

FHS Oral History Project – Adriana Collado

Description:

Adriana Collado was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1966. Seven years removed from the start of the Cuban Revolution, Adriana recounted her upbringing in a society transitioning from a capitalistic free model to a communist oriented world. She emphasized how the state forced children to prioritize the leader and follow politics more than anything, including their own families. The idea of the Revolution enticed her parents to stay on the island, as promises of improved healthcare enamored her psychiatrist father, and covering such an unprecedented political and social experiment attracted her journalist mother. Adriana ultimately assumed both her parents' careers, first attempting psychiatry by attending medical school in Cuba. She explained how the 1983 US invasion of Grenada—in which the Cuban regime claimed as their territory—marked her “wake-up call,” as the government expelled her medical student classmates for opposing the state's decision not to return the Cubans who resided in Grenada, which included the students' parents. Discontent with this incident, Adriana left medical school and transitioned into studying journalism in Cuba. She recalled a particularly unique experience in which she confronted Fidel Castro and the Cuban state during a meeting in which she and other journalist students questioned media practices and standards in a communist society. In 1990, Adriana fled the island for fear of persecution since she spoke against the regime during that meeting. She emigrated to New York and lived there for the next fifteen years. She recollected memories about 9/11 and her experiences working in several Spanish newspaper outlets. In 2005, Adriana moved to Orlando to join the Spanish division of the Orlando Sentinel. In 2017, Adriana returned to school to fulfill her lifelong passion of working in the field of psychology/psychiatry. Adriana shared her two-decade observations of Orlando's changing cultural and ethnic landscape. She underscored the “Other-ing” process she experienced in Orlando and the profound nuances that most immigrants deal with in navigating different societies and cultures and their own fluid identities within them.

Transcription:

00;00;00 - 00;00;16

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: This is Sebastian Garcia interviewing Adriana Collado on February 8th, 2025, at Audubon Church for the Florida Historical Society Oral History Project. Before we begin, can you please restate your name, your date of birth and where you were born?

00;00;17 - 00;00;24

ADRIANA COLLADO: My name is Adriana Collado Bertarelli, and I was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1966.

00;00;24 - 00;00;34

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Excellent. So tell me a little bit about your experiences growing up in Havana, Cuba, during the late 70s, early 80s.

00;00;34 - 00;01;59

ADRIANA COLLADO: Well, as you know, in 1959, there was a big event. There was a Cuban Revolution, which changed society completely, so I can say that I lived during a transfer, a cultural switch of all values from a capitalistic free society into a communist oriented new society with different structure, different values. My parents were excited about all these

changes and their rhetoric of communism that later turned to be not as nice. So I ended up being a political refugee in my early 20s. But my upbringing was believing that we were changing the world with a new political formula, and I was part of it, and I had to be a good soldier of the Revolution that means prioritizing following the leader rather than my own family and being very involved in politics even when I was a child.

00;01;59 - 00;02;11

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And did you ever have doubts? You know, growing up, like in that time period when you when you had to be a soldier, so to speak?

00;02;11 - 00;02;34

ADRIANA COLLADO: No, I actually was very, a very obedient, focused on what I should do and following the rules in the school during my elementary years, middle school, high school. Then when I started college, that was my wake up moment.

00;02;34 - 00;02;40

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And talk to me a little bit about that. What was the spark that ignited that wakeup call?

00;02;40 - 00;07;17

ADRIANA COLLADO: I went to medical school, in a year in which we were organized, like some sort of, we'd call it *destacamento médico* [medical detachment], how you say, like a little army of doctors that we be going to foreign countries to help them. What I did not know is that the government were charging those governments to send us, and we were not paid. But the government was actually making money, but they didn't want—I didn't know that at that time, and then during my school years, there was the event in Granada, where Americans took over and there were Cubans there, and they were, they went back to the island instead of as the government wanted just to die there defending the post, which was not even Cuban territory. So some of the kids, some of the students in the faculty in the medical school had parents there, and they were blamed for not supporting, the fact that their own parents supposed to die defending their post instead of coming back. And those kids, those students who were maybe nineteen, twenty years old, were expelled from the school because they didn't follow the what the Revolution, what the government wanted it to think. And that was a big shock to me because it went down to our human part, very personal and emotional and their families. I knew these students. They were my classmates. So being part of the establishment—like I was—was a contradiction for me and I felt very guilty of being, in some way, part of this process of expelling these students. So that was what my first step towards waking up, as I call it.

So I left the school actually, and I went to journalism. I went to a different university to be a journalist. And then we had a confrontation with the government about what was published, what we were able to cover, the things we were able to say and to write, and I understood at that point that I was living in a very different society than I thought. Since I was a daughter of a foreigner, the secret police identify me as a person they wanted to recruit, and they asked me to be an informant, meaning that you have to get together with your classmates and friends and inform what they were saying, what they were thinking. And that was a very hard process for me. I was very scared. I didn't want to do it, but I knew how they operate. And it was a very

difficult time because at that point you start suspecting about everyone because, you know, if you are checking on people, people are checking on you. And it's a very complicated psychological game. So I decided to leave the island because I couldn't follow that game.

My mother was an Italian journalist in Cuba, so [she] was a very targeted person. I had microphones in my house. The phone was tapped, so it was scary. And I was very young. So it was a very hard time for me.

00;07;17 - 00;07;53

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah, absolutely. And, before I ask some questions about your interest in journalism, and you just mentioned medical school. So there's a story there. You know, you were born when the revolution already took place, right? You were seven years after, Castro took over. Did your parents ever recount stories of what life was like before the Revolution in the island? Or maybe your grandparents, if they were living in Cuba.

00;07;53 - 00;08;55

ADRIANA COLLADO: Well, not my parents, but some other people, I mean, everybody old before. But at that point, I think the adults didn't want us to have any contradiction in our upbringing, not to put us in a difficult position. Whoever didn't like that regime try to leave and leave in the big exodus of '60 and '61. Whoever stayed, like my parents did, they were somehow committed to this new experiment. In my parents case, my father was a psychiatrist, and he was very excited about the promises of having good health care, good psychiatric hospitals. So that was his motivation. And he believed in that.

00;08;55 - 00;09;17

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Well now it's starting to make a little bit more sense your career choices. Your father was a psychiatrist. Your mother was a journalist. So this I mean, assuming that was what inspired you. What other conditions sort of made you want to take those career paths?

00;09;18 - 00;10;06

ADRIANA COLLADO: I always like reading and writing. And my parents' friends who were in the artistic community, I remember having dinners at home with writers and actors. Writers that at the time were censored, actually, some of them, but I used to do theater, so I liked arts. But I thought that if you study arts, you would not be successful. So you wanted to study journalism, right? Little did I knew that journalism was going to change, but that happened later, much later.

00;10;06 - 00;10;31

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And you mentioned how your father was sort of attracted to the idea of the revolution because of his career. Conversely, how did your mom feel about it? Because typically, you know, the state always assumes the media, the Communist state, of course. So what was that like for her?

00;10;31 - 00;11;04

ADRIANA COLLADO: My mother was very curious. She had a journalistic mind. So that experiment was very exceptional. She wanted to be there to lead what was going on. And being an Italian, she knew that she could leave any time she wanted to leave the country. And also she was committed to my father. But at one point my father couldn't leave the island, and my mother stayed with him. She never left the island either.

00;11;04 - 00;11;09

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So what year did you ultimately leave the island?

00;11;09 - 00;13;11

ADRIANA COLLADO: I left in 1990 after [attending] the college for journalism. The university had very few students. A reduced number of students. So we were a small college with a lot of foreigners, people from other countries with a communist orientation. So Cubans were like ten people per grade. So we start questioning things. Why are Cubans in Africa dying there in the war in Angola and nothing is being published? What is the concept of communist journalism that say that journalism is not for informing people, but for educating people and that you cannot give them any news that will disturb their formation and that you have to wait for an opportunity to publish certain news? We were questioning that. That was from Vladimir Lenin in his *credo* [creed]. So we were starting to have all these opinions and voicing them until the government scheduled a meeting with some people in the hierarchy of the country. And it was [Fidel] Castro. Castro came to the meeting. He was very upset because all these young people were questioning and questioning. And there was one question about—how you say *culto a la personalidad*?

00;13;12;01 - 00;13;12;20

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Cult of Personality. Yeah...

00;13;12 - 00;16;02

ADRIANA COLLADO: ...to the to the leader. But the question was very naive. It was like, how is the media portraying a leader that wants to be worshiped? Like it was the media who was making that image and not the reality because our leader, we thought, was so good. But when I saw Castro there and his face, he was so angry. And it was the first time he talked about our relationship with the Soviet Union, which at the moment was going through the *perestroika*, to their big change. And he said, "We're not going that route. We are going to stick with our values." So I said, this is a disaster. I remember going out at 2 a.m., in the morning because the meeting was very long, it was like six, seven hours. And going out—and this is a huge building, very tall, on top of a hill—and I could see vultures circling on top of the building, which was normal because that was the way it was. But at that time, seeing those vultures circling, I said, this is...it was so such a powerful image, like I'm living in a rotten, dead, creepy, dark place—I need to leave. And I was scared because I talked in that meeting. I spoke. Because I was always very outspoken. So I started to plan how to leave. So because my mother was Italian, she was able to get some, like a grant, a Fulbright to go to Rome to work in the press agency there, ANSA [*Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata*]. So I left with that. It was hard to leave because at that point I was targeted because I spoke. So it was hard to leave. Because of their commitment to the revolution, my father and my mother had been friends with a person who was the foreign minister, like secretary of state equivalent. But at that point, and the papers for

me to leave were there in their department. So my mother called his wife, and somehow I got my passport, but I [was not] supposed to, so they gave me a week, a window to leave, and I took a plane, and I had to gather all my things very quickly and left.

00;16;02 - 00;16;02

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And—

00;16;02 - 00;16;03

ADRIANA COLLADO: To Rome.

00;16;03 - 00;16;10

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: To Rome. And that meeting that you just shared. Do you remember the date?

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ADRIANA COLLADO: It was 1989 or 1988.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And you said you spoke at that meeting? What did you say exactly?

00;16;20 - 00;16;51

ADRIANA COLLADO: We organized a questionnaire, and each grade had a question. I was my group's selected person. My question was, "What is the concept of opportunity and the best moment to publish something? How do we know that this is the right moment to publish something?"

00;16;51 - 00;16;52

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What was the reaction?

00;16;52 - 00;17;10

ADRIANA COLLADO: The reaction to my question and all our questions was not answering them and starting to redirecting us in questioning why we were questioning.

00;17;10; - 00;17;11

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right.

00;17;11 - 00;18;26

ADRIANA COLLADO: So no one answered that question. We were five groups because it was a five-year career. So each group was sitting in a particular place that they could identify us. We were in a room with those glasses that there's somebody watching, and there was the whole media. Being Havana, it's not that big, and being in a communist country, there's not a lot of media, but we had the magazines and papers. There were like two papers and a few magazines and the TV and radio, all those editors, publishers and the everybody was there, and the adults were looking at us in awe and in terror. "What are you guys going into!?" But we were young and passionate, and we thought that we were right. And we were very actually, you know, and a little irresponsible.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right. And how far was that moment removed from the incident at the medical school?

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ADRIANA COLLADO: Like three years.

00;18;36 - 00;18;49

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Three years. So within those three years, you personally were already getting dissatisfied with the state. And this was sort of like your moment to express it to the state themselves.

00;18;49 - 00;18;51

ADRIANA COLLADO: Yeah. To Castro in his face.

00;18;51 - 00;18;56

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. That's quite remarkable. Yeah. That's pretty fearless.

00;18;56 - 00;18;59

ADRIANA COLLADO: Well you know strength in the numbers right. We were all there.

00;18;59 - 00;19;08

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right. Absolutely. So you essentially left the island when it was entering its so-called "Special Period," right?

00;19;08 - 00;19;09

ADRIANA COLLADO: Before, right before.

00;19;09 - 00;19;16

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right before the special period. Yeah. Exactly. Was it—did you leave family behind?

00;19;16 - 00;20;05

ADRIANA COLLADO: My mother. Ironically, she was the foreigner, she stayed and I [left]. She told me "You are Cuban, and you will always be, so this is not a good place for you. I'm going to help you to leave the island." But she was sick. She had an emphysema. She said "If I die, I'm dying, very sick, and I ask you to come back, don't come back. Because anyway, I had my life and I'm going to die. If you come back to be with me (I'm the only child) I'm not going to be able to help you to leave again. So I'm telling you, even if I ask you, don't come back."

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. Wow. And how long did you stay in Rome?

00;20;10 - 00;20;30

ADRIANA COLLADO: For a year. For a year. And I had met an Italian-American in Cuba that we were communicating, and we started a relationship. But he was living in New York. I was living in Rome. I wasn't planning to go back to Cuba. So we married, and I moved to New York City.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: In '91?

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ADRIANA COLLADO: 1990. At the end of 1990.

00;20;36 - 00;20;57

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What were your initial impressions about the United States, when you arrived here? Granted, you know, Cuba, United States, are so close to each other, so I'm sure you already had some preconceived notions when you were living in Cuba. So how did that sort of I don't know, I don't want to say conflict, but how did that how was that dynamic?

00;20;57 - 00;22;19

ADRIANA COLLADO: Oh, that was definitely a conflict. Even though I was disappointed with the government in Cuba, I had this impression of Americans being this imperialistic people who didn't believe in social justice, who were racist, and all kind of bad things. So I was the last person to leave the airplane. I didn't want to go. And I was crying, and the crew was thinking that I was some sort of illegal or something. I even heard someone said "According to me, they are going to send her back. She's not going to be able to enter." I was in distress. I was very scared. I thought that they were going to arrest me just for being Cuban. And that fear stayed with me for a long time, to the point that if I wanted to go to the post office because they wear a uniform and they are federal employees, I would have to ask someone to go with me, because I was afraid of everything and everybody.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And when did that fear sort of start to erode...or has it ever?

00;22;29 - 00;23;44

ADRIANA COLLADO: I would say when I had my children in New York, I started seeing the world through their eyes. So I felt I was belonging there more than because that was my children's home. And meeting Americans, I worked at the beginning in New York, as a babysitter, maid in a household, with a—and they were so nice to me. People helped me a lot. I know there's a lot of people that don't like immigrants. By my experience, a lot of people had to help me because I then divorced from my husband, and I was here all by myself. My mother finally died in Cuba. I couldn't go, and I was alone. But thanks to the help of people...so my experience here hasn't been of being discriminated, directly, I mean.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right, right. For sure.

00;23;45 - 00;23;46

ADRIANA COLLADO: By anyone.

00;23;46 - 00;23;52

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right. And how long did you stay in New York?

00;23;52;17 - 00;23;53;11

ADRIANA COLLADO: 15 years.

00;23;53 - 00;24;04

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: 15 years. Wow. Okay, so you spent most of your time in New York as, like, an American living in the United States. How did you reignite your career here?

00;24;04 - 00;25;14

ADRIANA COLLADO: When I went to journalism, I wasn't those folks that wants to go into things because I had my two kids. I was a single mother. I chose to be a copy editor and lately an editor. So I was in the office. I never had that. I was good, you know, I did my job well, but my passion was still being a psychiatrist, as when I started medical school. Every time I covered a story or wrote about any situation, I always looked for the human part more than the data. And I like seeing people and listening to them, and I wished I could help, or I could listen more, and I wanted to help them emotionally, which was not my role as a journalist. So when my kids finally were on their own—when I turned 50—I decided to go back to college to pursue my passion. To try.

00;25;15 - 00;25;15

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right.

00;25;15;29 - 00;25;29

ADRIANA COLLADO: I said, “I'm going to get old anyways, whether I try it or not. So I don't want to die thinking that I had this thing pending. So I'm going to try. If it doesn't work, I have nothing to lose.”

00;25;29 - 00;25;38

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right. Absolutely. Okay. So that's good to know. I will ask a question when we get closer to that because you said ten years ago roughly?

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ADRIANA COLLADO: In New York?

00;25;40 - 00;25;46

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Well, when you went back to school, that was what 2016-ish?

00;25;46 - 00;25;46

ADRIANA COLLADO: 2017.

00;25;46 - 00;26;00

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: 2017. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Well, since you mentioned I have to ask since you mentioned, you lived in New York for 15 years, you were there when 9/11 happened? Talk to me about that day.

00;26;00 - 00;28;37

ADRIANA COLLADO: Yes. And I was working in a newspaper, a Spanish newspaper. That day, actually, I didn't go to work. I think I had the day off or I was at home with my kids and somebody called me—I didn't know, I didn't. Somebody called me and said, “Are you okay?” I said “Yeah, why?” “You don't know what happened.” “No, I don't know.” So they told me, and I was living in New Jersey, which is across the river from Manhattan, so I could walk to see the skyline of Manhattan. And I saw, you know, the white smoke coming up, and everybody was like zombies, walking like zombies. And the news were repeating again and again, and the reporters and the anchors were like robots, I'm telling you, with someone here and there shedding tears. And they were repeating and repeating the images of people falling down, and so I went, and I saw that. And my first thought was silly. I thought, “How can anybody change Manhattan skyline?” Because that was very famous, you know, portrayed in many times. And then because I lived in a low income area with a lot of immigrants. It was a lot of Arabic people there who owned shops. And I went there, and I saw that some of them going in the roof and jumping of joy. Some of them not, but there was a few that were, and they would say “The Americans are always messed up with us.” And it was like unbelievable. But I don't think at that particular moment anyone could grasp the magnitude of what's going on. I actually never went back there. I didn't go to the ground zero. I don't want to see that. I don't want to see the memorial. And for many, many years I did my kind of my own grieving every 9/11 of thinking about what happened, and it changed my life, everybody's life that year, I think.

00;28;37 - 00;28;45

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Absolutely. You mentioned you worked in a Spanish newspaper. Talk to me about that experience.

00;28;45 - 00;29;28

ADRIANA COLLADO: Actually, from the windows of the paper, you could see the people falling. But I didn't go to work that day [on 9/11]. It was a lot of confusion. People didn't know how to cover that. We went to work as a means to process that story. When you work in a paper, when you work in the media, and something like that happened, you immediately switch to your journalistic mind, and you know that you have to gather stories, and you have to be there to publish the news.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And so did your paper ultimately do that?

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ADRIANA COLLADO: Yes. Yeah. Like every paper.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And just generally speaking not so much connected to 9/11, but was this location, first of all, what was the Spanish newspaper called? [*El Diario*]. *El Diario* [The Daily]. Did you work there for the 15 years you were in New York?

00;29;50 - 00;30;53

ADRIANA COLLADO: No. Then I switched to another paper called *Hoy* [Today]. Briefly before going to *Hoy*, I work for Starmedia.com—when in 2000 all the newspapers went to electronic, where digital was the big switch. So I went to work at that place. It went to the stock market, made a lot of money, and then crashed like many websites. But then I went back to printed media with *Hoy*. *Hoy* newspaper in Spanish, which eventually sent me to Orlando because they have a sister publication, the Orlando Sentinel. They had a Spanish supplement called *El Sentinel*. So I worked at that Sentinel when I moved here.

00;30;53 - 00;31;02

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And what was it like working in a foreign language newspaper outlet?

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ADRIANA COLLADO: Well, for me, it wasn't a foreign language. Actually, my English was very bad. I'm still learning. So, it was very comfortable to be able to work in your own language for your own community. But for me, being Cuban, I did not know of other nationalities, other Latin American nationalities, Mexican [etc.]. So I learned a lot about the differences between Spanish speaking people. It was very exciting, but I still wanted to be more. I wanted to be a psychologist or psychiatrist. But it was too late being a psychiatrist.

00;31;38 - 00;31;43

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So was it your employment the reason why you moved to Orlando?

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ADRIANA COLLADO: Yes.

00;31;43 - 00;31;45

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And what year was that?

00;31;45 - 00;31;47

ADRIANA COLLADO: 2005.

00;31;47 - 00;32;09

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So you've been here now for 20 years. What were some of your initial thoughts about Florida? Orlando? Especially being in New York, where, you know, everyone thinks of New York as the spot, especially immigrants. So what was that coming here to Orlando, what was that like?

00;32;09 - 00;33;17

ADRIANA COLLADO: When the opportunity presented, I knew it was going to be a big change, but I was thinking about my kids that this was a better place to raise them, considering

that I was a single mother, and because I was working in New York in a daily newspaper, which has a very late closing time, so I was going home at ten. But here the supplement was weekly, so I was going to be able to have a more family oriented schedule. But I didn't even know where Orlando was. I never went to Disney or anything. So it was an adventure. It happened very quickly. I was interviewed and offered the job on the spot. It was more money. It was very conditioned. So I moved here without even notice. The first thing that came to my mind was this song, "If you can make it there [New York], you can make it anywhere." So I moved, you know, trusting, I don't know, destiny. Faith. Fate.

00;33;17 - 00;33;19

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah, it's true. Yeah.

00;33;19 - 00;33;21

ADRIANA COLLADO: It is.

00;33;21 - 00;34;18

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You know, you mentioned the Hispanic community, and that's something that as immigrants, from South American or Latin American countries and even children of immigrants, that's something that we understand. We're very conscious about it. But I feel most people that don't come from these communities just assume that Hispanics, that category is appropriate, which at times it is. But the point I'm trying to make is how was your experience? Because you mentioned that you didn't really engage with other nationalities until you came to the United States, particularly the nationalities from other Spanish speaking countries. So what was that like for you? You know, navigating that in New York, but also here in Orlando?

00;34;18 - 00;35;18

ADRIANA COLLADO: I felt like, with all my experiences of, let's say, persecution, I felt like I was a drop in a big ocean because I heard so many stories, from other Hispanics. And it was interesting how your identity changes when you come here [United States]. In Cuba, I was white. So I always say, "When I was white..." because here I'm not considered white. So in a way, I experience differently—it is different when you, you know, those identities means a lot. I don't know how to explain. I never thought about that. But definitely changes your point of view, your appreciation of people, of the world, of everybody.

00;35;18 - 00;36;06

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: No, yeah, that's a great way of saying it. You said it is better than I did. More concise. Yeah, it's exactly that—your identity changes. And as you know, for immigrants themselves and I keep referring to it like that, not because just you, but like my parents were also immigrants. I was born here. So it's different. Yeah, that's a different level. But because my heritage is from an immigrant background, I get it, I understand, but there is an identity switch, and I've asked my parents themselves like navigating that must be challenging. Because it's even sometimes challenging, even if you're born in this country to sort of say, "Hey, like, yeah, I'm American, but I'm also Colombian" in my case. So I'm just curious to see how it was for you.

00;36;06 - 00;36;27

ADRIANA COLLADO: Yeah. It's a very interesting. It's a privilege because you can experience life and society and the others, you become the Other. In my country, I was privileged. I had a high status. Now here, I am the Other.

00;36;27 - 00;36;46

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. Exactly. Talking a little bit more concretely, in what way is the Latin community different from New York and Orlando, in your experience?

00;36;46 - 00;37;18

ADRIANA COLLADO: New York is more diverse. There are more balance between Latin American nationalities. Here is mostly Puerto Rican, few Cubans, a lot of Venezuelans now. But the Venezuelan immigration is more recent. There were not that many Venezuelans before. But in New York at that time it [was] mainly Caribbean. And in New York there's every kind of—it's very rich.

00;37;18 - 00;37;33

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. So as we've said, you arrived here particularly because of employment. Just so walk me through that experience of working for the Sentinel, the Spanish subset of the of the Sentinel.

00;37;33 - 00;40;02

ADRIANA COLLADO: Where I came here. Different lifestyle. The weather and the place looked more like Cuba, so it was some sort of familiar. The paper was embedded in the American, in the Orlando Sentinel. So I work side by side with American reporters. It was a shock. It was a shock for them. And it was a shock for me. They didn't understand exactly...I mean, we were the Other and they "New Other" because they were not used to diversity. The year I moved here, I was part of the wave. I was part of the trend of people moving south. They didn't know what to think about us. It was very strange and a little intimidating. Also, I had to relate with my bosses were American, my English wasn't that good, so I was a little intimidated, but I learned a lot and I met a lot of people. Very nice people. But, you have to explain yourself everything, the most basic things. So, I moved here. I bought a house after a year. And I came to this neighborhood, and because I was alone and I didn't know anybody, and I was a single mother, I wanted my kids to grow in a community, give them some sort of belonging to a place, to a community. So I started to come to the church. I wasn't a believer or never grew up in the church, as you can imagine in Cuba. So, coming here to this church was very important for me in terms of meeting, knowing the culture. People helped me. They were not impressed by me. I was the only Hispanic or person that didn't speak English very well. This was a very tight community. They opened their arms to me, and I learned a lot. Of course, I knew that I was different. But rather of going to a Spanish church, I stayed here for that purpose. I wanted to...it was the window to Orlando.

00;40;02 - 00;40;44

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. That's awesome to hear. And the church, of course, that you're referring to is the Audubon Church. And so you've been a part of this community since you arrived in 2005? [*Adriana nodded*] Wow. Okay. Excellent. You mentioned how in terms of, in

the context of your job, there was sort of a cultural shock for you. How has that changed in the past—well, I guess for you, I'm assuming ten years, because then around 2017, you left the job—so how did that change in that window, in that decade?

00;40;44 - 00;41;54

ADRIANA COLLADO: There was not a quality change. It was more like quantitative. The reporters there start paying attention to news from our community and start noticing the numbers. I remember a big, huge, demonstration in Lake Eola, against, some, it was Colombians with 3000 people there, and the paper didn't want to cover that, didn't put them in their list. And when we call and said, "Hey, there is 3000 people demonstrating in Lake Eola." They rush there. They then start getting more familiar with immigration issues. The Hispanic community, the growth of the Hispanic community has been enormous in the last ten years in Orlando. So they start getting more information about it, getting more familiar with these new people and they embraced the Hispanics.

00;41;54; - 00;41;55

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah.

00;41;55 - 00;41;56

ADRIANA COLLADO: Little by little.

00;41;56 - 00;42;08

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. Yeah. That's why I asked. Because your career here coincided with that rise of the Hispanic community in Orlando. What did you specifically report on?

00;42;08 - 00;42;22

ADRIANA COLLADO: I was a copy editor, but I wrote about arts and culture, so I get to know many Puerto Rican and Hispanic painters, artists. There is a lot here.

00;42;23 - 00;42;47

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right. So let's talk about your second life, so to speak. And going back to school, you already explained why you wanted to go back, but just talk to me about that experience as a, not only, of course, as we've been saying the Other quote unquote, but like, as an older student, too. What was that like?

00;42;47 - 00;43;47

ADRIANA COLLADO: Oh, yes. Going back to college at that point was very challenging, you can imagine. Well, I forgot to mention that when I was in New York, when I first arrived, I went to City College to pursue a master's in Spanish literature. But that career was in Spanish, mostly in Spanish. That's what I chose it. It was wonderful going back to college. But that was a strong part of my identity as a student, a person who likes reading and researching and all of that. So it was hard, but it was good. I was enjoying it because that was something that I always wanted to do. So at that point, I wasn't doing that to make money or to make more money just for vocation, for almost like luxury to be able to do that.

00;43;47 - 00;43;56

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Like, for like fulfillment. No. Yeah. [*Adriana whispered “Exactly”*]
What school did you attend exactly?

00;43;56 - 00;44;01

ADRIANA COLLADO: It was a satellite campus of Troy University here in Altamonte Springs.

00;44;01 - 00;44;05

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Nice. And when did you complete your degree?

00;44;05 - 00;44;07

ADRIANA COLLADO: 2019.

00;44;07; - 00;44;08

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: 2019.

00;44;08 - 00;44;10

ADRIANA COLLADO: Right by COVID, when the COVID started.

00;44;10 - 00;44;16

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. And as soon as you got your degree in 2019, you began practicing?

00;44;16;25 - 00;44;17;09

ADRIANA COLLADO: Yes.

00;44;17;15 - 00;44;22;11

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. And talk to me about how that career. Do you continue to practice? How has that been?

00;44;22 - 00;45;35

ADRIANA COLLADO: I started seeing children. And of course, they assigned me—I started for an agency that gets you clients—with Hispanics because of the language. But at this point, I feel very strong, confident that I know the difference between the different Hispanics. I know the culture. So I can understand. I think that all my previous experience, covering different situations, knowing about their history, where they come from, gives me a very comfortable and good perspective of their problems and how to help them emotionally. I'm very happy now. My kids graduated from college, whatever. They took their own paths and I'm happy that I did that switch. And I feel that my life experiences have prepared me for helping people, and I'm finally doing what I always wanted to be. It took a little while.

00;45;35 - 00;46;06

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: But the important thing is that you did it. And that's admirable. And I certainly commend you for that because especially at your age, you know, a lot of people think that when you get to a certain age, it's the end. But that's not true at all. So that's awesome.

Well, you kind of answered it. I was going to ask how did your former career sort of informs your practice now, but you just answered it. Yeah.

00;46;06 - 00;46;17

ADRIANA COLLADO: Yeah. By knowing their experiences and having being able to cover so many experiences, so many stories from different backgrounds and...

00;46;17 - 00;46;34

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: We've sort of touched on it, but I want to ask more explicitly. You've lived here in Orlando now for 20 years, two decades. How has Orlando changed in these 20 years from your eyes?

00;46;34 - 00;47;17

ADRIANA COLLADO: A lot. You can see it in the cities. But they're building a new communities, new houses. This neighborhood when I moved here, there was one store that rented DVDs and the old cassette movies. And that's it. It was desolated. It was very sad. Now you have restaurants everywhere, a lot of diversity. Young people moving here and people keep coming to Orlando. However, Orlando is a little bit like a revolving door. People come and go, come and go all the time. But it's very lively and it's nice living here.

00;47;17 - 00;47;28

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. Absolutely. In what ways do you think Orlando or Florida more broadly will change in the next 20 years?

00;47;28 - 00;48;40

ADRIANA COLLADO: There's going to be a lot of second generation Hispanic Americans. And that will change the very sort of rustic base of this region, especially Central Florida. There is a little bit of still differences between you can see in people my generation that grew up here how they are a little different. Not saying it's a confrontation. It's just a clear line in differences. But I think that this new generation of Hispanic Americans, that are more Americans than Hispanics, is enriching this area a lot, bringing from different cuisines to accents to traditions, music. It is really enriching here.

00;48;40 - 00;49;02

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: In what ways has your Cuban heritage and background influence your perspective on life generally, but also living in the United States, Orlando specifically?

00;49;02 - 00;50;49

ADRIANA COLLADO: There is a Cuban American writer who wrote a book, or an essay called "Living on the Hyphen Cuban-American." [The book is actually titled *Life on the Hyphen*]. So I'm still living on the hyphen, like, I still see the difference between the two worlds. And it's like having, you know, two identities in one. I am still very Cuban because, of course, I'm an immigrant. I'm not first generation. So, it makes a different community. I always think that there are third identities, it is a very particular identity with their own language, their own points of view. I'm very grateful. So I have a lot of gratitude in my heart for the United States, for the people here that have helped me. And I don't know if I would be that grateful if I

stayed in Cuba. So that is something that is—and also it humbles you. Immigration humbles you. As I say, “when I was white....” So, I see many perspectives. That's very enriching. And as an immigrant, I don't think I ever considered myself belonging to a specific place. I don't belong to any of these two places and cultural norms, but somehow I can live comfortably in both.

00;50;49 - 00;50;57

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah, that makes total sense. Yeah, absolutely. Have you ever returned to the island?

00;50;58 - 00;50;59

ADRIANA COLLADO: No, no, I never went back.

00;50;59 - 00;51;17

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. If someone is listening to this recording 50 or 100 years from now, what would you want them to know about your culture and the state of Florida?

00;51;17 - 00;51;55

ADRIANA COLLADO: That, my culture, like any culture, can merge. And probably in a hundred years, all we're going to have is a big mixed of cultures and that you are able to keep your language, your traditions, your images from your culture, no matter where you go and integrate. And that is a beautiful thing.

00;51;55;28 - 00;52;04;18

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Well, Adriana, thank you so much for taking some time with me and sharing your life story. I really appreciate it.

00;52;04 - 00;52;07

ADRIANA COLLADO: Thank you for your interest and for listening.