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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 rôle 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.