

Anna : So we'll start with um, when, and where were you born?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Date and years. I was born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Did you say date?

Anna : You don't have to...

Mrs. Lorenzana: Yeah, I was born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

Anna : Okay, and what was it like growing up?

Mrs. Lorenzana: I think it was kind of peaceful at that time and I remember taking public transportation, going to school and now if we do that it's kind of dangerous, but it was, you know, free. And the only thing I regret is girls could not play soccer and I was a pretty fan of soccer and I couldn't play because girls were not allowed during that time. Now it's fine. Um, so people decided either you go to a public school, public school or not like this, like the ones in the state. Sometimes kind of hard, you know, because everybody goes there and sometimes can be lots of violence and my parents will not accept that. So. So it was peaceful and not the way it is now.

Anna : Um, when did you first come to the US?

Mrs. Lorenzana: My very first time was just right after high school, uh, I came to learn English and I have the chance to go to college. So they said you take this course and then you take a proficiency test and if you pass it then you can enter college. So for me that was my dream coming true because I always wanted to be a teacher and I had the chance of coming in and becoming one. So I did that. So I was able to go to college, graduated and then I went back home. That was the first time.

Anna : So you were here from about 18, 17, something like that?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Yeah. And for like four or five years or five years.

Anna : Nice, and was your main motivation for coming to learn English education?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Yeah, basically I wanted to learn English and I wanted it to be a teacher.

Anna : So, um, what happened next when you went back?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Then? I went back home and I got a job as a teacher at a bilingual school and I was happy. We got married and then we were invited by the Mennonite church to come and work with the Hispanic community. My husband is a minister, so it was a chance for us to plan churches and just basically to work with the Hispanic community. So we came up, basically it was, we thought maybe only three years we'd been 25 now after we get the kids. And so.

Anna : How old were you then when he came back to the US for the second time?

Mrs. Lorenzana: I came back, got married when I was 30, 31 I think.

Anna : OK Yeah.

Mrs. Lorenzana: Yeah. So I was an adult.

Anna : Um, so when you came back here, and your husband was preaching or?

Mrs. Lorenzana: We, we started as a youth pastor. See in the Hispanic churches is not as um, they don't have that many people working full time. So he was the young, the young pastor and he functioned as an assistant pastor to this moment.

Anna : What were you doing during that time?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Just helping him because we didn't have our permanent residency. We were just in the process of getting one, so I couldn't work. I couldn't drive. He had a driver's license because he went to school, were in that area where we used to live that was in New Orleans, so I couldn't drive, I couldn't work. So I waited until I was enjoying just working with the kids and, and a church.

Anna: So at what point did you decide to become a permanent resident?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Well, we were, uh, we were invited, as I say, we were invited by the Gulf States Mennonite conference, something like that to be, I think it was a religious visa and then we were asked, would you like a permanent visa. We didn't understand exactly what we're saying and say, yeah. So we got the visa and, but the idea was to be here for three years. But then kids came along and our oldest son, he got asthma. So medical expenses were really high, almost \$400 per month. And since he was adopted, the government paid for that. So we thought, what can we offer him? I mean going back home, we couldn't afford it. Yeah, you know, his for his health and then we thought about education for them and how much we had the chance to have an education and we want to offer that to our children. So that's how make us decide. Let's go for the permanent resident.

Anna : So was that in the Harrisonburg area?

Mrs. Lorenzana: No no, that was Harrisonburg is our fourth place that we live and the longest.

Anna : So kind of take me through that journey.

Mrs. Lorenzana: We started, we came to New Orleans, we were there for I think three or four years and I was not working. We were just, I was helping my husband at church and just getting around and it's not the same like I went to school in the north, all of north and, and then um, he was invited to open the church in El Paso, Texas. So we went to visit and we fell in love with the place. It was in the on the border with Mexico and we could go to Mexico if we wanted just to visit. So we

moved there and that's where we have our kids in El Paso. Um, and then we decided we were beginning, we were starting to get homesick and it was kind of far away traveling to Honduras from El Paso and they were not that many Hondurans there and just, we just began getting homesick and the kids now that we had the kids, we wanted them to be closer to home so he had an opening, there was an opening in Miami, so we went there and it was more like being in Latin America. However, I didn't like the area because it's too hectic, but I began teaching again in a bilingual school, so I really loved it, but I didn't like the area and my husband always wanted to, uh, he always wanted to get a higher education. So he came to visit EMU and there was a chance for him to get his master's degree. So we said why not? So let's move. So we came with our two kids and we fell in love with the area and we've been here ever since. And for our children, this is home, Harrisonburg. It was a nice move.

Anna : How did you feel you were accepted here in Harrisonburg compared to other places and was there a community of people from Honduras here at all?

Mrs. Lorenzana: At first, not really. Not that many Hispanics that we met and we were not connected with any Hispanic churches because my husband was going into the seminary so it was mostly his classmates and going to church. And then I began working. I was working in the county my first two years. It was hard because I feel like I was not being accepted that well just because I was Hispanic. I even have comments of people saying, oh, but how come you, can you be a teacher when you were Hispanic? And I was like, why not? And people assume that my husband was an American because he was getting his master's degree and I say how come a Hispanic can't do that? So those two years were kind of hard trying to figure out because I never experienced that and after awhile you learn to deal with that. Then I got a job with Harrisonburg city school and I feel like this is where I belong because I was able to give back something to the community. Then I met others like me and I've never felt that discrimination from the administrators or the staff. Nothing. It's like it's me. Whether I have an accent, whether I looked different it is just me. One of the other teachers.

Anna: And, what year was it that you got to the Harrisonburg area?

Mrs. Lorenzana: We came 2004.

Anna : Okay, great. And how was it raising kids in this area?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Well, I will say Harrisonburg. Harrisonburg is total different than other places. We came from Miami and even though there were lots of Hispanics in the area, at some point it was not that safe. Having kids outside here. It's such a great community. We live in the park view area. So for us having the kids outside playing on their own, riding their bikes, that was wonderful. That was great. It was, we felt like it was a safe place and a welcoming place and we never told the kids that, oh, you're Hispanic, but we never mentioned that word because we didn't want to feel them different than anybody else. And even though we

made the rule at home only in Spanish, not English, they never questioned why. I mean, for them it was just natural.

Anna : Were there any norms that you saw in the U.S. that it took time to get used to or that you found kind of weird?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Um, the individualistic part sometime, even now it's hard because we're in a collectivism community. Everybody's into everybody's business. I'm probably that part in. It was interesting seeing how people treat us and I talk about the plural because I'm including my husband. We noticed when people knew we had some kind of education, people started treating us differently and it was that, wow, that's as soon as we mentioned, Oh, you know, I'm a school teacher. Oh, okay. Oh, there were a couple of people at the beginning thinking, oh, so you were an assistant assuming that just because I was Hispanic, I couldn't have. So that part. I remember one time my husband was mowing when the lawn and one of his coworkers drove by us, oh, so this is, you have a part time job. And I said, no, this is my house, this is where I live, just because he looks Hispanic. So that was kind of different and trying to learn to deal with that and, and helping our children to learn that they don't have to react when people treat them differently. Um, Harrisonburg's a nice place to be. It is, it's a, it's a great community and, but that was something we got to our attention why people treat us different when they know the education that we have.

Anna : Um, have you been back to Honduras? How many times?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Since I came to Harrisonburg?

Anna : Or I guess since the US.

Mrs. Lorenzana: Since the U.S. Not that many. Probably last time I was home was last year and after that it took me almost 10 years. So probably four or five the most that had been home.

Anna : And was it just to visit family and everything?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Yeah, just a family. At first I wanted to go home because my parents lived there so I wanted mostly for my parents even though I got siblings back there, but then when we became Americans citizens, then I was able to request my parents so they came and lived with me and so that made it easier, not so urgent to go back home because I had my parents with me.

Anna : So when did you make the decision to naturalize?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Oh, our residency was going to expire. So basically that because it was pretty expensive, just changing the status. So we never, we always postpone it because we never had the money basically. So it was either becoming an American citizen or keeping keep it right in and say, you know, what, let's go for the

citizenship. And we did it and I'm glad we did. Especially now with this environment. Yeah, it's pretty hard.

Anna : Uh, so what was that process like?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Ah, we, let me see if I remember of 10 years. You have to take a class and, and they asked me some questions. I think I, I bought a book and I studied on my own, the questions and just prepare for that. Then we had an interview separate, you know, my husband went side and me and you have to be ready, you know, they asked you about politics and they ask you about who are your Senators, your Congress. So I have to learn that. Don't ask me now who they are because I can't, I don't remember and, but I knew, you know, the basic history, so that was not that bad, but it's always so tension, know, so nervous going in and, to have that interview. However, I felt like they were really nice people. Very nice. In our interview, the only thing I regretted is I wanted to use my maiden name and they didn't allow me to do that. They say no, that's the last name. You cannot do that. And of course you know, you're getting into the process. I didn't feel free to fight for it because it's like, okay, then they're not going to give me my citizenship because I wanted to keep my own last name. And they say, no, you use only one last name, your name and last name. So, yeah, now it's like, how come I didn't fight for it? I mean now that I know, but during that process you don't have so much of a choice. It's like, okay, whatever you say, I'm going to do it because I'm in this process. Probably the, the people that helped me were being like that. But the interview, it wasn't that bad. It was only five questions. If you pass the five questions, that's it. And then you know, all the process, the fingerprint and going to the doctor and background check and everything. So it was a long process. I think now it's harder. I think that's what I heard and it was expensive. I can't remember how much but almost a thousand dollars probably for each one of us.

Anna : How long did that process take from start to finish?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Probably no more than a year. No more than a year I think.

Anna: And how old were you then? What year was it?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Uh, I was in my forties.

Anna : Um, Evan?

Evan : Um so you first came to the, to the New Orleans area?

Mrs. Lorenzana: My very first time, no.

Evan : When you went, where did you go to school?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Seattle, Washington.

Evan : Nice, Seattle's cool.

Mrs. Lorenzana: Yeah.

Anna : Um, how did you get the opportunity to study in the US? How did you find out about that?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Through my pastor. The church was a church connecting.

Anna : Um, I guess, what do you miss about Honduras the most?

Mrs. Lorenzana: What I miss? Know, it's kind of hard because for me, if I have my family with me, I don't miss anything. But what I miss about Honduras is that friendship for example, this time of the year. Oh, it's the best going home because everywhere you go it's music. There's music and just feel the Christmas spirit that here we don't and that part, the friendship. Having lots of my friends in always getting together because here you're busy and we've been very lucky for having good friends, good people. We have met good people, but we're always busy.

Evan : So the first. So after you went back, after coming from school, you went back to Honduras and then you said your husband got a job in New Orleans. Okay. Um, how'd you like the New Orleans area or it was like...

Mrs. Lorenzana: I didn't like it at all. So we were there only for 3 years. It's kind of gloomy and I don't know, just, you know, Mardi Gras. I was not into that. Now, the food is good. I mean there were a lot of visitors but I was not really so excited make New Orleans my home. I know it was just temporary compared to El Paso and here. Those have been my best places.

Evan : And how'd you uh, was the reception in New Orleans? Like, when you first came did you see differences in the reception between New Orleans and like El Paso or Miami?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Every place that I've been, even though there are some Hispanic, since Hispanic is such a broad, you know, culture and, and, and in New Orleans there were a lot of Hondurans and we spent most of the time with the people at Church. My last year that I was there, I began working in a public school, so that's I feel like I have. That's the first time I experienced the American culture and it wasn't that bad. I was taken well, of course you know when you have an education and you have a degree, people respect you. So, we learned that. I don't know how we can sense that the people start treating you differently just because you have a bachelor's degree, you have a master's degree. The other day my daughter was telling me, I always remember you always saying when you go to the store, just try to look nice because I always tell her, you know, people are going look at you like, oh, look at that sloppy Hispanic and now with this environment people treat you differently. And, and you know, one of my kids, my son, my son, sometimes he looks more really Hispanic, dark complexion, black hair, and he

has felt some people treating him differently. Just the way he looked. Even though he was born here. Both of my kids were born back there. I just remember one incident in New Orleans my first day at school. Um, I went pretty early and one of the teachers. Really Nice Lady. She came and greet me and say, Oh, you're the new custodian here. Just assuming because I was Hispanic and I say, no, I'm the new bilingual teacher. So you know, things like that, incidents like that I had experience. But you learn, you learn this, not me with the problem is the other one that doesn't understand. So New Orleans is, I didn't like the area that much, no particular reasons. Just El Paso. We really enjoyed because we were able to go to Mexico and get some of the food, spicy food and beans and the cheese and you know, at that time we just drove by and went to those expensive restaurants and they will not that expensive because we were paying in dollars and just the whole culture. It was a nice, nice place.

Evan : So in El Paso, did you have permanent residence while you were in El Paso.

Mrs. Lorenzana: Yeah, yeah, well yeah.

Evan : So it was pretty easy to go over the border and come back?

Mrs. Lorenzana: During that time, that was, my daughter's 18. Yeah. 18. Almost 20 years ago. All you had to do is show you a green card, drive by. That's fine. Sometimes they just. Do you live here or are you an American citizen or say no, we're just permanent residents. Okay. Just go. That was that easy. That the trust that people now probably is not that easy. I don't know. I haven't been there in 20 years. Yeah. But it was a neat experience just being able to go to two different countries.

Anna : How have you seen Harrisonburg particularly changed from when you got here?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Oh, a lot. A lot more streets, you know, more new roads and more immigrants. I think a lot of immigrants, not just Hispanic, um, Asians and from the Middle East during that time and more stores and now it's easy for me, whatever I'm craving that I have, you know, from home all I have to go to one store and I get it a little bit more expensive, but I get it. So in that way for like, oh, they're bringing a little piece of my country here and I want my own children to experience that. My daughter just came from college. And what do you want to eat? Oh, just make me some beans, mom. So like I was, I was, you know, it means a lot to me because like wow. So she's bringing that, because I don't want them to lose their heritage. I wanted to keep it and, but at the same time they are Americans, so they need to experience what this culture brings. So it's a mixture. Yeah. What else? Yeah, the um, the school in the school system now we have a bilingual program. Now it's in every single school in Harrisonburg cities, except one. We have the bilingual program, kids are learning English and Spanish at the same time and I think that's a plus that brings a lot to the community and it's not that the Hispanic or taken over, it's just we're teaching the community to be open to new cultures, to new languages. I've never been in Europe, but you know, people speak lots of languages. Uh, my husband and I are fan of soccer,

so we're always listening to this European soccer. And like, were so impressed that a lot of them, they speak two, three, four languages and, and, and you listened to like, wow. So hopefully, you know, it will change the whole mentality of not because you're white, you're better than someone else. Yeah.

Evan : So within the school and do all of the kids go through the bilingual program?

Mrs. Lorenzana: No, no, they, it's an, it's an optional thing.

Anna : Do most people opt in?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Um, it's probably more and more people wanted to get into the program. When we started 10 years ago, uh, it was a waiting list. I used to teach at Smithland, so I was there 14 years and I started that. I was one of the people, to choose to start the program. So kids drove from different places just to get into the program. Now you go and you don't have to travel. I mean you don't have to, you, you can be in your own district and you find a bilingual program. And I think the first group, it's probably seventh or eighth grade, the first group that started. So more and more people are getting more used to and eh, it's neat seeing like in parent teacher conference or, and PTO activities, that interaction is not the white or the Hispanic is just parents come into school, kids learning a different language no matter what language it is, it's just they're kids. So in that sense, I see a change. You find more Hispanic churches or other cultures. I don't know what other cultures will be, but you know, that brings more respect to diversity.

Evan : Um, so it sounds like the, uh, the Methodist Church was a big organization that helped...

Mrs. Lorenzana: Mennonite church.

Evan : Excuse me. But it sounds like they had like a very influential part of your immigration story.

Mrs. Lorenzana: Probably, yeah, I will say. Yeah.

Evan : Would you say that, um, it's like the biggest organization that, um, that helped you connect more than Harrisonburg and um, or were there any other organizations within Harrisonburg that kind of helped you get more comfortable with living here?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Since my husband, a Mennonite minister, probably I will say so, EMU plays a big role because both of us graduated from there. So EMU has special heart especially, you know, part in our heart and probably, you know, the connection. You may people you met there, they're friends for life. I was telling my kids the friends that you're making there are for life, you know, those friends, that mentor. So I would say probably the Mennonite church. Um, yeah, EMU, EMU

and Harrisonburg city schools in my personal case, because I've been teaching here since we came.

Evan : Were there, I think you said this, but there weren't that many Hondurans in Harrisonburg when you first came?

Mrs. Lorenzana: I think I didn't know them because I was so involved in the EMU community, so I was not involved that much with now it's easy, so much easier just to connect with because of the parents and at that time, not that much. We were new in the area, and it takes a while now I feel like this is home for me. I feel that I'm part of this and yeah.

Anna : Do you have anything to add?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Thanks for doing this. I feel like you guys want to educate the community and it's not a matter of a race or where are you from it is just a person and some people are so caught up on how you look and that will determine who you are and it's not just one, you know, to bring something good to this. Because we had Americans back home. People decided to move back home. And our faith brings us here. So I know there was a purpose for us to be here and which I want to be the best and help and I always tell our kids, don't look at the color of the skin. Look at the heart. In fact, yesterday we were talking with my daughter and say, you're going to marry someone that has a good heart. That's all we're asking. Good heart don't look at...I don't care what color the person will be, but I've learned to say that it's not easy. You know, at first you were so prejudice even for me thinking, my kids are going marry an American. They're going to change, no. So I've learned that it's not whether they're Americans or Hispanic it is just about who they are. My son married an American, but Victoria, I don't see as different. I mean besides the language it's learning, but yeah.

Anna : Thank you.

Evan : I thought it was interesting how you said, uh, people seem to kind of be nicer or maybe pay more attention to you when they found your education background. Is that you think just a U.S. Thing or have you seen that back in Honduras?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Oh, uh, probably everywhere, everywhere, everywhere. And probably we feel it more because the tension there is in the environment now that I remember when we were thinking about starting to dual program, there was an article or an interview, I cannot remember the exact thing, but um in the news that we're thinking about bringing Spanish into education and so many comments of ignorant people. I'm sorry for the word ignorant people, but you know, our languages, English, they're not going to learn English and all of this. And I remember one particular comment people saying, but send those cockroaches back home, back to Mexico and it's like, I'm not from Mexico. So you know, those comments really hurt and I'm not saying that all immigrants are the greatest people. But anywhere you go and getting back to your point, I found a,

we found it here, not so much of a tension whether you have a degree or not. Like for us, when my husband went to the seminary and people started calling their first name to the teacher, like, oh, you don't call the doctor. So for us was, it was a shock because back home you have to call someone Dr. so and so or Mr so and so. And here you could call them by their names. That was a shock for us and say, Oh this is neat. And in we don't know if it's the mennonite community, that EMU community that was so relaxing and friendly and welcoming. Or it's just Harrisonburg. I mean so, but you can tell people treat you different. And I don't know if everybody feels the same way. If they know, Oh, you got a degree also, so we're big on education, for my husband. We push education, and our daughter now just started college at Mary Washington.

Evan : Mary Washington's a big education school, so.

Mrs. Lorenzana: I gave up, I wanted her to attend EMU. They said mom it is so close to home and when my, my husband used to work there so my kids were little so they used to be in EMU the time. So they grew up there. They need a break and like, so I'm glad she picked one that is not that far away and yeah, it's been good. I heard good things and she's excited for whatever she's going to study at Mary Washington is close by and she can do some internship or whatever. I didn't want JMU because it's too big. It's still thinking like, no, I can't do that. Even though I heard good things, but I don't know. That was my mom's side of it.

Evan : Um, another question, um, with 2016 being a big election, did you see any kind of differences after that? Or Harrisonburg kind of been more of a vacuum and stayed friendly and a better place or...?

Mrs. Lorenzana: Um, that's an...I just feel like now it's kind of hard talking about politics even with your friends because you don't know who they are. You think they believe like you, but they don't. In fact, one of my best friends here at school, we're good friends, but we don't talk about politics because once we start talking about politics, there was not a common point. So we decided, you know, that not even mentioned. Not even say that I went to vote. Nothing. That's not part of our relationship because it's hard. We don't think about things the same. And I think it's been harder now with this last election. People are more intense and I don't know why we just feel there was more tension. We just feel like we have got to be careful now. I don't know why, but even speaking Spanish in public, I never thought about it, but now it's like I'm kind of concerned because you don't know how people are going to react. I was offended when they say Mexicans were criminals because even though I'm not Mexican, I'm Hispanic, I'm one of them and I say I'm not a criminal. That was really hurting me. And just so you know, when you hear those negative comments, it really hurts. It does, because you cannot judge people just by the way they look or how they speak.

Evan : So you said you've called Harrisonburg home. Would you say that you feel American or, uh, you still feel more Honduran?

Mrs. Lorenzana:

Um, that's a good one, that a good one. Sometime my husband thinks I'm too American. I will say both. I think we both, what's the word you acculturate, right? Is that the word acculturation? I think. It's when you embrace the new culture and it becomes part of you, but you still bring your heritage. Um, it depends. Sometimes. Sometimes I feel like I'm still very Honduran and there are times I feel like I'm, well look how much I have changed. Especially going back home and after 10 years being away, you know, here you are in a restaurant and you don't like something you can say I don't like it, it's not what I ordered and you'll be fine most of the time. Back home is like, you eat it fine. And um, I have to remind myself like I don't like to waste food. And I think here we waste so much food here and I think I bring that spending part of me like I cannot waste, especially food. It's insane how much they waste. Yeah. That's good. Yeah.