# Interview with Veronica Luz Espina

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Interviewer: Carol Esarey



## A Note to the Reader

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Esarey: My name is Carol Esarey, and we are at the University of Illinois Springfield for this interview. Being interviewed today is Veronica Espina. Did I say that right?

Espina: Espina.

*Veronica Espina*

Esarey: Espina, born in Chile and immigrated to the United States with her daughter, Almandra. This interview is part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Immigrant Stories*. This is a historical document.

I think what we'll do is go back and go over briefly some of the information you gave me before and maybe fill in some areas. Veronica, could you please tell me… Maybe the first thing would be to kind of go back and give me just a little background on your mom and dad. We've got the name of your dad as Eduardo Espina. And your mother is…

Espina: Monica.

Esarey: Monica. Say the last name.

Espina: Ubilla.

Esarey: You gave us your dad's occupation as a chemical engineer and your mother as a pharmacist.

Espina: Yes.

Esarey: Now, I never got down your siblings. So let's just talk a little bit about your sisters. Just kind of describe them a little bit.

Espina: Well, we are four siblings total. So I have three sisters. My older sister, the oldest, is Monica.

Esarey: Named after your mom?

Espina: Named after my mom. She is an engineer, but worked for primarily the commercial/economic side of banks, basically investing and all that kind of thing. She's very, very interesting, a very bright woman, single, very dedicated to her work, a little bit shy, dances flamenco, artistic.

Esarey: A little bit shy, but dances the flamenco. This is where she gets it out (laughs).

Espina: Yes. And she works extremely hard. She has long hours at work, and then she takes her work home. So I know that flamenco is her way to, you know, express her artistic interests and relax and do what she wants to do.

Esarey: Monica is how old?

Espina: Monica is… She's going to be forty-four. And then comes Anna Maria, who is the next sister. We never called her Anna Maria; we call her Anita. She is forty-two, going on forty-three. She is an elementary school teacher, also a flamenco dancer.

Esarey: That's interesting.

Espina: She came to the U.S. about six months after I came, a similar story. But she left, going back home. I'm not sure what she's doing right now. I want to say that she wanted to have her own business, but she went back home.

Esarey: She went back to Chile.

Espina: She never lived in Springfield; she lived in Chicago.

Esarey: She lived in Chicago, but only stayed a short time.

Espina: Yes, and left.

Esarey: Do you know why?

Espina: I think that she missed home.

Esarey: She missed being home.

Espina: We all do. There's certain things that immigrants miss the most; they mean different things to different people. But I know that she missed family and friends and sort of the cultural aspects of living and being there.

Esarey: So different.

Espina: Even though she liked living in the U.S., and she had some projects going on, it was really hard to go from having an education and a degree to have to start over in the U.S. until somebody hires you, which is… You know, that is a problem. It is a story…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) This is how it is.

Espina: …that accompanies immigrants in many cases, especially those that have had a sort of career before moving. There's those at the very top, let's say doctors and engineers and nurses, that for some reason migrate and are able to find a job because that's the reason why they migrate, and they [the new country] want their skills. So when they move to another country, they continue doing the same. But, for example, teachers, which is my sister's case, if you migrate to another country then you have to start certifying again and taking tests again. So it was really hard…

Esarey: She said, "Maybe I don't want to bother."

Espina: Yes.

Esarey: Then you have one more.

Espina: And then I have our little sister, who is eleven years younger than me, so she's probably going to be thirty. Yeah, she turned thirty in July. She also [is] very interesting. She started with architecture, very artistic, and one day say to my mom and dad, she said, "You know what? This is empty to me. I don't want to do this any more."

Education is very expensive, **very** expensive in Chile, higher ed. And my parents were a little bit devastated because she was like in her third year when she decided. They were like, "Okay. What do you want to do?" She said, "Well, I want to be a psychologist." She realized that my parents had already paid for three kids to go to college, so she became the best in her class.

She went to school with [a] scholarship, which is very rare. It's very competitive, very expensive. And she almost had full ride for a couple of years. So she tried really hard to not put that burden on my parents. She's a very, very amazing woman. She works, I think, with juveniles. She doesn't work with a prison right now; she's working with rehab, with juveniles.

Esarey: As a psychologist.

Espina: Yes.

Esarey: Her name is…

Espina: Natalia.

Esarey: I can't help but comment about how each of you in the family—all four women—has become a professional woman.

Espina: I know. I think I told you before…

Esarey: Tell me again. What was it that your parents did, or what influences were there to allow you to move like that?

Espina: Yes. You know, I'm going to give you the general background, which is, a lot of people think that in Latin America all cultures have this macho image in which woman are submissive, subjugated…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) That's true.

Espina: …and that's the case in many cultures, not just in Latin America. There are macho men everywhere. When you have very domineering men that will not want their wives to work outside the house, that's not the identity characteristic of Latin America. That's everywhere. I tell you this because a lot of people will say, "Oh, girls going to college in your country." It's like well, yeah, because on the flip side there is a lot of matriarchy in Latin America.

In my family, women have character. Women were, for the most part, especially in the maternal side of my family—my mom and her mother, my grandma—were women that had very strong personalities, that they were not told, "Hey, you're not going to do this. You're not going to accomplish that." They had a world open to them, even though the historic circumstances had not been like, for example, "You're going to be a doctor."

My grandmother was probably not a doctor because there were not women going to medical school at that time. So she was a midwife. But later on, she could have she could have been an obstetrician or something like that. Yet she still went to school and became a very, very renowned midwife in the city where she lived. In fact, when my mom had the first the first two of us, she went to deliver with her, which is kind of odd, go deliver with your mom. But it was a done deal. Why not? She's good, and she's going to be in a good hospital, well taken care of.

So it comes from that side of the family, I would say. The paternal side was more submissive. My grandma was really young when she married this older guy. I'm talking about my dad's mom. So that was a different story.

But just to finish with the idea, my grandma and grandparent, my grandfather, have only one child, my mom. What I think, what I heard, is my grandma—her name was Maria—she had several miscarriages. So she was almost forty when she was able to have this precious baby. They were like desperate for a baby, and that was my mom, Monica. I was thinking that my grandparents wanted a family, and my grandmother was a midwife.

My grandfather was a tailor, very elegant man. And they sent her [their daughter] to private school. This only child went to boarding school. In fact, my mom, later on, will tell us stories that she really didn't like to be away in boarding school. She missed home. She was an only child, sent away to get this great education in a Catholic private school with nuns and all that deal. But she really didn't want that. So when she got married, she's like "I'm going to have all the kids that I can. I'm going to have several, several kids, and they're going to do great things,' like my parents wanted me to do.

On the other hand, you have my dad's family, in which women were a little bit more submissive. But because my dad married this women, with a lot of character to go to pharmacy school, when he had all these daughters, he knew, "Hey, these girls are going to go somewhere. They're not going to stay home." I think I mentioned to you, I never, ever, ever heard from my dad, "Eh, it's okay, honey. You're going to get married," never.

Esarey: He wouldn't do that.

Espina: It was always, "You need to study. You're going to get a scholarship. You're going to be a doctor. You're going to be a lawyer." We kind of bent his hand here and there by not being necessarily what he wanted, but we achieved very good professional careers.

Esarey: Absolutely.

Espina: My oldest sis, who was really very studious, my dad [said,] "You should be a doctor." But Monica couldn't see blood. She couldn't…(Esarey laughs) She didn't like to be around sick people. Okay, she became an engineer.

Esarey: That was acceptable.

Espina: That was, yeah. You know what I'm saying.

Esarey: Yes.

Espina: He expected great things. He told me, "You're going to be a lawyer. You can argue. You're independent. You give us a hard time. You break the rules. You're going to be a lawyer." I'm like, "Dad, you went to law school; you didn't like it." "Okay, yeah, that's a good point." So it was like, "Well, what do you want to do?" "Well, I want to be a history teacher." He was like, "No, teachers don't make any money." "Well, how about journalism?" "Okay, journalism is good."

Esarey: You made a deal.

Espina: I made a deal. I either wanted to be a history teacher or a singer. I was very into music. My dad was a jazz fanatic, and we heard jazz at home, growing up. So he made a deal with me, and he's like, "No, you're going to make a future. Just do something else." We're going to go to that part of my life as well. We were growing up in a dictatorship, and so…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Yes, we'll talk about that.

Espina: …having freedom of the press, becoming a journalist, was a dream for me to discover what happened to our country, to read all these banned books and all that. That's what I wanted to be, and he and my mom supported me. It was good.

Esarey: The two of them were together when it came to what you could all do.

Espina: Right. And the two of them had very different lives, life histories, very different backgrounds. I think they lived through experiences during the dictatorship—and I'm talking about [Augusto] Pinochet—that somehow affected them at a personal level in different ways. My mom became sole breadwinner for many years.

My dad's… Part of the families were socialists and communists, some of his siblings. So there was these sort of blacklisting with him, and some of his family was exiled or had to leave the country. So he had a lot of problems finding a good job for an engineer. It was very hard on him, which in return, made it very hard on us because he was very demanding with us. We're going to do this. He was the guy with rules and strict and no boys. But it was also the time; it was a terrible time; it was dictatorship time; it was people being disappeared…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) What timeframe are we talking about? You were growing up in the '80s?

Espina: I was born in the '70s.

Esarey: Born in the '70s, but you kids were…

Espina: It happened in 1973.

Esarey: I've done a little homework (laughs).

Espina: Yeah. I grew up [in the] '70s and '80s. The '80s was my youth.

Esarey: And Pinochet was in charge, totally.

Espina: In charge until 1988. Yes.

Esarey: So you girls were going to private Catholic schools at that time…

Espina: Yeah.

Esarey: Correct?

Espina: Correct.

Esarey: …in where you were living. I think you wrote that down; you gave that to me.

Espina: Yes, San Diego.

Esarey: Right. That's really interesting that the maternal side of your family was so independent, so strong.

Espina: Yes, very strong. My grandma always tells stories about my maternal grandma. We call her "*Nona Maria*" because that's the Italian for "grandparent." My grandparent had been raised by an Italian family. He became an orphan—his parents died—so his older sister took him to live with her. She had married an Italian man. So he was raised with this Italian man he adored and learned a lot of Italian cuisine and culture. So when we were born, it's like, "You're not calling me *abeulo* [Spanish for grandfather]. No, there's no way. You're calling me *nono."*

Esarey: *Nono*?

Espina: *Nono*, which is Italian for grandpa.

Esarey: So what languages did you speak?

Espina: Spanish.

Esarey: Spanish, but you had Italian roots in there somewhere.

Espina: Well, no. My grandpa had been raised by this Italian family, but I don't know if he learned the language with them. They were, like—how do they call—in-laws, not blood relatives. So he went to live with them really…

Esarey: I don't know what that word is.

Espina: No, in-laws, like his brother-in law.

Esarey: Oh, I thought I was getting to a word we needed to identify. Do you have any pictures of your grandmother and grandfather?

Espina: Oh yes. I have them. I'll just have to ask my mom.

Esarey: Sometime we can share…if you could share some of those pictures, like a picture of your mother and father, pictures of your grandmother and grandfather on each side. If you have anything like that, several family pictures, if you could share those. Would they send those to you, or do you have them here?

Espina: No, they will send them to me.

Esarey: They're okay with sharing their pictures.

Espina: Yes. I haven't talked to them, Carol, but they're like, "Oh, Veronica's doing a project. She's going to finish it." They're—how should I say this—they're not necessarily scared of me, my parents are not. But there is some sort of… My parents kind of admire me. They will not say it to me; they will say it to relatives and other people…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) But not to you?

Espina: …how proud we are of you, because I was a rule breaker with them. I was a difficult child. They didn't learn to tell me the things they were thinking about me. But, when I told them, "I'm doing this project, and it's meaningful to me, and I want you to participate," they do. They know that I have a rational argument, and they follow. It's very interesting, our relationship with my parents. It's more… There's not really [a] daughter-parents relationship; it's more equal at this point. It was because I broke all the rules. At this point it's like, "Okay."

Esarey: You broke all the rules.

Espina: Yeah, I broke all the rules. That was what I was supposed to do, living in that environment, in a dictatorship.

Esarey: Do you think we are at a place where we could begin to talk about what it was like to grow up in a dictatorship?

Espina: Yes.

Esarey: I think we're kind of right there. You've given me a background, and now here you are. You're old enough to go to school; you're living in an environment… But first I just want to go back for just a second. Music seems to play a big role in your family. Can you discuss where that all came from?

Espina: Oddly enough, my dad had friends that were into jazz. My dad was probably born in 1936. I'm talking in the late '40s and '50s. He had neighborhood friends that were jazz musicians. And one close friend of my dad was a remarkable, very famous jazz pianist…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) In Chile.

Espina: In Chile…that had a short career, because he died in a car accident. My dad was influenced by all these friendships and the music they were listening[to]. So he, early on, tried to play, I think, trumpet and saxophone, but didn't pursue that because then he went to college and tried different careers until he finally decided to be an engineer.

But, growing up, my dad always played very specific music at home, mostly jazz. When it wasn't jazz, it was the crooners; it was Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole. If there were Chilean musicians playing in the background at home, it was Chilean jazz musicians and others that were more pop music, but that kind of trend.

So my dad knew that I had this music inclination, and he could always find me singing, everywhere. I was a singer. When I was very young, he would play a record for me and say, after weeks and weeks of hearing this in the background, he'll like, "Who's that?" He will test me, and I would be so nervous to disappoint him. I would be like, "That's Sinatra?" I was wrong. "No, that's Dizzy Gillespie! How did you not know the difference?"

He would play and play jazz musicians for me. I knew Miles Davis when I was a kid and John Coltrane and all these amazing jazz musicians, to a point that, when I left home, and I was still in journalism school, I left home in a relationship with a jazz musician in Chile, who is now very famous, a guitar jazz musician. We had bands together. We did musical projects together. My daughter is also a guitar player. So yeah, music is a huge part of our lives, making music, educating ourselves in different music.

Esarey: You're saying that, when you left you had a relationship with… Is your daughter…

Espina: Oh yeah. That's my daughter's father.

Esarey: That's your daughter's father, because you haven't mentioned him at all. I didn't want to bring it up unless you were…

Espina: Yeah, that's Maurico, Maurico Rodriguez, who's pretty famous and recognized.

Esarey: You're going to need to write that one down.

Espina: Yeah, jazz musician, a guitarist.

Esarey: I'll ask you later to write that down. So your daughter is also…

Espina: A musician.

Esarey: …a musician.

Espina: Yeah, she has recorded with her dad. In fact, her name, Almandra, was the name of a band from Argentina that I liked very much, growing up.

Esarey: That was the name of the band?

Espina: That was the name of the name of the band, and it was also a non-frequently, very odd, an artistic name for a girl that was not very used in the '90s, when my daughter was born. It started to be used later. When we decided to name her Almandra, it was because it sounded pretty; it was a pretty name, but it was also related to music.

Esarey: And you were in the band as well?

Espina: Well, that was an Argentinean band.

Esarey: Oh, it was an Argentinean band?

Espina: That was the name of an Argentinean band. But later on her dad, Maurico, and I had several bands together. Then Maurico's first band was named Almandra Trio, which is in honor to our daughter. So yeah, very neat.

Esarey: How long did that go on?

Espina: Her dad and I were together about eight years.

Esarey: About eight years.

Espina: We were very much in love, and then it was very difficult for us. We were very young and had a kid, very young. He was younger than me, and he had his dreams of coming to the U.S. and have a career. But he didn't want to leave us. He came here to study and went back. It's a long story. There was [a] scholarship. At the end, it didn't work out. Then I migrated.

Esarey: Yes, you did. How old were you then? Give me your age, approximately.

Espina: I came here in January.

Esarey: Nineteen ninety-nine.

Espina: January of 1999, and I was twenty-eight. I was going to be twenty-nine in March of that year, yeah.

Esarey: So you were with him during the 1990s.

Espina: Right.

Esarey: For eight years of that time.

Espina: Yes, we probably started our relationship in the '90s. We were very, very young.

Esarey: I think we'll come back to that. But I was very interested in… This was a very strong, musical…

Espina: (interrupts Espina) Yeah, background.

Esarey: …background, for everyone.

Espina: Yes.

Esarey: Flamenco, singing, all of it. Great.

Espina: Everybody in the family was encouraged to do some sort of music. Some of my sisters did study piano, and we all got guitar lessons at some point. So, yeah, music was a big part of our lives.

Esarey: Let's talk about 1973 and '74, when this dictatorship… You said, maybe the first time that I talked with you, that this had a profound affect on what happened in your family after that. Some things changed.

Espina: Oh yeah. There's just nobody my age that could ever say that the dictatorship didn't affect them, no matter what side of the political spectrum they leaned.

Esarey: How old were you, when you were…

Espina: I was three years old when the coup happened. You know, they called it the *coup d'etat*, we would say, "*golpe al estado*.' It's actually Spanish for "blow to the state or [blow] to the head."

Esarey: And you were living where?

Espina: I was living in Santiago, and I was the third child of my parents at that time. So Anita must have been four and Monica maybe five or almost six.

Esarey: Your dad at that point was in engineering. He was doing engineering work?

Espina: No, I think he was finishing school or going to…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Oh, he was finishing school.

Espina: But my mom was a pharmacist and had a pharmacy at that time.

Esarey: She owned one?

Espina: She owned a pharmacy. The story goes from the day of the coup, in which I have very vague memories of helicopters, a distinctive sound of a…

Esarey: It was a military… It ended up being a very, very much a military coup.

Espina: And then those stories, later on, complemented my mom's side of the story. Being a pharmacist, you notice immediately [that] certain things were going on because people started coming to the pharmacy, asking for aid, first aid elements, and things that you will use to stop bleeding and things that you will use to take care of the wound.

Even though, as soon as the military takeover began, the communications were… Media and radio only transmitted for a couple of hours, and they were immediately taken over and cut, and people, the population in general, didn't know much what was going on. My mom immediately knew because she was selling products at the pharmacy that were related to people dying. She will tell me later that that was that day, September 11, 1973, [and] what was going on in her pharmacy. She was selling things she didn't think made sense.

People were coming home from work saying, "My factory closed down today. Did you hear the shots?" My dad, who was working at that time, also was sent home. That's how that awful September 11 looked like in my memories, by hearing the stories from my parents, what I remember hearing as a [child].

Esarey: It was September 11?

Espina: Yeah, in 1973.

sarey: Wow, another 9/11.

Espina: Yeah. Teaching Latin American history here UIS [University of Illinois Springfield], I always tell my students, "Interesting. This was **my** September 11th."

Esarey: Exactly.

Espina: "Think about yours and how they correlate. It's a very awful date in history."

Esarey: It's striking.

Espina: Yes.

Esarey: You were very young then, and you have vague memories of that. But your parents have told you stories or your sisters or your family?

Espina: My parents.

Esarey: What happened to your dad, as far as work? Was he ever able to get work during those years or what?

Espina: My dad…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) He was a young man.

Espina: My dad was working for a big company at the time, I think General Motors or something that had a transnational [corporation] at that point. My dad had a fight later on with somebody there and quit. That led him to look for other jobs. I'm telling you this because he always told me that days or some weeks after the coup, the military, the soldiers, showed up at the company where he was working and put all the men against the wall.

Esarey: Oh, gee.

Espina: "And face the wall." You know what's going to happen when you face the wall, and you have military men behind you…

Esarey: (whispers) With guns.

Espina: …with guns. So my dad says that that was the scariest moment of his life. He knew that there was a problem, because… I need to tell you something. We had a socialist president, Salvador Allende, up to that point. A lot of people in the economic right wing did not want a socialist president that was going to change, for example, how the wealth was going to be distributed, how taxes were going to change, how the process of nationalization of industry was going to hurt investment of the wealthy in Chile and in the U. S. and in Britain, everywhere, right? So basically national and international corporations were hurt by a socialist government.

Now, interestingly—and this is why a lot of people were so deeply hurt by the coup—Salvador Allende, the president, did not arrive to the government as a revolutionary. He did not overthrown the government. He did not kill the previous president. There was no guerilla [organization] for him to be counted with. He was democratically elected by the people in a second-round vote.

Esarey: Yes.

Espina: So, for the people supporting Allende to have a *coup d'etat* was not only an insult and horrible thing, it was basically getting rid of this democratic process that had elected a socialist president. But it was hurting the economy of the U.S., and the U.S. was looking at Chile as the next Cuba. I always tell my students…

Esarey: Well, that's interesting.

Espina: Why would the U.S. bother to go and intervene, for [U.S. President Richard] Nixon to make this decision—and those tapes were released twenty-five years later—of Nixon decisions and the memorandum, saying, "We're going to Chile, and we're going to support the military there and create a coup." We actually trained Chileans to get rid of Salvador Allende. That's what Nixon plotted. We [being] the military in Chile.

I always said there were, what, 10 million people in Chile at the time, maybe 9 [million]? I don't remember; it's the '70s, the southern-most country in the world, a little, long country, far, far, far away from the U.S. We're not talking about Mexico or Canada. We're not talking about Cuba.

Why would the U.S. have the interest to intervene? Why is Nixon worried? It's because, one, they're thinking about the domino theory; one falls, the rest of Latin America becomes red. And two, there was a lot of economic interest and investment from Americans in Chile. If Allende decided to nationalize the industry, bye bye American investment. It was going to…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) They would leave.

Espina: Or it was going to be property of the Chilean people and government. So, this is how the coup was plotted. This is how it was organized, and it was organized in Nixon's office. So, September 11 for me has that meaning, intervention, the decisive and deliberate decision to eliminate our civil liberties and our right to freedom and our right to self-determine who is our president.

Esarey: And you're determining that the United States had a hand in this. I mean, maybe not directly, but you're feeling there were…

Espina: Well, I'm not determining. No, no, it was directly involved. You can find all this information on the internet. After twenty-five years all this records…

Esarey: I don't mean you that you, you know have a huge…

Espina: There's no research in the world that can show you otherwise. There was direct…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Would you say other countries were involved, besides the United States, maybe by just allowing this to occur, this coup?

Espina: It was only Nixon, the one who provided certain military strategies and training. If you look at the School of the Americas, which is where the United States trained…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) I'm going to look it up.

Espina: …our military bodies, you will find that the Chilean, the Brazilians…

Esarey: I probably need to take your course.

Espina: There were other investments, of course. There were British and French and all kinds of investments in Chile.

Esarey: I know you had a lot of Europeans.

Espina: It had a very good market for Europeans who had been colonized by Spaniards. So it had a lot of Spanish investments too. But the coup was plotted in the U.S., with the help of the wealthy in Chile.

Esarey: Got it.

Espina: I won't say the other way around. The wealthy in Chile, in the right wing was backed up by the government of Nixon at that time. And it makes, sense, Carol. It was the Cold War. It was the terrifying vision that the whole world was becoming red. It was the Soviet Union against the United States. So most of American presidencies of that time were marked by the idea, we cannot allow the U.S. to keep losing territories to the Soviet Union or governments to the Soviet Unions, and we need to intervene.

Che Guevara had been so successful, and the Cuban Revolution had been so successful, in terms of completely claiming independence from the U. S. and alliance with the Soviet Union, that most of the capital that was invested in Chile was at risk in the eyes of the American government, if we were to become another satellite of the Soviet Union.[1]

The thing was, Allende was independent; Allende was a socialist. But he did not arrive to the government by throwing a revolution. He was elected by the people, which is not what happened in the Soviet Union bloc. You see Poland and Czechoslovakia that were all military interventions of the basically Russians, intervening in those countries and setting up communist government. Well, that's not the case of Chile. Chileans voted for this president. Does that make sense?

Esarey: Yes.

Espina: That's the reason why there this animate effort to completely get rid of that government. It couldn't happen only by Chileans overthrowing its own

1 Ernesto "Che" Guevara was an Argentine Marxist revolutionary, physician, author, guerrilla leader, diplomat, and military theorist. A major figure of the Cuban Revolution, his stylized visage has become a ubiquitous countercultural symbol of rebellion and global insignia in popular culture. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Che_Guevara)

government by the right wing. It needed the support of the biggest one there. And who was the biggest opponent to the Soviet Union? The U.S.

Esarey: You never stopped being interested in history, did you?

Espina: No, never.

Esarey: This is a passion with you.

Espina: It was music and history. I always told him… I always told my dad, "You don't understand."

Esarey: Well, it's not gone, because you're extremely articulate in summarizing this huge upheaval. Thank you.

Espina: But you know what? I think when somebody takes away something from you, you learn how to want it back. I grew up in the darkness. I grew up in a dictatorship that didn't allow us to know sources of information, independent research. The history books were changed. We were allowed to know what the dictator wanted us to know. And so for me…

Esarey: Books were banned.

Espina: Books were banned. We created systematic torture in Chile. We trained people in the School of the Americas to come back to Chile and torture our own people so we would prevent the access to information. When a dictatorial, authoritarian government wants to control the power, the first things they do is to cut access to sources of information, control of the media, put a curfew in place—right?—and ban books.

Esarey: And all that happened.

Espina: And all that happened. You get rid of the youths; you disappear some of the teachers; and you close the schools of philosophy, sociology, history. You intervene every way in which society is allowed to think for itself.

Esarey: And this is the atmosphere you grew up in.

Espina: Right. I grew up having birthday parties with curfew.

Esarey: With a curfew.

Espina: With a curfew, with a curfew, with a military siren. So for me to know history, that was a demand. I was an avid reader; I was gifted. At that time they didn't call kids gifted. There was no gifted program in Chile. But I could write and read at age three, so I was bored constantly, and my parents fed me books because this kid was bored.

Esarey: Did they continue to find books for you, even though books were banned?

Espina: Oh yeah. We had a great library at home. My parents were avid readers. I was very lucky in that.

Esarey: So you could continue, even though you had to be quiet about that.

Espina: Yeah. Think of my mom, a pharmacist with three kids, right, because my little sister was born eleven years later. She was a busy woman, and I was a force of nature. I wanted to read it and do things, and she was working.

Esarey: (laughs) A force of nature, that's good.

Espina: And I told you that I was born with this weird disease that nobody ever disclosed to me. So I had a physical slower development.

Esarey: And are you going to find out what that is?

Espina: They still don't talk to me about it. But anyway, so because I was…

Esarey: You were going to try though.

Espina: Yeah, I send emails. I needed to talk to my mom. But anyway, because I had that kind of a slow motor-skills development, my brain did all it could to compensate.

Esarey: It was your physical motor skills, that you were just slow in… Bt it picked up…

Espina: Right.

Esarey: …as you got older.

Espina: Yeah. So yeah, I wanted…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) But up here, rolling all the time.

Espina: Oh yeah. But you know what? I overcame whatever I had. I also fixed my legs, because for some years I walked with these boots that will help my legs to stay in place. And I became an athlete. My dad was very supportive. "You need to do sports." I was **very** good in school, straight A. But I had a scholarship to go to the university because I was both. So I always tried to do both. It's like, you tell me what I cannot do, and I'll show you I can do it, that kind of little girl. It was not mean; I just had that willingness, I think, because of the historic time.

Esarey: And a persistence.

Espina: Persistence, because I had a very same thing. When I tell you that the dictatorship impacted us profoundly, it was because my dad also changed with it.

Esarey: What happened to him?

Espina: He became bitter. He lost his job. He couldn't find a job. He had lost his contacts. Part of his family was exiled. We have family on the mainland.

Esarey: What happened to the family that was in exile? What did that mean, to be in exile?

Espina: To be in exile… There were two types of fleeing, basically, because after the coup, you could see bodies in the river, and you knew that there were disappearing people.

Esarey: People were just gone.

Espina: People were gone, and people were getting killed. You could hear the machine guns. It was scary to be a socialist. It was scary to be a communist. They were going to be killed, if you had any sort of leadership in any type of movement, from a teacher belonging to a union, to a politician. There was no difference; you were going to be disappeared.

Esarey: It's everybody.

Espina: Everybody. My dad had two brothers that… One of them was more active in his political ideas. I want to say they were communist, and they left. But leaving was not necessarily, "Oh, I'm leaving the country because I don't like it any more." It was because, if they didn't leave, they were going to be killed. They were lucky enough to get the Red Cross [to] help them, and somehow they got to a plane because, at that time the only way for people to leave was to reach some sort of democratic embassy that would help you and open the doors to you. We had Canadian embassies, French, German embassies taking Chileans because they realize they are going to be killed. I want to say—I would like to talk to my uncle and ask him, so he could clarify—But what I know is that they left with the help of the Red Cross. And they [were] in London and Romania…

Esarey: Really?

Espina: …who was supposed to be a communist heaven, for communists. But once they got there they realized this is another dictatorship, so they left. So my cousins grew up in Africa…

Esarey: In Africa? They grew up in Africa?

Espina: …because they ended up leaving Romania for Mozambique, and they grew up in Africa.

Esarey: Where are they now?

Espina: They now are back in Chile. They came back…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) They all came back when you could…

Espina: …in the mid '80s, yeah. When there was no danger. There was another brother of my dad, [who] went to Venezuela.

Esarey: When your father was lined up against the wall, what was that all about? To frighten them, to intimidate?

Espina: They were a couple things. They asked them for very specific people, let's say, "Have you seen John Smith? Why is he not here? Are you friend with him? Are you friends of his or his family? Where is he now? Answer." The problem is, that even if you knew John Smith, if you admitted that you had been a friend…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) You are in trouble.

Espina: …you are in trouble. So people stood quietly, looking at the wall. Some people were taken, and some people were not. My dad told me that it was the first time in his life he felt his legs and knees shaking, like he was going to pass out.

Esarey: He might have been thinking, "I'm going to die here. I could die."

Espina: Yes, terrified. "I am going to close my eyes and hear a sound." That was, yes. And so my dad…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) You say he became bitter, maybe disillusioned?

Espina: Disillusioned, angry.

Esarey: Angry.

Espina: Angry. Angry he couldn't work. Angry he had worked so hard to go to college, and finally decide on a career, and there he was driving a taxi.

Esarey: He ended up… It sounds like he put a lot of energy into helping you girls…

Espina: Right, right.

Esarey: …his children, become better and succeed and to learn.

Espina: Yes, and at some point, in the '80s, beginning of the '90s, my mom did pretty well. She had one, two or three pharmacies. And my dad would be in charge of one or two, because he was educated and understood what was going on. But he was not a pharmacist. I would think that his dream of working as an engineer, as he wanted, was broken.

Esarey: That was broken when that happened.

Espina: He was an angry man. He was an angry dad. He would blow up if the table was moved one centimeter out from the wall. So we grew up in fear, but we also grew up knowing "Geez, Dad has it really hard. Dad is driving a taxi for [a] twelve-hour shift."

Esarey: Which was just…

Espina: Why is an engineer…?

Esarey: Why is an engineer having to drive a taxi?

Espina: Right. If you do research, in economic times, in bad economic times, women get any job. But men wait for their dream job. Well, my dad couldn't do that. So he took whatever.

Esarey: He couldn't wait. He took whatever he could get.

Espina: I think that's what made him so angry, is that Dad didn't sit at home, waiting for his dream engineering work. He drove taxis; he cleaned places. When he didn't want to work or felt humiliated, he was a cook; he was the house husband. We were terrified of that, yet we knew Dad was brilliant. We knew Dad had music in him. We knew Dad wanted the best for us.

Esarey: This was all topsy-turvy…

Espina: Right.

Esarey: …from the way it was supposed to be.

Espina: Right. That's how I said the dictatorship affected us so deeply.

Esarey: You said you had a strong story of what happened to your family when that happened.

Espina: Yes, because Dad would have been a different man. He would have been…

Esarey: I've been dying to hear you describe that experience of what happened to you then. But I think, because it's 2:00, we'll stop.

Espina: Okay.

Esarey: And we'll pick up right at this point, if we can, then we'll go forward.

Espina: Yes. I'm going to make a note of what I need to ask.

(end of transcript #1)

# Interview with Veronica Luz Espina

# IM-A-L-2011-052

Interview # 2: August 5, 2011

Interviewer: Carol Esarey



## A Note to the Reader

This transcript is based on an interview recorded by the ALPL Oral History Program. Readers are reminded that the interview of record is the original video or audio file, and are encouraged to listen to portions of the original recording to get a better sense of the interviewee's personality and state of mind. The interview has been transcribed in near-verbatim format, then edited for clarity and readability, and reviewed by the interviewee. For many interviews, the ALPL Oral History Program retains substantial files with further information about the interviewee and the interview itself. Please contact us for information about accessing these materials.

Esarey: Today is August 5, 2011. This is Carol Esarey; I'm a volunteer with the Oral History Program. This is the second interview with Veronica Espina—I got that right this time—as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Immigrant Stories*. This is a historical document. We're just going to pick up and keep going from where we were the last time.

Espina: I'm going to continue with a little bit of the background on how the politics of that historic moment, in which I was born and then grew up in Chile, affected my world vision and world view and growing up in a family.

Esarey: (whispers) I'm just checking the lines.

Espina: I think maybe later on I can explain to you how politics is a big part of my life and how that may seem kind of weird for mainstream Americans, because one of the things that I had discovered teaching about Latin America, here at UIS [University of Illinois Springfield] and also talking with friends, is that even though the United States has an amazing Constitution, and we encourage freedom of speech, sometimes talking about politics is not something that people perceive as positive. Some people will not like to talk about politics, or it's a nasty topic for some; we should not be concerned about politics.

But for a Latin American, from the people that sell on the streets to educated people, politics is an every day topic, because we have gone through processes in Latin America where it has been… During the '70s and '80s, it was not an accident; it was not an exception to have dictatorships in almost every country in South Central America. So people who grew up in dictatorships, right, who were under very authoritarian regimes, wanted to talk about politics and wanted to express what they were thinking about the government.

Esarey: You're right. We often consider politics a subject that you're just not so sure you can talk about because it might make someone uneasy.

Espina: Right. I remember when we created this course at the University of Illinois called Latin American Expressions, my colleague and I, Dr. Manti, were researching the topic, how to teach about Latin America through arts. I found this piece written by Octavio Paz, who was a Nobel Laureate, Nobel award writer, from Mexico. He wrote [that] the difference between people in Latin America and in the United States—the North American identity, how you call it—he used to say… He wrote that people in Latin America did not trust in institutions, did not trust the government. Therefore for people, change was through revolution, and the revolutionary has been always been thought [of] as a Latin American.

People think about revolutionaries coming from Latin America, not necessarily from Europe or from North America, but from Latin America. It makes so much sense to me because he explained, in the United States, for example—he lived here in the United States—people reform. They trust the system enough to want it to reform it, to change it, to negotiate their grievances to make it better. But in Latin America there's no such trust, so you want to overthrow it. You want to get rid of it. You want to have revolution because you don't trust the system. Those were very evident to me; there were significant differences…

Esarey: (talking over Espina) Very significant.

Espina: How do you teach about that? And then I understood why politics, for me, was such a fascinating topic.

Esarey: Why? Why exactly?

Espina: Because we grew up not trusting the government, because we grew up thinking there's no possible reform. This just has to completely change from the root, because when you have people disappearing...because when you see half of your family in exile, or you realize that there isn't justice or that people are getting wealthy and wealthier and rich and rich, and the rich is getting richer, right? And the poor is getting more impoverished every day, that there's no trusting in this system. There's no way to reform it; you have to overthrow it.

Well, that didn't happen to you because, as we talked about before, [Salvador] Allende was elected by a democratic vote. And Chile had a tradition and a history of democracy that had been there for several centuries. That's why it was so important for me, growing up, this topic of politics. That's why it was important to me, as an adult looking back and analyzing my childhood, to understand that I couldn't analyze my family life and my relationship without that context. Does that make sense?

Esarey: Yes.

Espina: For example, I went to Catholic school, private school. My parents made a big effort to send all the girls to Catholic school.

Esarey: Education, you said, was extremely important to your family.

Espina: Yes, [Augusto] Pinochet made sure he privatized education, which means that not everybody has access to good education. When you privatize education, you make public education fall apart. So, in order to get good education, you have to pay for private schools. I remember going to this Catholic school with nuns and talking one day…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) How old were you then?

Espina: I must have been in… I don't know, seventh grade.

Esarey: Twelve, thirteen.

Espina: Yeah. Talking one day about how funny Pinochet looked in the last nation address, because we will have, every other Monday or whatever, a televised address to the nation, and all the media will cover it, of course. There was no choice. He always looked very angry, and at the beginning, he wore these very dark sunglasses.

Esarey: Was this mandatory?

Espina: Right. This is a national address that all channels have to tune into, right, and radios…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) You watched it in school.

Espina: And… I probably watched it at home because it was usually at night, after the news. So I was making this comment about how terrible Pinochet was and how ugly he looked or, oh, how angry he seemed, his voice. One of my friends in this little Catholic school—there probably were twenty per grade—said, "Veronica's a communist!" And we got all so quiet and scared. I was twelve, maybe, and I was called a communist. But we all knew that communists were disappearing, were not getting found.

Esarey: Yeah, you just went like that.

Espina: And I was scared. That was one of my best friends, who had called me a communist. I don't think I talked about politics with my friends for a long

time. Later on, as an adult—we were still friends—I reminded her of this comment she made. She didn't remember it (Esarey laughs). But she grew up in a family that was completely opposed to Pinochet, were completely resistant to the system. They were like the opposition, how we called it. So she felt badly. But I remember having that fear because you had the *latores* [informats]…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) She pointed her finger at you, yeah.

Espina: Right. She pointed the finger at me. We had a legal figure that was called *de latore*, which was basically an informant. That could have been your neighbor or your best friend, who was informing on you. But as a twelve year old, having that kind of fear, isn't it ridiculous? I had it because we were growing up in that kind of system.

Esarey: What was that word that you used?

Espina: *De latore*.

Esarey: Would you spell it for me? Just write it down. It means…

Espina: It means basically being an informant.

Esarey: An informant.

Espina: Right. Which, of course, my best friend wasn't, and her family wasn't either. They were very much involved in a creating a resistance to Pinochet. But it shows you how much distrust…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Distrust, yes.

Espina: …you had to have, in order to survive.

Esarey: And distrust was part of a dictatorship.

Espina: Right. If you could find that among your friends, in a classroom in a private school, that meant that it had permeated every single activity of your life. So you basically grew up in fear. It was…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) But before that happened, you didn't have that feeling. You felt you could speak your mind, until someone said that to you.

Espina: Well, I kind of knew, because we would be taking a taxi… Let's say, my mom and I were going to run an errand, and we would take a taxi. And my mom would make a little joke with the taxi driver. She will say, "Hey, are you turning right or left?" And the taxi driver would say, "Of course, left." And they would giggle to each other, a completely stranger. It meant, "Hey, the…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) It was a code.

Espina: ". . . the left still [is] alive, underground," which meant, we don't like the regime. To decode those things as a kid, we probably had to have been living

through such an incredible propaganda and emotional pressure to survive under these conditions, that we picked it up pretty quickly, as a kid. It was also something that I did because I was pretty good analyzing peoples' faces and speech and all that. But I had already, an understanding at a young age, that the worst things that you would not talk outside the house—right?—because you would not say… It was clear to me that, if I had taken this taxi with my mom, and my mom was not saying things, as she was supposed to, and she was doing a play on words with the taxi driver, then that meant something. You know what I mean?

So, as a kid, I knew there were things I was not going to talk about outside the house. But I didn't know how pervasive it was until I found that friend in school who called me a communist. And then I realized, "Oh, we all (unintelligible)."

Esarey: (talking over Espina) And you never forgot that incident.

Espina: Oh yeah, right.

Esarey: It made an impact on you.

Espina: And at that time I also didn't know why part of my family had been exiled. What our parents didn't tell us, "Oh, because some of your uncles or aunts were communist." It's just "political problems," things like that, very generic things.

It was later on, when we had family reunions, that our relatives would explain things. And then it was like me putting puzzle pieces together and understanding ten, fifteen years later, Ah, that's what they meant when they used these words because it was…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) It was important for you to understand that, wasn't it?

Espina: Um-hmm. I always had, I think, the people who are my friends, that were my colleagues [unintelligible], this urgent need to make sense of these things, this urgency in analyzing, urgency in conveying the message, which is very important for teaching. When I teach I have this urgency of what my students are learning, understanding. If they are understanding, well, that's how I grew up, trying to put puzzle pieces together. So, of course, that's who I am. It would make sense that later on I would choose to be a journalist; I will choose to be a writer; I will choose to teach, because I was trying to…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) And here you are in a media setting, in a communication place, in a university.

Espina: In a university, right. Which, if I tell my parents, "Does this make sense to you?" They will tell, "Of course, you were going to teach. Of course, you were going to be at a university," like they always saw that in me. But growing up, you had to put the pieces together in order to...

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) They knew you.

Espina: Right. And I kind of recognize that now, as a part of my identity. But I had to leave home; I had to migrate in order to see that.

Esarey: You went a long way, didn't you? (laughs)

Espina: Right. It's the same with other realizations. When I came to, for example, the university as a graduate student, I came here with a Rotary scholarship. I was a Rotary scholar. I…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Oh were you? Is that how you got here? I was going to ask how that happened.

Espina: I applied for this scholarship, and I won this Rotary scholar. It was ambassador of peace; that's how they call it.

Esarey: Was that the local Rotary?

Espina: It was given by a Santiago Rotary Club, but I can't remember specifically the district.

Esarey: Where were you living before you came here?

Espina: In Santiago.

Esarey: Well, let's back up there just a little bit. Are you ready to migrate, or are we going to talk about life…?

Espina: Oh, we're still going to talk about life.

Esarey: Oh, okay. Because I want to know what made you decide, yeah.

Espina: To come. Yes.

Esarey: So you're still in school.

Espina: I'm still in school. I'm growing up. And then, like I told you, I broke several rules. I think that one of the rules that I broke the most was defying authority. Of course, makes sense, right? When you're living under this terribly brutal and cruel dictator, you want to defy and completely go against authority.

Esarey: What rules did you break?

Espina: I talked back.

Esarey: To…

Espina: It's not a big deal, to the nuns, to the teachers in school, right? I was always considered a brilliant child. But, "You are so brilliant, Veronica, but . . ." I always heard my sister Monica was the well behaved. I always told her she was very, very smart and sweet and well behaved, first child. So they will say, "You're so smart, but why are you not like your sister Monica, who is so well behaved?" So all the compliments came with, "but…"

Esarey: There was always a caveat, wasn't there?

Espina: Right. The problem was that I pick up on things very quickly, and I have this desire to tell people my opinion. And they were not asking for it! (both laugh) So I grew up not supposed… I mean, it was not important to anybody what I was thinking, but I will tell the history teacher, "Mr. So and So, your class is boring. Can you make it a little bit more interesting?"

Esarey: Oooh (laughs).

Espina: Ouch!

Esarey: Oooh.

Espina: I told one of my history teachers, who was a very lovely man… He was nice, and he loved teaching, but he was always a bit boring. One day I told him his class was boring. He was so offended and hurt, because I was a good student, and how did I dare to say that in front of everybody that…twenty other students that were in the class. He said, "Teach it next time. If you don't like it, teach it yourself." The next period, I went and I taught it myself. I read the chapter before going, and I taught it. Who knows what I taught? Maybe I did horrible.

Esarey: But, by god, you were going do it.

Espina: I was like, yeah, you're boring. I better teach it myself. I did that kind of thing. I questioned my teachers.

Esarey: Did you question your parents?

Espina: I questioned my dad. I questioned his anger.

Esarey: How about your mom?

Espina: Mmm, my mom was pretty idolized by all of us because she was…

Esarey: (talking over Espina) She was in a different place.

Espina: And she was making the family work. While Dad had to drive his taxi and being unhappy, she was a pharmacist, taking care of all of us. Yes, I admired her, and I was thankful. But I also resented the fact that she would not defend me when the fights with Dad came up because it was basically, "Veronica, shut up. Just don't create a wave." I was always, "This is not fair." "Okay, you need to be a lawyer because lawyers are, like, going to fight for justice, and there's no justice here. Right now, you follow the rules. There's no justice, okay?"

So I did that at home, and I did that at school, which meant that in my junior year, I got expelled. They kicked me out of school. I had several behavioral problems because I would talk back.

Esarey: And you got known as somebody to watch.

Espina: As a smart aleck who talks back. There was an incident in which I had no involvement, but I got blamed, and of course, I got kicked out. There was an incident . . .

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) How long?

Espina: What do you mean, how long?

Esarey: How long were you kicked out?

Espina: I was, "Don't come back to school. You're not graduating with us."

Esarey: Oh.

Espina: Yes, I was expelled.

Esarey: It wasn't a short suspension? They said… You were still in a private school.

Espina: Correct. I was never suspended. It went from, they got sick of me, to she's not coming back.

Esarey: You're gone.

Espina: Right.

Esarey: What happened then?

Espina: It was very stupid. It was like there was a prank at school, and somebody got hurt. I was not involved, right? But my friends were. So all the teachers got together and called us, one by one. I had decided, I'm not going to give my name, my friends' names, of course not. I would not do that, but they gave my name. So…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) They blamed you.

Espina: They blamed **me**. One of the teachers at the institute that was very close to me, who was **another** history teacher, he's like, "Veronica, do you realize that somebody may be giving your name up? Because you're protecting them, you're going to get blamed, and nothing's going to happen to them." I didn't believe it. I didn't want to believe my friends would do that. I was like, "No, that will never happen."

The teachers met and had a resolution, and the resolution was Veronica needs to leave the school. It was terrible and sad, and I was scared. The school year ended in December, because you go to school in Chile from March to December.

Esarey: March to December.

Espina: December 8 is when the summer begins, right? So your vacation time is generally February and part of March. They decided to expel me in November, (whispers) and I didn't tell anybody.

Esarey: That what?

Espina: I didn't tell anybody. I was completely terrified.

Esarey: Your parents, your family, didn't know?

Espina: My parents didn't know.

Esarey: What did you do during the day?

Espina: It was a weird thing, in which they didn't call them either, which is strange. All the Espina sisters are in school, and nobody knows that the middle one has been expelled? By December, my mom went to renew my…to matriculate me—that was the word they used. It's like, "You're not matriculating Veronica. She's expelled."

She was shocked, "What?" She didn't tell Dad, because he was going to be furious. It was a secret between the two of us. January passed; February passed; and Mom had not told anybody. She had to have been pretty terrified of that too, to not tell him what Veronica did.

Esarey: Um-hmm, guilt.

Espina: What she did is, in France, she found this school in a very impoverished neighborhood. It was a school who will take kids with problems, like behavioral problems, or kids that nobody else wanted.

My mom was kind of confused about it because I had straight A's, and I was pretty smart and well educated, but I talked back. She kept thinking, It's not that bad. She shouldn't go there. That's where the problem kids go. But what we didn't know is that, one, that school had a system very similar to popular education, which taught kids in a non-threatening environment. And later on in history, [it] became one of the most successful educational systems for impoverished kids, to empower children and place them in society and tell the poor, "You know what? You can be smart and succeed," basically to acknowledge class mobility. We didn't know that.

So I'm starting school in a new system. We don't wear uniforms, which was **extremely** new, because every kid wore uniforms. And we could call our teachers by their first name. And we talked about **politics.** It was a **lefty** school.[2] They called it "The Red School." So, of course, I was much better then than ever before. But it was very hard to adapt. It was co-ed; I had never gone to school with boys. And, two, there were very impoverished people, and they thought I was a rich girl.

Esarey: So you kind of were out there.

Espina: So I was an outsider. But it taught me so much. I did my junior and senior year there.

2 The slang, lefty, means one who has left-wing political views. (https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/lefty)

Esarey: Did your father ever find out that you went to this other school?

Espina: Yes, he did. But it's the way that my mom did, it was so smart. She said, "Veronica's not going to the other school any more. She has been expelled. But she's going to the new one. She starts tomorrow." Because she was set with a solution right away…

Esarey: (talking over Espina) She just kind of whoosh.

Espina: … He had very little time to "beep" and say something nasty. I had already started school.

Esarey: And it was a done deal.

Espina: It was a done deal. That changed…

Esarey: (talking over Espina) That really worked for you, didn't it?

Espina: It did. It did. I was shocked about how people really talked in that school, about how kids will address their teachers, how much they loved them, how much of a role model these teachers were. It was a system that had been created by a very famous educator in Chile that was working for a very wealthy school. But there was a considerable position to Pinochet, so these were the wealthy kids…

Esarey: (talking over Espina) What was the name of the school?

Espina: Colegio Cristoble Colon…

Esarey: Oh boy.

Espina: Which is Christopher Columbus.

Esarey: Christopher Columbus

Espina: Um-hmm.

Esarey: Do you have any pictures of that school?

Espina: Oh yeah.

Esarey: That would be one of those pictures that would be good to have.

Espina: Yeah. In that school we didn't have the typical courses that we would have in the other private school…

Esarey: (talking over Espina) What are those words?

Espina: Colon, C-o-l…

Esarey: (talking over Espina) C-o-l-o…

Espina: …o-n.

Esarey: o-n. Thank you.

Espina: We're talking about the '80s, so this is a very advanced curriculum. For example, in this new school, instead of having the typical music, history and English or humanities, language arts, we will have history of Latin America and the political spectrum of today, history of the Cuban Revolution, hello? We will have psychology, which was not taught by any high school.

Esarey: This is a junior and senior?

Espina: Right. We didn't have religion (both laugh). It was, "Ah, thank god." We prayed because they chose to.

Esarey: But it wasn't a mandated religious class?

Espina: No, but it was actually funded by the church.

Esarey: The Catholic Church?

Espina: The Catholic Church, but the lefty areas of the Catholic Church. So liberation theology is the doctrine of a more lefty, more liberal, church that was present there. So it was kind of a different sort, a different type of mass. There was a lot of singing. The worship was informal. The relationship with God was not mediated necessarily only by the priest. It was so different. And I liked it a lot.

Esarey: This school worked for you.

Espina: It did. And, of course, there were kids doing drugs, and there were kids that were dropouts, and there were kids that had problems. But because the teachers were trained to treat it differently, the success rate was very high. People mostly stayed in school.

Esarey: Did you find yourself talking back?

Espina: No.

Esarey: Didn't need to.

Espina: No.

Esarey: There was no need to fight this. This worked for you.

Espina: I actually found myself defending the teachers more often because (Esarey laughs) some of the other kids were rude, like, "Really, you're going to talk like that?" because we were way closer to them.

Esarey: Your mother must have been really pleased that this was working for you.

Espina: Yeah, she was. She was very pleased. It was also my first encounter with gender differences, which was the only thing I didn't like about school because…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) You didn't want to be with the boys?

Espina: Well no, because the school was in the ghetto, okay, basically. And the poverty affected the kids and their families so terribly.

Esarey: What did you see?

Espina: I saw that more often, the expectation was for the boys to graduate and go to school, and the girls, hopefully, you'll get married, which had been something I never saw at home, like I've explained to you. So I understood; I kind of put it together that when poverty strikes so hard, it's not important to be a girl, which may happen everywhere in society, regardless of income. But it was extremely noticeable for me that that was the case. So the competition, in terms of who had the best grades, was not with any girls in my case…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Because there weren't as many choices. The choices weren't there.

Espina: Right. It was with the boys. So I encountered these gender battles with boys, that I had never had in my life, like, "Oh, she's smart." "Oh, she's going to go to college." It's like, "Yeah, what were you thinking? I'm going to go to college and probably get a better score than you in the test." I saw that. And later on, I discovered myself, when I migrated—which is one of my lessons of migrating—that I was a feminist, clearly, very young. It's okay to be a feminist in the United States. It's not okay to be a feminist when you live under a dictatorship. Under a dictatorshi…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Well, I don't even think you probably used the word.

Espina: Right…

Esarey: You didn't know what…

Espina: … Actually I didn't know what it was. I had to ask somebody, "What is a feminist?"

Esarey: What does that mean?

Espina: What does it mean?

Esarey: Or, is that me?

Espina: Right. I understood things later on, when I left. But that school really brought to me a lot of realizations, and some of them were problematic, like the gender issues, like the class system, to understand that even though you could have good grades, you were going to remain in that class because class mobility was not either allowed or expected. But I also felt many times like an outsider…

Esarey (talking over Esarey) You were still the outsider?

Espina: …because my mom was a pharmacist. I understood how painful for children it is when you have these divisions. I understood it from both sides, growing up impoverished, because one of my parents could never find a good job, or…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) You had it both ways in your own home.

Espina: Yeah, right. But at the same time, I knew that I was living in a middle-class neighborhood, and when I would go to play volleyball—I was playing volleyball at that time—to other places and other schools across the city, and take a bus for one hour, let's say, to commute. Then I would start seeing parks and trees and gardens. That meant arriving to the rich neighborhood. I will notice all the differences between the rich and impoverished neighborhoods.

So I understood, maybe at age fourteen, fifteen, that we **were** middle class, and that an hour away, the mansions existed. You know what I mean? While at the same time, I was going to school in the ghetto. It's a huge confirmation for a teenager!

Esarey: Well, it impacted your life.

Espina: Yeah, it did. But it also made me so much more flexible socially. I could talk to my friends and teachers, you know…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) You were experienced.

Espina: …in the ghetto in the Catholic school. And I could talk to the kids that were sons and daughters of the bankers and people that own half of the country, because I play volleyball with them. And then I went to school, later on to college, to university that was considered "Harvard" in the country. I went to school, and I was in the classroom with people that were incredibly wealthy.

Esarey: How did that happen? You graduated; you went through those last two years. Then how did you decide what you were going to do about college? How did that happen?

Espina: Well, because class mobility was so difficult and inflexible, there was not much of a mobility. That sounds like an oxymoron. There was not much class mobility, period (Esarey laughs). At that time, there were a couple of universities that, if you went there, then you kind of ensured your future, that you were going to get a decent job, if you didn't belong to this family with these last names. If you were not a Kennedy, let's say, but you went to this good school, then you were going to have a good career and a good future.

Esarey: No matter what.

Espina: Right. And I, obviously… I wasn't a Kennedy. We were middle class. That was the kind of the system that was put in place. And, like I said, at the time I went to school, school was privatized, education was privatized, so that the university was incredibly expensive. So all you had to do was to do well in the standardized test, which was very, very difficult. Now, keep in mind there's just no junior college; there's no community colleges. So, in junior year, you decide what you're going to be—which is a difficult thing to do—and you take a test. So, by senior year, when you graduated, you already know where

you're going to go because you took the test. And I took the test. I did well, and I knew the best university to go at the time was the Universidad de Chile.

Esarey: University of Chile?

Espina: Universidad de Chile, um-hmm.

Esarey: You write that down (laughs).

Espina: Which was like my parents alma mater, and it was…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) So they both went there.

Espina: Yes.

Esarey: Did any of your sisters go there?

Espina: Yes. My mom graduated from Universidad de Chile. My dad went there, but didn't graduate from there. He switched. But he went there and had that experience.

Esarey: And you majored in?

Espina: Journalism.

Esarey: You already knew then, okay.

Espina: Right. But I didn't go to Universidad de Chile. What I said is that Universidad of Chile was one option, and it was more lefty, more socially conscious. It was sort of a social responsibility attached to that university. And then there was Universidad Republica, which was like…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) This is the one you didn't go to? (laughs)

Espina: Right.

Esarey: (laughing) You write down the one you did go to.

Espina: And then Universidad de Republica.

Esarey: Was that your choice? Were you able to choose that yourself, or did your parents?

Espina: Well, I was playing volleyball for a club that belonged to the Universidad de Republica. I had played for four or five years, and they told me, "If you do well in school [and] you are a good athlete, we're going to give you a scholarship." And I got a scholarship, which at that time… The scholarship didn't have money attached to it. But it will help you study or whatever.

Esarey: So the scholarship was more of an honor?

Espina: Yes, but how do I explain this to you? You have to take a test, okay? And you have to have a minimum in this test, average points, to go. That scholarship was if you were below the points to enter the School of Journalism—you

would have had a huge score, very high—they could give you some points to match it.

Esarey: This would help you climb that ladder.

Espina: Right. And I was, let's say, I don't know… It was 730 points you needed to have to go there, and I had like 680. I was thirty points away. I can't remember; I'm not doing the math in my head very well. But I got the scholarship.

That meant I was going to play volleyball for the school. And I decided I wanted to do that and go to that school, one, because I loved playing volleyball for the club, and two, because I knew it was one of the best universities in the country. That's how I decided. But when I want…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Was it in Santiago?

Espina: In Santiago.

Esarey: So did you live at home?

Espina: Yeah.

Esarey: Okay.

Espina: It was a beautiful campus, beautiful, beautiful. It had most of the humanities and arts there. It had law, history, education, journalism, theater, and some of the [sciences], like math and so on.

Esarey How did you like college?

Espina: I loved it. It was…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) It fit you, didn't it?

Espina: Yeah. I felt a little bit more liberated. I felt that I had less curfew. But it also responded to the political time. I graduated from high school in '87. So my first year of college, in '88, we have the first election we had in sixteen years. We had a referendum. It…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Oh, talk about that a little bit.

Espina: It was called *plesbicito* [referrendum], which was a vote that you could only mark yes or no. It was 1988.

Esarey: Write that word down, if you would. So you had two choices, yes or no.

Espina: Right.

Esarey: And what were you voting on?

Espina: Does Pinochet continue? Yes or no.

Esarey: Oh.

Espina: After living in the dictatorship and being brainwashed with state propaganda, there were very, very, very…a lot of people very scared. A lot of people wanted to vote no because there had been disappearances, because people were informing on others, because there were sixteen years of basically not civil rights. And it was the first time—I was 18 years old in 1988—and it was the first time that a sort of election, national election, would happen. It was just historic.

I was going to be a journalist. I was going to my first year of journalism school. I was going to be able to vote. We had this huge campaign of the yes and no, *si* and *non*. Of course, I went and voted no. But, being in the classroom, I was sharing classes with sons and daughters of Pinochet's ministers, who were voting yes. So it was a very politicized and polarized environment.

I always think that the first three or four years of school, I never spoke in the classroom, which was unheard of. I was always talking.

Esarey: You just were quiet.

Espina: I could not talk, because all these know-it-alls, who were incredibly wealthy, denied in front of everybody that torture had ever happened, that disappearances had ever happened in our country, that Pinochet was "a great leader," were sharing the classroom with me. It was so devastating that I didn't speak for a long time. Of course…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Because…

Espina: I don't know. I felt completely exposed because we had…

Esarey: (talks over Espina) Intimidated?

Espina: Intimidated in fear. But keep in mind that these were thousands of dollars of very wealthy people, before had been ministers and the chamber of commerce...

Esarey: (talks over Espina) People ruling the country.

Espina: The rulers of the country, right? So they spoke three languages. They vacationed in Europe. I was like, "I don't have anything to say. And if I do, how do I back that up? There's no research. There's no source of information." We don't publish at the time where the disappeared went. We don't publish about… We had no record of how many or where the torturing chambers were because there was a dictatorship.

It was very difficult to argue, unless you had been trained as an activist. Or your parents had talked to you a lot of politics at home, which really wasn't the case. We talk about politics in terms of how much we hated Pinochet and things like that. But my parents were not members of the Communist Party or the Socialist Party, so they couldn't give me a lot of

background. The part of my family that knew about those had been exiled, and I didn't know them very well. You know what I mean?

Esarey: You were kind of out there all by yourself.

Espina: All by myself. Where my sisters went to school, at Universidad de Chile, they went and created student organizations that were completely either socialist or with this kind of values in which they told you all kinds of things and taught you how to say or create an argument. I didn't have any of those tools, even though I had been a great student.

Esarey: You probably felt very strongly about these things. You had no outlet for it.

Espina: Right. So what I did…

Esarey: (talks over Espina) What did you do?

Espina: … I joined the student organization, which is like SGA (Student Government Association). And that year, in I think 1989, my second or third year, second year, I was…

Esarey: (talks over Espina) So you were a sophomore?

Espina: Right. I went to meetings. People were talking about what had happened. And people were talking about civil rights and all kinds of things that I needed to learn and get informed and read and books that had been banned. So I joined the student organization of my university that had never been democratically elected, had been assigned by the administration. And we won the elections against the conservatives at the university.

It was very interesting, because I went to the university at this time… All student like me, sophomores and juniors, people that later on became ministers or president, democratically elected after Pinochet, people who became very relevant in our political history, we went to school together. We all trained each other in what to say, how to say it. People from Europe and the rest of Latin America came back from exile to train the youth, to create political movements, to create parties again—there were not political parties during the Pinochet years—so, of course, I joined a party.

I was able to feel more self confident about my own political history at that time. I guess being outspoken or self-confident in your own intelligence wasn't enough when you have not ever seen a traditional, democratic participation, when you haven't been allowed to meet publicly, when the…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) It was the next step.

Espina: Right, when it was completely denied. You didn't know what to do when you are meeting with people or how to conduct meetings.

Esarey: You had to learn that.

Espina: I had to learn that. By the time I was ready to graduate I was way more informed and ready to talk than my first years.

Esarey: And you did graduate with a degree in journalism.

Espina: Right. It was a double degree in journalism and another degree that is called "social information."

Esarey: Social information.

Espina: Yes.

Esarey: What does that mean?

Espina: That we were able to not only print and work in media of any kind, broadcasting, radio, print, magazine, but we were also trained to inform society on different things. That's what it meant. All students graduated with the same title, the same name of the third degree; it was journalist and social information.

In my last year of journalism… It took me longer because, of course, the first two years I didn't pass certain courses. I had not seen any of that stuff, some of the stuff, before. So I had to redo a couple of courses. It took me a year longer to graduate. Because I knew I was going to stay there for a year longer, in my junior year I started to work on a master's degree. I graduated, let's say, in '93 from journalism school and '94 from our history, from the philosophy school. So I had a post-graduate.

Esarey: You graduated actually in '93-'94 with a bachelor's plus?

Espina: No. I graduated in '93 with a bachelor's degree in journalism and then in '94 with a post graduate in art history.

Esarey: Because you had already started working on that.

Espina: Right.

Esarey: Wow. You just went right on, kept right on going.

Espina: Yeah.

Esarey: In journalism?

Espina: No, it was in art history.

Esarey: In art history?

Espina: Art history, yeah.

Esarey: You pulled out the art part of your background.

Espina: Yeah, I did.

Esarey: Have you used that since?

Espina: I guess it helped a lot because I did my first internship that you were supposed to do in your junior year, I did it in newspaper. But I was assigned [the] politics section, and then slowly I moved to art and entertainment. My background in art history helped a lot, for me to write about music, to cover music for musical events.

Esarey: That was M.A., right, your Master of Art? Is there an equivalent?

Espina: (interrupts Esarey) It is an equivalent, but it's not called an M.A. in Chile. It's called a post-graduate degree.

Esarey: So before you started work, a "job-job," you went right through school.

Espina: Yeah, but I was working in my last year also.

Esarey: You worked your last year. What did you do?

Espina: I worked for a newspaper that printed a magazine and… Oh wow, what did I do? I think I covered art for that little magazine. I don't remember very well.

Esarey: It was just a part-time job?

Espina: It was a part-time job that allowed me to pay bills and…

Esarey: Sort of break into the world of journalism and magazines and media.

Espina: Right.

Esarey: How old were you when you met your jazz musician?

Espina: I was going to be twenty-one.

Esarey: You had finished school.

Espina: No.

Esarey: No, you had not.

Espina: No, because a bachelor's degree in Chile are five years.

Esarey: That's right. That's right. You were eighteen, and you went right into your three or four years.

Espina: Maurico—that's his name—was seventeen, going to be eighteen. I would have never thought he was eighteen. Here's what happened. When I was in journalism school my best friends were from the music school, school of music. A couple of them played jazz, but studied classical instruments. One studied clarinet, and the other one was a guitar major. But when we didn't play jazz… And they were connected to other musicians, right. So through them, I met this group of musicians that created a rhythm and blues band.

Esarey: Rhythm and blues, how about that.

Espina: And it was beautiful.

Esarey: It's wonderful.

Espina: But the cool thing about the musicians is that all had been exiled. They all grew up in exile; their families had been exiled. Some of them grew up in Costa Rica. In the case of Maurico, his parents moved to Mexico and later on the U.S. Maurico had lived in Mexico and Texas, where Maurico's parents finished Ph.D. school. They were sociologists. The other guitar player in the band grew up in Germany because his parents had been exiled.

So the cool thing about this band was, not only that all these kids—they were all boys—were remarkably great jazz musicians, they had also—all of them—grew up in different countries because of the political regime.

Of course it makes sense to me; I wanted to meet all these musicians, and I wanted to know their stories and…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) "What did your parents do that you had to leave?"

Espina: Nothing, they were communists. Nothing, they were socialists. They didn't do anything. You know what I mean, that kind of thing? You have to leave because you're going to be persecuted.

When I went to see this band play, I was blown away with the young guitar player there. They were all like, "You need to meet this kid. He's only seventeen, and his musical maturity and his level of…whatever (Esarey laughs). He was super shy. He wouldn't talk much. But on the stage, he was a god (Esarey laughs). We started being friends, and then later on we fell in love, so we started dating.

I remember vividly that I went to his parents' house. His dad had died, so it was only his mom; she was a widow. I remember that he introduced me to her and said something really terrible, something like, "Yeah, she's like twenty or twenty-one. But she's so immature, Mom, don't worry about that." (Esarey laughs), like talking about the age difference, because he was only eighteen, and I was twenty-one or something like that.

Esarey: (laughing) She's so immature.

Espina: I didn't understand what he meant. I asked him, "What do you mean, I'm immature?" "Well, you know, you're kind of funny, and you like are ridiculous sometimes—I have this funny sense of humor and talk about all kinds of things—and are really extroverted. I guess that's immature, right?" I was like, "No, that's how I am. I mean, you're shy; you could be immature." I remember I was feeling very offended about that (Esarey laughs). But what he meant is like "You really can tell anything to Veronica, and she will either laugh or have something to say about it."

Esarey: He was trying to pay a compliment that didn't turn out.

Espina: He was trying to pay a compliment, like saying to his mom, "Don't worry about this age difference, Mom. She's really not going to do anything to me."

Esarey: (laughing) And it blew back in his face.

Espina: I was so offended, and the mom laughed. That's how our relationship started. It was very interesting, but… Of course, I kept it very hidden when we started dating, and I didn't tell anybody, especially not my dad, who loves jazz…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Yeah, here's this jazz.

Espina: …who completely chased away every single boy who ever called the house. He was very protective and didn't want boys. "These are my four girls; they're going to graduate; they're going to do it, and they're going to do great things in life and have great careers, no boys." He thought it was his way. I keep thinking, But…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) That was unrealistic, wasn't it?

Espina: Right. Wow, really, really, I really like this boy; I really like this guy. What's going to happen to me if I'm not going to be able to date him? Dad will do anything for me not to see him. So I left home, which was the craziest and most terrible thing for a girl my age in those years in Chile.

Esarey: To do.

Espina: To do. In fact, because I did that, my mom told me to never come back. It was very hard.

Esarey: That's very extreme.

Espina: Yeah. Because girls either left home after graduation or after getting married. Even though we're not encouraged by any means to get married at all—I mean, boys did not exist, period—leaving home was an insult. It was, "Who are you? We have given you everything. Are you serious?" It was not considered an act of independence to leave home. It was not considered an act of anything but betrayal. So my mom and dad made sure… My mom said to me, "Well." I said one day to my mom, I realized I was falling in love. I was either going to have to terminate completely the relationship or get completely suffocated by my dad, who was going to say, "You never… You will never see this boy again."

Esarey: The choice was…

Espina: The choice, yeah. So one day, before my mom went to the pharmacy in the morning and my dad left with her for work, I asked my mom, "Hey mom, everything that is in my room is mine, right? I mean, the bed and the night table?" "Yeah, it's yours. Why?" "I'm just checking." And in the afternoon, a couple of friends came with a moving van, and we took everything that was in my room. I took all my furniture and all my clothes, and I went to live in the garage of a friend that day.

Esarey: You went to live in the garage of a friend.

Espina: Then that night… I suppose my mom was frantic, and I don't remember calling her that night; I was too scared. But maybe a couple of days later, I said to her, "I'm not coming back." She was so mad and insulted and sad and probably worried.

Esarey: (talking over Espina) All of that. All of that.

Espina: Who is this girl? She said to me, "Well, don't ever want to come back, ever, ever. You're not part of this family, and we will never pay for your education again." And it was extremely expensive. That's the reason why [unintelligible]. Most people, at that time in Chile, who went to school, did not work. They either had parents who paid for the education or got into incredible debt to pay for very high loans. I did both. I enjoyed a little bit of my parents' help, until I left. And then I took loans, which was a weird thing to do.

Esarey: Very unusual.

Espina: Very unusual.

Esarey: But you managed to finish.

Espina: Yes. There was no other choice in my mind but to finish it. It never occurred in my mind, never crossed my mind, I'm not going to graduate. That was good.

Esarey: You were going to have the relationship and graduate.

Espina: (talking over Esarey) Right. I was just not going to finish at home, right.

Esarey: Wow.

Espina: I had a boyfriend in the new school that I went to high school, my sophomore and junior year. But it was a boyfriend; it was very naive. I was never going to get married to him. We broke up in the senior year. We loved each other very much, but I was never in love.

Esarey: Nothing serious.

Espina: I never felt this tremendous admiration, this desire to spend my life with anybody. But I fell when I met Maurico. So it made sense to me, oh my god, I'm never going to lose this; I'm leaving home. And I left. It was very hard.

Esarey: How did he feel about you leaving? Did that kind of scare him to have you…

Espina: No. We talked about it.

Esarey: You talked about it.

Espina: I was his first girlfriend, and he was my first serious boyfriend.

Esarey: Wow.

Espina: So we talked about it, and he was like, "I'll help you in any way. Yeah, your dad is not somebody that we can work with."

Esarey: How long did your mom stay angry with you?

Espina: Oh, probably two years.

Esarey: That's a long time.

Espina: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That was probably at the end of 1991. And in 1992, I got pregnant.

Esarey: You what?

Espina: I got pregnant. My daughter was born in 1993. By July that my daughter had been born, I still hadn't talked to my parents.

Esarey: That the baby was born?

Espina: When the baby was born, in the hospital, my mom showed up…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) She couldn't not do it.

Espina: She could not…and gave me a huge big hug and embrace, and she cried and loved the baby, right… But my dad didn't. My dad didn't meet my daughter until she was probably two years old. It was really hard.

Esarey: That's so hard.

Espina: I tell you, it was terrible.

Esarey: Oh, what an extremely difficult time.

Espina: Right. It was very difficult, because later on I thought about it. I really didn't realize, but in those years I didn't see my sisters either.

Esarey: Didn't see your sisters. Where were you living then?

Espina: I guess my sisters felt that if they saw me they were betraying my parents. It was a weird, very weird thing. Yet, maybe two years after I left, they left. So I kind of paved the road for them, which is something they would have never done. Monica and Anita, who were older than me, left after I left, and the one who stayed at home was the baby.

Esarey: Where did you live?

Espina: The first year I stayed in garages, and I rented a room, one room. And the former wife of another musician, and then…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) You kind of moved around.

Espina: Moved around. There was one night that I remember—I was maybe six or seven months pregnant—that I didn't know if I was going to sleep in the park

or not, because I couldn't find where to stay. I was paying rent here and there with a little income.

Esarey: Were you healthy? Were you seeing a doctor?

Espina: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I guess all the musicians were helping. Some of the musicians…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Everybody was helping you.

Espina: Everybody. Well, we were very young. I was dating this incredible musician that everybody loved, so it was people trying to help him, help me. We found a doctor who was a friend of another musician, who was my obstetrician. That's how it worked.

Esarey: That's how it worked.

Espina: At some point, I had to move again to another room. I was renting rooms in peoples' houses.

Esarey: Were you working too?

Espina: I was working at a newspaper, hiding my pregnancy. Nobody knew I was pregnant. I was hiding my belly.

Esarey: Hiding the pregnancy.

Espina: Right. You have to think, after a dictatorship. Knowing that, socially, women didn't leave home until they got married, here I was, a single woman, pregnant, finishing school, living in a rented room.

Esarey: Yeah, you were right out there.

Espina: It was either too liberal for people or just plain subversive, something a girl was not supposed to do.

Esarey: You're not supposed to do.

Espina: And I was working for a newspaper that was very conservative (Esarey laughs).

Esarey: How did you happen to get in the…

Espina: I hid my pregnancy. Whatever work I could have, it helped me pay rent. I was an intern in different places. I had not graduated yet, so I couldn't have a full-time job as a journalist. One day, when all this craziness finally was taking a toll on people… Maurico was worried about me. He loved me dearly, and I was going to start to show. I was…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) You'd reached this point of no return.

Espina: His mom called me and said, "Veronica, just come live with us. Just come live with us." That's where I stayed for almost a year.

Esarey: (talking over Espina) The rest of the pregnancy?

Espina: The rest of the pregnancy and until Almandra was maybe a year. I was heaven because they had a nanny, because there were grandmas; there were other people; they all helped me.

It was heaven and hell because, with all this help… But there were all these grandmas who [were saying], "Don't eat garlic because it's going to affect the baby." "Oh, and don't eat this because…" They were all worried about my diet. I had not had that preoccupation with my pregnancy. In fact, I had been ignored by my own family, and there I was with this family who was crazy about this baby who was going to be born. I was thankful; I was really thankful.

Maurico's mom was a highly educated woman, with a Ph.D. in sociology, who was a feminist and understood. "What is this poor girl doing without family support? Come and live with us." She was a widow. She was a little bit out of sorts that this young son was going to be a dad with this lady, with this young woman, who had not graduated yet; she was still in school, but worked. She was worried. But at the same time, she admired me because she was like, " Man, you've done all these things by yourself."

Esarey: (talking over Espina) You're making it.

Espina: "You have a work; you have a job." She always was there for us. In fact, if you talk to my daughter, that was always her favorite grandma.

Esarey: Still?

Espina: Well, she died.

Esarey: Oh, she died.

Espina: But she was…

Esarey: (talking over Espina) She is someone your daughter remembers.

Espina: She's somebody that my daughter just adored.

Esarey: Do you have a picture of her?

Espina: Yeah. I have pictures of her with the baby and…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Is that something you could share?

Espina: Yeah.

Esarey: His name is Maurice?

Espina: Maurico, very close to Maurice.

Esarey: You've got to write that down, his whole name. Do you still communicate with him at all?

Espina: Yeah. We've had kind of like a rocky relationship after our separation. But we've always been in touch. We've always visited each other.

Esarey: So your daughter is able to have a relationship with her father.

Espina: Oh, yeah.

Esarey: When you speak of him, I don't see a frown on your face.

Espina: No.

Esarey: You seem to still respect him.

Espina: Very much so. Well, it was hard in many ways, because for him, for a long time, his career was more important than anything, but it was not more important than his daughter. It was definitely…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Right up in there, huh?

Espina: …very close. It was also very understandable because the jazz scene in Chile is very small. It's already hard for a jazz musician to survive in the U.S., with a way bigger economic market. So,…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) He is still successful, correct?

Espina: Yeah. He encouraged me to get the scholarship that brought me here.

Esarey: You came here in '99, you told me.

Espina: Right.

Esarey: So you stayed, you said…

Espina: We stayed together until 1998, as a couple.

Esarey: From 1993 or 1992?

Espina: From 1991 till…

Esarey: (interrupts Espina) Nineteen ninety-one, you left home. And then you had your baby…

Espina: In '93.

Esarey: …in '93, and then you stayed together until 1999.

Espina: Yes.

Esarey: I have to ask you; I can't wait any longer. What made you decide to leave the country [Chile]?

Espina: He had grown up in exile. He was around four years old when he left with his parents. He grew up in Mexico, and then when the parents pursued a Ph.D., he grew up in Texas and knew that he wanted to probably come back to the United States to go to a very good music school. Those plans were kind of

interrupted at some point, when I got pregnant. But I always assured him, "No. You're going to be a great musician. You need to go." So he went to New York to music school there. I can't remember the name; it will probably come to me.

Esarey: Not Julliard?

Espina: No, he went to Eastman School of Music; I think that's the name, Eastman. I think it's probably in Rochester [correct], New York. I'll have to look it up. He went there for a year. It was very sad and very hard for us to separate because Almandra must have been two when he left. She was very young.

Esarey: And when did he do that? What year did he go?

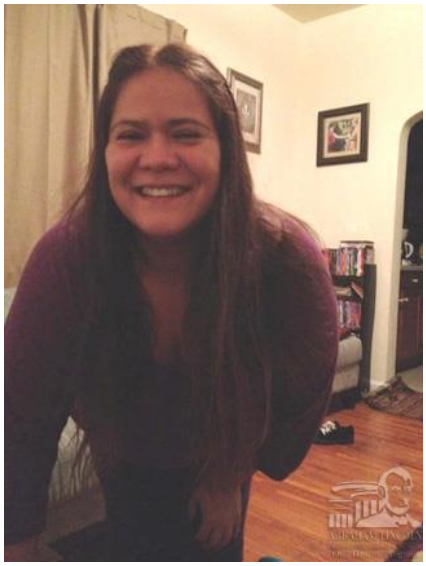
Espina: Ah, maybe 1995.

Esarey: Yeah, your baby was small.

Espina: Right. It was very sad for him; he adored her.

Esarey: And left for a whole year by himself.

Espina: Right. Really, thinking of graduating was not a possibility for him, in his mind, because he missed us too much. He felt terribly guilty. So we started, "There should be a possibility we can get a scholarship." But there were not scholarships for, really, Latin Americans to go to the United States, unless it was some sort of refugee status or something.



*Veronica at home on Christmas day, 2011 in Springfield, Illinois.*

Esarey: Yeah, what were you going to do? Right.

Espina: I applied for this scholarship with the Rotary International, and I had to write an essay about it, and I won the scholarship. I was very happy. Our idea initially was, maybe we could live together in the United States. But by the time I had won the scholarship, we were not really together any more. What we did is, I moved first, in January of 1999, to begin the spring courses at UIS. And then he came in March with the baby.

Esarey: So you came here to go to school.

Espina: Right. Then Almandra came here with him when she was five and a half, around March of that year. He said, "I'm going to make sure that Almandra finishes kindergarten in three months."—They came in March—"and that she speaks a little bit of English before I leave." So he did, and stayed until maybe June or July and left for Chicago because he wanted to play there, and stayed maybe a total of two years, until his visa expired.

Esarey: Oh yeah, okay.

Espina: The student visa, right? He didn't like it. He didn't like the life in Chicago. He missed Almandra and didn't live with her because we lived in Springfield. We were not together any more, so we were both heartbroken. He was very heartbroken.

*Veronica with her daughter, Almandra Reodriguez, between her sister Natalia Espina (closed eyes) and Veronica. Below Natalia is her sister Anita Espina, and sister Monica Espina. This picture was taken in December 1998, a month before Veronica left to come to the United States as a graduate student.*

Esarey: Yeah, separated by distance.

Espina:Separated and see Almandra only on weekends. [He] didn't like the music scene in Chicago. He felt really that the music was worth it to stay there, but not the social environment. He felt that Americans were cold. He felt that he did not relate to the way of living, that things were superficial, that he missed home.Esarey: He was lonely.

Esarey: He was lonely.

Espina: He was lonely. He said, "Man, if I'm going to see Almandra every other weekend, like I see her now, I'd better just go back to Chile and see her twice a year." So he moved back. Almandra must have been probably seven when he moved back; she was heartbroken.

But what Maurico did was very good, in terms that he promised her he will see her twice a year. So he made sure that, for many years, he sent two plane tickets. He will send one in June or at the end of May, when Almandra's school was over, and one at Christmas, so she could spend the summer with him, which meant that Almandra started taking planes by herself at the age of seven. She will travel twice a year.

Esarey: Go back and forth.

Espina: Go back and forth. That's how she grew up bilingual. That's how she grew up knowing both cultures. That's how she feels…

Esarey: (talking over Espina) And had appreciation of both, yeah.

Espina: …and many, many times came back and said, "I don't want to live here any more, Mom. We don't belong here." I was like, "Yeah, but do you want to

live with your dad, because your dad is always on the road?" It was hard for her, and she went through a lot of problems adapting to the school because the schools that she went to here discriminated very badly.

Esarey: You talked about that the first time we met. You live in Chatham, right?

Espina: Yeah.

Esarey: That that was the first time—I remember your statement—the first time that you had ever felt real discrimination.

Espina: Yeah.

Esarey: When you grow up with plans that really put a lot into your education, and you were pretty educated, and you go to a place where they treat you, "Oh, you're a Hispanic. Why are you not cleaning bathrooms?" I was asked once, "Why are you not cleaning bathrooms?"

Esarey: No.

Espina: Yeah. The husband of one of my colleagues, a teacher at a high school, her husband told me once, "I don't understand why they give scholarships to people like you. You're a foreigner. You should be cleaning bathrooms. Why are **you** here, taking our jobs?"

Esarey: That's horrible.

Espina: It's a horrible thing to say, but think about it. If an adult, a grown man over thirty, is able to tell me that, can you imagine what my daughter heard in school from all the kids that were hearing their parents say things like that? It was horrible for my daughter. The Chatham School District has 1% of Latino students.

Esarey: That's all.

Espina: That's all. It was hard for her. There was this idea that, if you're Latina, you're a Mexican and, therefore, all the terrible stereotypes that people attach to Mexicans were attached to her. Many times I had to tell Almandra, "First of all, we're Chilean. Second, when they tell you, "Mexican," please do not feel insulted. Please acknowledge and recognize that, for them, Mexicans are horrible people, and we don't think that way. We do not think that way about Mexicans. Don't grow up hating being called Mexican for that reason. It's a way to hurt you. How do you tell that to a seven year old who's asking you why…

Esarey: (talking over Espina) I don't think they can get that concept.

Espina: Yeah, it was hard for her. She grew up very shy. She was bullied heavily, and I can say with certainty that that's probably [long pause]… (tearfully) My only regret…

Esarey: That's real.

Espina: Sometimes we did birthday parties and sent out invitations, and nobody would show up.

Esarey: And she'd be alone.

Espina: I couldn't understand it.

Esarey: (talking over Espina) It hurts you too.

Espina: I didn't understand it. We had survived a dictatorship. We had survived the most awful things in history, torture and disappearance. And these awful little eight years old [eight year olds] were bullying my daughter.

Esarey: Ignoring how…

Espina: Ignoring her, telling her awful things about her mom, who spoke with an accent, or the food we ate at home. "We don't want to go to your house. You guys eat weird food." You know what I mean? It was terrible. That's probably my only regret.

Esarey: Is it a "was?" Is that over?

Espina: Yes, but you know what…?

Esarey: It's not really over.

Espina: She was so heavily bullied that at some point she acted up in school. She had discipline problems. Yet she was always this sweet little thing, shy, terribly shy and quiet. So you know what she did? She wrote songs, and she wrote poetry, and she created amazing works of art.

Esarey: Is she still doing that?

Espina: She still does it here. She's coming to UIS in the fall.

Esarey: She is?

Espina: Study sociology, anthropology.

Esarey: Do you think it would still be a good idea for the three of us to talk? Do you think she's interested at all in that?

Espina: Yeah, she could be, but I cry when I remember this.

Esarey: You want to wait.

Espina: I think my heart is still very broken about it.

Esarey: Well, it's very sensitive, difficult… Maybe she doesn't want to…

Espina: I think it's because… You know what, Carol, it doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense to have all these talent and even intelligence, to recognize that some things are just simply wrong. Yet, your kid feels completely exposed

when she goes to school, and there's nothing that you, as a parent, or an educated individual can do.

Esarey: (talking over Espina) You can't fix it. You can't fix it.

Espina: And you see your kid coming back from school hurt, every single day, from middle school to senior high school. My daughter missed school quite often. She was sick quite often. I didn't put it together for a long time that that was anxiety, that her stomach ache was triggered by fear.

Esarey: Yeah, it took a while…

Espina: It took a while for me, and then we started counseling. Thank God, there were some administrators at the school who understood and were very supportive when Almandra missed days and days and days of class.

Esarey: (talking over Espina) That's good to hear.

Espina: And we had a very good counselor. She had counseling that she did, she's done for several years. I can bet that most of the children of immigrants that are not necessarily born in this country, but they might have been born or they have been here for a long time, I can bet that the kids of immigrants go through very similar experience, regardless of social class or economic status. They're always reminded of how they don't belong, instead of how wonderful being bilingual is, how wonderful understanding cultures is.

Hey, I never heard anybody telling my daughter, "Isn't it great that you spend the summers when we are in the middle of the snow here, because you go see your dad during Christmas and that you spend Christmas at the beach, with the ocean." I never heard those things being told to my daughter. I heard, "Go back to Mexico."

Esarey: (talking over Espina) By her classmates or…

Espina: Right. She heard, "Spanish is stupid. Learn English." I think it was because we were coming from a huge city, and we came to live in a very little town.

Esarey: You mean you were…

Espina: Very homogeneous. I'm sorry; I didn't think that this would be so present in my heart, how she had to grow up with that sadness. It makes me regret it sometimes, quite often I find myself thinking, "Man, she likes it here for this and this and this reasons." And these are the reasons why it's worth it to be here. But I wish we had not been when these things happen, you know?

Esarey: You're still considering becoming a citizen?

Espina: Yeah. Well, it wasn't as much of a consideration for me…

Esarey: (talking over Espina) As for her. You said you wanted to do it for her.

Espina: … as for her. Right. She always told me, "Why do you want to be an American, Mom?" I was like, "Because I will be able to vote." And she was like, "Why don't you want to do that in Chile?" It was like, "Because I want to live here. And maybe at some point we will return, or I will." But she felt so rejected, growing up, that her way to feel a little bit more certain was to claim, "I don't need to be an American citizen." was to tell me that, to remind me of why we shouldn't, which… Okay, she's her mom's daughter.

Esarey: That's just what I was thinking (laughing); she is her mother's daughter; she has that strength of character! She knows what you did and what you had to go through and still are.

Espina: Oh yeah.

Esarey: So you're still thinking about this.

Espina: Well, see, really, there hasn't been much of a choice there, because after September 11, the processes for naturalization changed. They got extended, and people had to wait and wait and wait to become citizens, not necessarily because there was neglect there, but there was more paperwork, and then the fees increased and then… If you could become a citizen in a shorter period of time, before 9/11, that wasn't the case after 9/11. It was a little bit more complicated.

Esarey: Is there an option of being a dual citizen?

Espina: I don't know. I have to look into it. When I asked, maybe three or four years ago, there wasn't an option. But it never occurred to me that I could not go back as a retired person, let's say, back to Chile. I never thought, "Oh, that's going to be a problem for me." That's always a possibility.

But because I learned so many things here, because of the possibilities of learning, really, were so tangible for me, I always thought we can stay here longer and keep doing what we're doing. But for her, it was a different story, because learning for her was painful, because she went to [a] school in which the learning was set up in ways that hurt her or that made her feel humiliated or foreign. Basically, it wasn't safe for her to learn.

Esarey: She's graduating?

Espina: She graduated from high school in May.

Esarey: So she will be coming to school in a college atmosphere. Is she looking forward to that at all?

Espina: Very much.

Esarey: I would think that that would be a liberating kind of wonderful thought to her.

Espina: Oh yes. She's told me, "Mom…"

Esarey: (talking over Espina) And maybe mean a different life from now on.

Espina: Right.

Esarey: No matter what.

Espina: She's told me different things. She's told me (whispers), "Mom, I'm going to be a [unintelligible] to learn so many things. I understand that. She's not telling me "I'm going to be here ten years." But what she's telling me is like, "I want to take so many courses." She's telling me that she's ready to learn. She's telling me she doesn't think it's going to be horrible.

Esarey: She's ready to fly.

Espina: Yeah. She's ready to become the beautiful flower that she's been. I think she's ready to become somebody great, without being scared, because I think that when you have been…

Esarey: (talking over Espina) Oh, that's important, yeah, without being scared.

Espina: … saying, right, like she did in school. Maybe being great is not even a possibility, because that's a scary thing to be, when you've been told that you're not.

Esarey: But we don't know yet, do we?

Espina: She has this passion. She's told me, "Oh my God, Mom, I'm going to take so many courses. I'm going to double major, maybe take courses in political science. I want to do sociology and psychology, just like my grandparents. And I'm going to do this; I'm going to take courses in art." Oh, she's looking at music classes, and she's very, very, very excited.

Esarey: That's wonderful. And she'll be here and have you as a support system. It could be a whole different experience for her, and you.

Espina: Oh yeah. This shows you, also… This process of applying and all that...

Esarey: (interrupts Espina)You have to get me a picture of this beautiful girl.

Espina: Oh yeah. But I was going to tell you, in the process that's very interesting to me because some of her counselors at school are like, "Your mom doesn't want to let you go, does she? She can't deal with the empty nest." I'm keep thinking, Why are you saying that? One of the counselors said, "Your mom wants you to live at home, when you could live on campus."

First of all, the only reason why they told her that, was she could be independent. I said, "Don't you know my daughter has taken a plane by herself since she was seven years old? (Esarey laughs) Don't tell me about independence. My kid has traveled all over by herself, twice a year for ten years. She knows two countries. She understands the difference [in] how the mountains look before she's arriving into Santiago. She understands cultural differences. She understands what it means to be bullied. No, you don't know what independence means. Culturally, you don't understand. And yes, if Mom

can save money in tuition by her staying at home, yeah, she will stay at home. It's funny how people perceive this.

Esarey: Yeah, it's a tunnel vision.

Espina: Right.

Esarey: We're going to stop.

Espina: Yes.

Esarey: We need to stop today.

(end of transcript #2)