

[English] Rosita Presmanes-Interviewed by Ayvette Santiago

SANTIAGO: [00:00:00] I am Ayvette Santiago and I am interviewing
Rosita Presma--

PRESMANES: Rosita Presmanes.

SANTIAGO: 285 Maplewood Avenue. Now the question: What's your
name? Name.

PRESMANES: Rosita Presmanes. Or Rosaura, I put the big name
Rosaura if you want it, but Rosita short name.

SANTIAGO: What's your name and when were you born?

PRESMANES: In 188 and -- or 1900, put 1900.

SANTIAGO: And your family? Children? All -- do you know and,
when they were born?

PRESMANES: [00:01:00] Where was I born? In Spain.

SANTIAGO: OK, the family -- and -- when you were a child, you
know?

PRESMANES: Little?

SANTIAGO: Yes, little.

PRESMANES: In Spain.

SANTIAGO: When you were a little girl?

PRESMANES: In Spain, and came here, do you want me to tell
you? We came here in the '20s, in 1920, we came to
Bridgeport, and I was in Bridgeport, I was married in
Bridgeport, we went to live to Vermont, and in Vermont I

was married, I had two children, a boy and a girl, I returned to Bridgeport, and I have lived here in Bridgeport since for 50 years, the other things occurred in Vermont, you know? and I have had my house [00:02:00] and now I have sold it, and I live here in [Sycamore?] apartment and what I see in Bridgeport is something superior because is industrial, you know industrial location, and I worked in Warner Brothers, I worked in many places.

SANTIAGO: How many years did you work in Warner Brothers?

PRESMANES: In Warner Brothers we were in the 42 to -- until the war finished, to the 47, something like that, and after because my son was already in the Army, and then coming my son --

SANTIAGO: What was your son?

PRESMANES: Now, my son is 62 years old.

SANTIAGO: No, what was he? a lieutenant, or --

PRESMANES: He would have -- not he was a soldier, yes we have to talk about that also. Now, I worked very hard, and I was saving my money [00:03:00] little by little until I could buy mi house and now I sold it, now I came here, for the first time I change of -- after 50 years OK, to come here. These are my inner feelings, can I say it? Can I say it?

SANTIAGO: OK, you can say it.

PRESMANES: I have come here, and by taking this apartment I have taken all the interest funds I have, all the money (inaudible) and I pay too much rent for this reason.

SANTIAGO: Here?

PRESMANES: Yes.

SANTIAGO: How much monthly?

PRESMANES: I pay 345.

SANTIAGO: It's too much.

PRESMANES: I have to pay you know, Blue Cross and those things, but everything cannot be here. [00:04:00] Then I have my feeling. Can I say it?

SANTIAGO: Yes.

PRESMANES: Here, when I made the application in what was distributed [cheese?], you know it from the state, the [cheese?]?

SANTIAGO: Yes, the [cheese?].

PRESMANES: So I want to do the application, and they tell me no, for me that was a punch in the heart, because I pay a bigger rent than others, as many people pay like me.

SANTIAGO: And do you live alone here?

PRESMANES: Yes, alone.

SANTIAGO: OK.

PRESMANES: And after that I went outside to eat in senior citizen in the [Baptist?] Church.

SANTIAGO: Yes, I have the paper, I have the [transfer?] I --

PRESMANES: Really? And there when I filled the application that I was going to eat, they tell me what social security I have, and I and told it and (inaudible) and here they don't give that to me. [00:05:00] I felt as a -- nobody, I don't care because my roof is only for me. But it is for me contempt, a bad feeling. You know.

SANTIAGO: Here the cheese is given in (inaudible) too --

PRESMANES: (inaudible) and they are here complaining to people that have more money and they say it. That is a dirty point somehow, but why? I have won my money, I have worked all my life, I have given education to my children, you know, complete high school. I have a grandson -- (inaudible) all with good education. [00:06:00] It's an honor to say. And after that, because you have had a little money, do you understand me, no, and after who pay the price? Me, because I have more money than others, and that I don't like. I have felt that word. For me Bridgeport is number one.

SANTIAGO: Did you go to high school in --

PRESMANES: I speak --

SANTIAGO: I know it but --

PRESMANES: She knows but she does not pronounce it well --

SANTIAGO: Did you go to school? [00:07:00]

PRESMANES: When I came here from Spain I have had school,
when we have come here in the year 20 and we had -- I
wanted --

PRESMANES: Not, no education. I have given education to my
children and to my grandchildren working. Here, when I
came to America, we have wanted to go to Jefferson School,
rather. And you know how much did it cost us? Thirty-five
cents every night. Today is the chur-- the dancing school.
You know --

SANTIAGO: Until what year did you go to school?

PRESMANES: In the 22.

SANTIAGO: Not before?

PRESMANES: Not, we went to learn English, we went to learn a
little English.

SANTIAGO: Until what grade did you go?

PRESMANES: Nothing! A few weeks, and because of this we do
not know English very well [00:08:00] because we have not
gone to school. We have not gone to school. And that is
my story that I have worked and I have made some money.
And the school, I could not go the school because it costed
money, and you won in the factory 50 cents per hour.

SANTIAGO: Per hour?

PRESMANES: Per hour, 50 cents per hour, when Roosevelt, the
president, you did not know him, but we have democratic

history because he was a number one man. He recovered the nation, that it was as poor as it is now. When Roosevelt, the situation was as now, the man who was citizen had to register, because if by chance he had to return to Old Country. [00:09:00] As now too, that the Mexicans and the Cubans are wanted little. Have you listened to that story now or not?

SANTIAGO: Which one?

PRESMANES: The proposition of Congress about the people that have come to America in the year 82, if Reagan had pass it, they would have had to return. Listen closely, do you understand now?

SANTIAGO: Yes, (inaudible).

PRESMANES: When Roosevelt was here, we were aware of that, because still we were not citizens, I was not a citizen, American, anybody.

SANTIAGO: They say something about the war?

PRESMANES: About the war, Roosevelt was when the war was happening. My son was in the war.

SANTIAGO: And how was it?

PRESMANES: And too (inaudible)

SANTIAGO: And how was it? [00:10:00]

SISTER: Also in the war --

PRESMANES: Wait to see what she says -- no, I was not in the war.

SANTIAGO: How was it where you lived? you know and all?

PRESMANES: Yes, already we were living here during the war.

SISTER: She was in New York.

PRESMANES: He (inaudible) was living in Bridgeport, oh yeah, my sister in New York.

SANTIAGO: How was the life during the war? you know. World War, you know? World War I. That and how was --

PRESMANES: In Japan, China, my son was in China. It was against Japan, you know, Japan was not, I see here in the (inaudible) people went and took it like this and threw it, made in Japan, pum, because they had -- that is the truth [00:11:00].

SANTIAGO: And how did you live in that time?

PRESMANES: How did I live?

SANTIAGO: Yes.

PRESMANES: Very bad, because I am going to say to you.

There was a lot of work for the women. The women worked because the men went to the war, and there was a need for women. One time I had to get shoes and I had to go to the State to ask for permission, they gave me a foot stamp. A permit to get shoes. You do not buy it as you want it. The factories worked for the soldiers, to make uniforms, to

make shoes, to make everything, right? If a lady went to buy a shoe, (inaudible) you have to have a point, [00:12:00] a little paper. That was so in the war when I was there.

SANTIAGO: Did you work at this time?

PRESMANES: Yes, that was when I was a widow. When it was the war, my son had a daughter, she already finished high school, as you now, and after she began to work here in Bridgeport. Where I have won money is here in Bridgeport (inaudible) and now she has that apartment and she lives happy, but I am very alone. I do not know where I will end up, but here I am. What else did you want to tell me?

SANTIAGO: Oh, oh --

SISTER: So many things have happened --

SANTIAGO: When you lived here the people was (inaudible), Puerto Rican, or Portuguese? [00:13:00]

PRESMANES: When I came here to Bridgeport, was may be some small percentage were from Puerto Rico, not many people came from there, now there are millions and millions of Puerto Rico in New York and Connecticut, right? And one day when I worked in Warner Brothers (inaudible) called me, and I do not speak good English, but she told me "Rosita come into the office," because it is true. I go down to the office, there are two Puerto Rican girls, like you,

they wanted work, and they did not know nothing of English. These two Puerto Ricans did not know one word of English, and I a little, but I did interpret. Do you know what is interpreter? [00:14:00] I did not know much, but I do interpret to two Puerto Rican girls that were going to work in Warner Brothers.

SANTIAGO: (inaudible)

PRESMANES: It was war time, I worked in parachutes, parachutes for the soldiers. Yes inspector, many little things.

SANTIAGO: Where you lived, were the people --

PRESMANES: They were good.

SANTIAGO: Like they were saying that they did not want the people, the Puerto Ricans.

PRESMANES: Not, they were good. Mostly English Americans, because there were a very few Puerto Ricans.

SANTIAGO: Where you lived, there were many Puerto Ricans?

PRESMANES: Nothing, almost none, no one. All American,

SANTIAGO: All American.

PRESMANES: I tell you all American, only a 17 or 16% in Bridgeport of Puerto Rico, it was American nation.

[00:15:00] But now there are many from Puerto Rico, now here there are many Puerto Ricans, too many.

SANTIAGO: Now there are --

PRESMANES: I think also that -- I could tell you well how you live saving a dollar, you know, how you save a dollar you know. I am going to show you my bed, to start with, if you want stop that for a moment --

SANTIAGO: Wait --

PRESMANES: And I see outside chairs, mattresses, furniture removed, I do not say Puerto Rico, I say generally.

SANTIAGO: Yes, it is good.

PRESMANES: Generally is well said, or not? Look I have this --

SANTIAGO: No this is the more --

PRESMANES: Look at this, it is 60 years old.

SANTIAGO: That bed?

PRESMANES: Yes, look at everything, this is brand new, look at my room --

SANTIAGO: Yes, everything is new.

PRESMANES: These are a bit younger. The manner that someone knows to live. If some day you marry, you should learn from me.

SANTIAGO: No, because my mother bought --

SISTER: (inaudible)

PRESMANES: I am about to finish. That is it, I won't say anymore. Now, you speak with my sister.

SISTER: (inaudible)

SANTIAGO: The church --

PRESMANES: Yes, how do you live in America?

SISTER: Well good, the one who can live well, and the one that cannot, does not.

PRESMANES: The one that knows how to live, lives perfectly [00:17:00] and the one that does not know how to live will never, is like a (inaudible) new go straight, it always goes crooked.

SISTER: (inaudible) I cannot say much.

PRESMANES: Well if you do not want to say much, do not say much.

SANTIAGO: The less or more.

PRESMANES: Less or more.

SANTIAGO: We will finish faster then.

PRESMANES: Is important for her.

SANTIAGO: Which church did you go to, and how was it?

PRESMANES: To the Saint Peter church I have been going, because I have lived in Harbor Avenue for 38 years in the same house and I went to Saint Peter and other things.

SANTIAGO: Do you remember Martin Luther King?

SISTER: Yeah, he died.

PRESMANES: I don't. I remember, but I don't have relationship with --

SANTIAGO: I know, how was it the days when he was saying all the things about --

PRESMANES: I -- those politics and those things, it is tough. Luther King, do you remember, the black one that was killed.

SANTIAGO: Yeah, it was in a movie as well.

PRESMANES: That is more for --

SANTIAGO: The women when they were working, received the same cash than the men, or more?

PRESMANES: Always the man has earned more than the woman. Now is different the system. Equal rights now. But first it was when Roosevelt began The Union, when the people earned 35 cents per hour, when we came here to America.
[00:19:00]

SISTER: We still managed with that.

PRESMANES: Of course, the bread costed 10 cents, that was different, but no matter now, this loss of control (inaudible). The more people earn the more they spend and they never save anything, so yes.

SANTIAGO: The days no -- the changes in life, how was that? The changes.

PRESMANES: The changes in my life?

SANTIAGO: Living in a place, later in other, how was that?

PRESMANES: For us all good, because we have worked since the first day, you know, working always, and we liked to work, and we were not in trouble ever, and we were good families. I am just saying the truth.

SISTER: What do you want? I am not saying anything, say what you want.

PRESMANES: This girl does not speak well Spanish to ask, or for anything. She knows it herself, right girl?

SISTER: Yes, I cannot speak English well.

PRESMANES: That is the problem.

SISTER: She said that a man will come, but they said he speaks a bit of Spanish.

PRESMANES: Yes, she also said a man was coming, and how did this happen?

SISTER: That lady that --

SANTIAGO: Which?

PRESMANES: It was this afternoon, she said for the --

SISTER: To my house, if they do not speak Spanish, I cannot speak English very well.

PRESMANES: He is coming, somebody is coming to speak.

SANTIAGO: Today?

SISTER: Then your thing is different than mine.

PRESMANES: No, it is the same thin when we were in the
[Baptist?] church, [Merien?] was going to give us the
appointment on the 25th --

SISTER: That is why I am saying that.

PRESMANES: -- a man is going to come and maybe I go as well.
[00:21:00] When I saw a man in the door --

SISTER: Well she has not said anything, if not I won't
understand I told her.

PRESMANES: When I opened the door, the man is --

SISTER: (inaudible) and says that they spoke Spanish. I know
(inaudible).

PRESMANES: Now something else that that you want to know?

SANTIAGO: The people want you to see the other side.

PRESMANES: She is filling there, [Trinity?].

SISTER: Yours.

SANTIAGO: I am filling it and that is recording it.

SISTER: I do not (inaudible).

SANTIAGO: When you lived there, people that came from other
place --

PRESMANES: I am good --

SANTIAGO: No, wait, like the people where you lived, they did
not do anything, how is it that they did not want them
here?

PRESMANES: No, all perfect at this moment. I can tell you that wherever I have been in America it has been number one, good. All well, well, good.

PRESMANES: Wherever we have been, in every place. We really have never had --

SISTER: Oh, not me, everyone liked me, everyone, just as anywhere.

PRESMANES: (inaudible) All good. No troubles, the neighbors, everything, I found out the town beautiful and clean in Bridgeport, and I don't see many --

SANTIAGO: Did you have children?

PRESMANES: Yes, I had a son, and a daughter.

SANTIAGO: Two?

PRESMANES: Two, no more. And I have the son, the son who is in North Carolina and is a minister, preaching, a priest.

SANTIAGO: And now that we are finishing.

PRESMANES: And the granddaughter, is a teacher but in profession school, you know (inaudible). And what else? All well.

SANTIAGO: And now we are finishing, how do you feel at Bridgeport right now?

PRESMANES: Well, always fine. I am fine. Life here in Bridgeport is American beautiful. No matter. Well.

SANTIAGO: Do you not feel, the people does not.

PRESMANES: Everything, until now I have not had anything
(inaudible).

SISTER: It is hard (inaudible).

PRESMANES: I am telling you good things about Bridgeport.

SISTER: You want to know about me?

SANTIAGO: When you -- were like me, you know, the years, young,
because the youth --

PRESMANES: Wait this is the last question. Young and
beautiful like you.

SANTIAGO: They did, you know, to avoid being in the house,
activities, you know?

PRESMANES: I cannot understand you there.

SISTER: When you were a 20-year-old girl.

SANTIAGO: Ah, my pencil broke. Yes, like the youth today that
goes out to the movies.

PRESMANES: Yes, we went to the movies. There was no
television, we did not have television.

SANTIAGO: Where did you go out to?

PRESMANES: The television? The movies?

SANTIAGO: Anywhere, --

PRESMANES: When I was in Bridgeport there we went to the
movie theater.

SANTIAGO: Where did you go to do, you know, fun, you know?

SISTER: For recreation. There were some parties here.

PRESMANES: A club, a club.

SANTIAGO: You know, and when did you go to parks?

PRESMANES: To the Bridgeport park, to relax, to walk around,
for picnics. This is learning for you, right?

SANTIAGO: Yes, I want to learn. And how was it? Do you know?
And what did you do when you are young?

PRESMANES: When we were young we were married, I told you at
the beginning, we raised the children, and we lived, to
take the children to school, nothing more, that is our
life. We did not have as many, going from one place to
another, but later on after we married we went to Spain,
and Canada, we went to California, and travelling after the
marriage. Yes.

SANTIAGO: OK, I have a question -- more or less everything.

PRESMANES: Not more or less, because you speak little
Spanish, and you take time to say --

SANTIAGO: The things --

PRESMANES: The things, is true.

SISTER: (inaudible)

PRESMANES: That is the bad thing. [00:26:00]

SANTIAGO: This is for the Bridgeport history what I am doing, so
other people can, if you want, can -- you know.

PRESMANES: Better impression?

SANTIAGO: No, if you want another people, more people which can go to this.

PRESMANES: To repeat it, to copy it, to --

SANTIAGO: If the people want to know, and they can hear it, and they know how were the days?

PRESMANES: My days?

SANTIAGO: Yes, if they want it.

PRESMANES: For they can put it on their records.

SANTIAGO: Yes, they do.

PRESMANES: So I give permission? Do you see how I have to help her to speak Spanish, my sister is listening I do not.

SANTIAGO: This is, if you want, or if you prefer that you do not want other people to know it.

PRESMANES: If you want another person to know it, or if not.

SANTIAGO: Not, the paper stays there. If you want, if you want another people you know.

PRESMANES: Yes, is this all in English, right? This says, this is our information, if we want it for the library, if we want for the Community Center, social and civil groups to preview future. If I want to give the permission I give the name, and if not, I don't give the name. [00:28:00]

SANTIAGO: And no one listens to it except the young people.

PRESMANES: They are listening to it (inaudible) but they don't know it here. If I don't sign --

SANTIAGO: Nobody else will listen to this, nobody.

PRESMANES: Look at this, and it would be better if they do not listen to it because it is not so important. Right?

That is not so important.

SANTIAGO: Not, that is not important. That if you want.

PRESMANES: If I want it, to copy the students, right?

SANTIAGO: You finished, to the end. The end.

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