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From Immigrant to Ethnic: Interview with Isabella Zuleta by Joseph Conforti

Isabella Zuleta

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Rhode Island College
ETHNIC STUDIES PROJECT

Oral History Interview # 11

with

Isabella Zuleta

April 21, 1976

By Joseph Conforti

Tape 1 Side 1

- 7 Born in Colombia. People very warm there. Went to Catholic school, came from a good area, had certain advantages most did not have.
- 19 Left when she was 9 or 10. Went to Europe--Spain, France, Italy. Her city was much like here only people were friendlier, would help with problems.
- 32 Father was a psychiatrist, currently in Venezuela. Brought up as strict Catholic, felt she had to be perfect. Family large, visit each other often.
- 58 Mother worked as stewardess, much travel. They moved to Panama and lived there for 1½ years. Parents separated when she was 3 or 4. Went to Spain with her mother when she was 9. Then to France for a few months and then to Italy, staying with her grandmother.
- 86 Missed Colombia, especially her family and closeness she had known there. She feels people here don't care about others.
- 96 Returned to Colombia 2 years ago for a visit.
- 108 After return from Italy, she lived in Canal Zone for 2 years with family her mother knew.
- 139 Came to America. First to Miami then to Rhode Island when she was 15. Doesn't think she would like Miami or New York--too many people, too fast-paced.
- 163 Didn't like coldness of people here. Took 1 to 2 months to get acquainted with neighbors.

Isabella Zuleta

- 185 She was ahead in regular subjects but had to make up 2 years because of language. Went to Classical High. Found it difficult because students weren't very friendly.
- 205 Left school, felt students weren't at all respectful toward teachers and was shocked by this.
- 226 Lived in North Kingstown for a year and attended school there. Felt people in Providence somewhat more open. Especially liked area where she lived in South Providence because of Spanish-speaking people there.
- 253 She began to lose her command of English by living in Spanish community.
- 271 Family background.
- 317 Mother did not adjust very well to U.S. until helped by other Spanish-speaking people.
- 365 People prejudiced against Spanish and Blacks. She thinks schools should play role in eradicating this.
- 404 Feels Spanish are more friendly, warmer, more helpful. Americans too concerned with money.
- 435 Attitudes toward young Spanish girls still similar to those in Colombia--girls to be protected, not given much freedom.
- 492 Unsure whether she wants to conform to U.S. role for women.

Tape 1 Side 2

- 4 When she first came to South Providence, mostly Dominicans. Now also Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Colombians.
- 15 The people's country of origin was most important to them. Each had their own organizations. But they were all willing to help others with adjustment problems.
- 36 Problems caused by language barrier.
- 92 When she first came, she wasn't involved in community.
- 125 Attended URI, enjoyed experience there.
- 140 Strict upbringing. Church not important to her in U.S. Didn't help her to adjust.
- 203 Contrasts between education here and in Colombia.

Isabella Zuleta

- 217 Feels she has become Americanized. Has kept what she considers the best aspects of her Spanish background.
- 235 Enjoys greater freedom for women she finds here. Account of what is expected of single young woman in Spanish culture.
- 308 Dislikes having mother tell her what to do. Likes American custom of independence and freedom of choice for women.
- 352 Feels American families are not as supportive as Spanish. But she thinks she would prefer to marry an American.
- 475 Feels Spanish community wants to retain their own customs and traditions.

Tape 2 Side 1

- 18 Changes in Spanish community--stay together more than before.
- 26 Spanish don't understand why Americans are so cold and so preoccupied with money and success.
- 52 Younger generation trying to blend Spanish and American cultures.
- 63 Likes her independence. Good to be liberated but only to a certain extent.
- 134 College education good in U.S. but Spanish secondary schools superior.
- 156 Women she knows are trying to blend both cultures. Want to be treated with respect, want to raise children the way they were raised--fairly strictly.
- 201 Different nationalities in South Providence do not act as one group. Older generation doesn't understand American culture but refuses to learn about it from younger people.
- 265 Feels there is a sense of community among the Spanish-speaking in South Providence.
- 365 She misses Colombia and the way of life there.
- 385 Wants to learn more about American lifestyle and then return to Colombia and inform them about it.