know if I would like that.*

**I:** But it's safe, I don't think he'll crash. It's like the Tour de France. Look it up on the internet, and see if you would like it.

*V: You know what he likes? Motorcycles.*

**I:** Oh yeah? Bikes are better Adrian, and more fun.

*A: Bikes are slow, and motorcycles are fast.*

**I:** You know, you can go really fast on bikes, and that's you making it go fast, but motorcycles have motors.

*A: I would give my mom rides.*

**I:** Right, you would take her out on your bike.

*A: Yes, and then go back home on the motorcycle.*

*V: Motorcycles come easy to him. [Laughs]*

**I:** Of course, that's what it's like to be a kid. Thank you very much.