

Centro oral history interview protocol

Elizabeth and Jerry Forman, December 14, 2009:

Interviewer: Christina Ziegler-McPherson

Interviewees: Jerry Forman, 116 Bloomfield St, Hoboken, N.J.

Elizabeth Forman

Place: 116 Bloomfield St, Hoboken, N.J.

Transcription made by Christina Ziegler-McPherson, 2009.

Consent: do you give your consent to -

Jerry Forman: to get remarried again?

No, to record this conversation for the purpose of preserving the history of the Puerto Rican community in Hoboken?

Jerry Forman: Yes. You know where we were married?

Where?

Jerry Forman: In the synagogue.

Which one?

Jerry Forman: The one right on Park Avenue, Orthodox Jewish synagogue.

Where were you born?

Jerry Forman: Her or me?

Both of you.

Jerry Forman: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, I was born in the Jewish hospital. She was born in Corozal, Corozal, Puerto Rico. Did you ever hear of Corozal?

No, sorry.

Jerry Forman: 2,500 feet above sea level. Cold at night, yes it is, that's the way it is in Puerto Rico.

Do you mind me asking when you were born?

Jerry Forman: I was born 1928, she was born 1930.

Mrs. Forman, when did you first come from Puerto Rico?

Jerry Forman: How old is Vicky?

Elizabeth Forman: 51.

Jerry Forman: When was Vicky born?

Elizabeth Forman: January 7.

Jerry Forman: When?

Elizabeth Forman: January 7, and Vicky was born in Brooklyn, right?

Elizabeth Forman: Brooklyn.

Jerry Forman: Brooklyn.

So you first came to New York?

Elizabeth Forman: 51.

Jerry Forman: Yes, to have the baby.

And when did you move to Hoboken?

Jerry Forman: About a year later.

When you moved to Hoboken, where in town did you live?

Elizabeth Forman: Bloomfield Street by Olga, Mrs. Borsini?

Jerry Forman: Borsini, they owned the building and I was talking to her [Mrs. Forman] in Spanish, and Olga, her name was.

Do you remember the address?

Jerry Forman: yeah, 210, no, no 1002 [Bloomfield Street].

Elizabeth Forman: 1002, right.

Jerry Forman: 1002. And she said to me 'how come you're speaking to your wife in Italian?' And I said, 'no, I'm speaking to her in Spanish.' 'where's your wife from, Spain?' and I said, 'no, my wife's from Puerto Rico.' 'Oh, I didn't know that, if I knew that I never would have rented you the apartment!' In front of her.

Elizabeth Forman: I laughed. And then a week later, she was my best friend.

Now, with the street, when you moved there-

Jerry Forman: it was Bloomfield, 10th and Bloomfield.

Right, but the ethnicity of the people there, was it mostly Italian, Irish...

Jerry Forman: All mixed.

Elizabeth Forman: There were no Puerto Ricans, we were the first ones, I think.

Jerry Forman: No, we were the first on the block. It was all Italians.

Elizabeth Forman: (unintelligible), that was all.

Jerry Forman: It was Italian.

Elizabeth Forman: All Italian.

Jerry Forman: All Italian up there. Two blocks up, it was all Jewish, they had the synagogue up on Hudson Street. It's not there anymore, and then they had another synagogue on, on Garden Street, the oldest synagogue in the state of New Jersey and they made condos out of it.

Elizabeth Forman: And my husband be helping the Spanish-speaking people.

Jerry Forman: I worked for the *El Diario*. I was a newspaper reporter in the *El Diario*, in *Nuevo York* when it was located in Brooklyn. I covered the farms, I covered the farm labor, where they were, you know, enslaving Puerto Rican help, so I worked-

Elizabeth Forman: (unintelligible) for the Puerto Rican people.

How did you guys meet?

Elizabeth Forman: He was in the Army and I working in the restaurant, the Air Force.

Jerry Forman: She was working on the base and we bumped into each other.

When was this?

Jerry Forman: And then she offered me \$10,000-

Elizabeth Forman: Oh, that's a lie.

Jerry Forman: if I would marry her.

Elizabeth Forman (laughs).

Jerry Forman: I says, 'I'll take 5 in quarters.'

When was this, when did you get married?

Jerry Forman: We got married twice, we got married in Puerto Rico and then we got married in Brooklyn and then we got married in Hoboken.

So, that's three times.

Jerry Forman: Right.

And what year did you get married?

Elizabeth Forman: Oh God, I'm telling you.

Jerry Forman: In Brooklyn, we got married in the City Hall, that was the second time.

Elizabeth Forman: It was 8-4 something. We have so many children we don't know what we were even thinking about in those days (laughs).

Jerry Forman: I have it in the book, somebody took it.

It's OK. You said 57 years.

Jerry Forman: Vicky was born in January?

Elizabeth Forman: Seventh.

Jerry Forman: January.

Elizabeth Forman: I forgot even the year.

You said you've been married 57 years.

Jerry Forman: 57 years.

OK, I'll figure that out.

Jerry Forman: 57 years.

Elizabeth Forman: From there you can figure it out. Believe me, because I can't.

Jerry Forman: We got married in Brooklyn at City Hall on Court Street, on Court Street.

Mrs. Forman, was there any objection from your family to you marrying Mr. Forman because he was Jewish?

Elizabeth Forman: No.

Jerry Forman: (unintelligible)

Elizabeth Forman: No, because my mother passed away when I was young.

[3rd party enters the room, asks: "you guys are busy, right?"]

Jerry Forman: Yeah, yeah, we're being interviewed by the Chase National Bank for a small loan.

Elizabeth Forman: (laughs).

Jerry Forman: I'm going to put your name down (speaking to the third party)

Elizabeth Forman: My mother passed away when I was young and then I raised myself.

What about your father, other family?

Elizabeth Forman: My father, he went with his girlfriend, this way (gesturing).

Jerry Forman: She had an aunt that raised her, Paula.

Elizabeth Forman: My aunt, but she passed away too.

Jerry Forman: She passed away too, Paula.

Elizabeth Forman: And so I have nobody when I met him. I know he was a Jew (unintelligible) but I not know what it was.

Jerry Forman: And I thought she was a Jewish girl.

Elizabeth Forman: And I never met any Pole and (unintelligible) or anything. Because, like I told you, I have a big family but-

Jerry Forman: and then we brought that big family to Hoboken. We brought all, that building across the street, first floor apartment right and left, second floor apartment right and left, third floor, and then the building over there, what did we have, 130.

Elizabeth Forman; 210 and 208 [Bloomfield] was ours.

Jerry Forman: Was our building, and what about the one across the street?

Elizabeth Forman: That's 604.

Jerry Forman: The one with the G.I. Bill?

Elizabeth Forman: 127.

Jerry Forman: 127?

Elizabeth Forman: Yes.

Jerry Forman: You see those big bay windows? And I sold that ...

Elizabeth Forman: (unintelligible), she don't care about that.

Mr. Forman, how did you learn Spanish? Did you learn it at school or at home?

Jerry Forman: From back and forth (gesturing to Mrs. Forman).

Elizabeth Forman: And I learned English because he was in the Army, you know, and he bought me, I have a book, he used to help me.

Jerry Forman: You know, I still used to have it around here, I gave it.... It's the one they give me in the Army, you know.

Elizabeth Forman: They learn us to speak English or Spanish or whatever you want to learn.

Jerry Forman: You want to say a word in Spanish, then you say it in English. You know, I seen it this week.

Elizabeth Forman: I want to get it back, Jerry.

When you think of the Puerto Rican community in Hoboken in the 1950s and 1960s, what kinds of things come to mind?

Jerry Forman: Oh, they had a hard time. They had a hard time. I worked at that time with the Birenbaum family, being commander of the Jewish War Veterans, I was able to get employment for them at, at the American Tootsie Roll Company. And they had three shifts down there and anybody who came from Puerto Rico, I would go down there and get them a job. Then there was another company-

Elizabeth Forman: the Three Brothers.

Jerry Forman: The Three Brother on First Street. Morris...

Elizabeth Forman: Morris, what's his last name?

Jerry Forman: Oh God, I forgot Morris, then there was another company that made, that made-

Elizabeth Forman: and over here where they made watches. You went there too.

Jerry Forman: Yeah. Boy, I'm getting bad. There was a company, another company, the Birenbaum Brothers, and they would hire from me. I would bring the Puerto Ricans in to them and they would hire. Tootsie Roll was very good to me.

So you were like a labor contractor?

Elizabeth Forman: No, he works for nothing. For love of God. Like he's doing now. You see this mess here? (indicating Mr. Forman's Share program donations) That's why.

To Jerry Forman: So what kind of work did you do?

Jerry Forman: I was director of welfare.

For the City [of Hoboken].

Jerry Forman: For the City.

Elizabeth Forman: And now what he is doing is over here, you see the way this is, is because he's doing...

Jerry Forman: I do two things here. I do the Share program for food and I do the services for those that are on probation.

Elizabeth Forman: (unintelligible).

Jerry Forman: Community service.

Elizabeth Forman: For nothing.

Jerry Forman: I don't get paid.

How did you get your job with the welfare department?

Jerry Forman: I got the job at the welfare department through Johnny Grogan [mayor of Hoboken from 1953-1965]. Through John Grogan, God rest his soul. Grogan, I don't know if you know, was the international president of the CIO in this country [international vice president of the AFL-CIO, also president of the Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers, 1950-1968]. So I got a job as an investigator and I started with him and then I went up to become director.

So this was in the Forties, after the war?

Jerry Forman: no, it was during the Fifties, the Fifties and Sixties. I put 20 years in there, and I left my field, my field, you can't see, it's over there, my diploma on the wall.

Elizabeth Forman: Dental technician.

Jerry Forman: I was a prosthetic technician. I made false teeth. And she worked and helped out and we had the, we had the, she was having children plus we were having, we opened, she opened up the first Hispanic restaurant in the state of New Jersey. You know where the Clam Broth House used to be [36 Newark Street, Hoboken].

Yes.

Jerry Forman: That's where it used to be, that was her place. It was called Casa Latina. At that time in Hoboken, if you spoke Spanish, they would throw you out of the place. Did you know that?

I have heard that there was discrimination. Why do you think there was so much discrimination against Puerto Ricans?

Jerry Forman: Jealousy, envy, thinking that they're going to take over, they're going to take over the whole town and chase out, they used to say, 'they're going to chase out all the white people.' Am I right?

Elizabeth Forman: Yeah.

Jerry Forman: And, what the heck was it? Stanley Ross I worked for, he was the editor of the...

Elizabeth Forman: *El Diario*

Jerry Forman: *El Diario* in *Nuevo York*. And then we moved to Manhattan, I forgot where in Manhattan, lower Manhattan.

When was that?

Jerry Forman: In the Fifties and Sixties, Fifties and Sixties. I used to go to all the farms in the state of New Jersey and New York and Pennsylvania to see if the folks, if the men weren't ill-treated.

The farm workers.

Jerry Forman: Yeah, the farmers would take advantage, and they all lived in chicken coops, run down. Then when the housing came in, I made sure there was no discrimination, I made sure that we, we, that Hispanics, the Puerto Ricans got a fair shake in the housing. For every floor that was there, I made sure that one Puerto Rican family was given an apartment.

Mrs. Forman, what caused you to open this restaurant?

Elizabeth Forman: Always I love to work, I love to work.

Jerry Forman: She was always a hard worker. And having children in between.

Elizabeth Forman: I never have children get out my house to go to the hospital. And always I was in the business. I'd say, 'Jerry, I have my labor, take me to the hospital.'

Jerry Forman: From the business.

Elizabeth Forman: From the business (laughs).

Jerry Forman: From the business.

What did you do, did you cook, did you run everything?

Elizabeth Forman: (unintelligible)

Jerry Forman: She cooked in the business, she was a good cook.

Elizabeth Forman: And I have a bar too, you know, together, we service everything.

What kinds of things, did people have private parties, dances or was it just a restaurant and bar?

Jerry Forman: Yes, I have dances too.

Elizabeth Forman: When I had Café Elisa we used to have dances, Tito Puente used to come down, Celia Cruz, all of them.

Jerry Forman: Celia Cruz used to sing to me, oh, what a beautiful voice.

Elizabeth Forman: Daniel Santos, all of them used to come down, you know.

(unintelligible)

Jerry Forman: Because there was no place here in New Jersey that any of these Spanish-

Elizabeth Forman: We were the first one that opened up. And then everybody started.

Jerry Forman: You know, I used to get together with her and we used to run a dance in Stevens, on Garden Street, you know that place on Garden? Oh, they had a big beautiful hall there.

Elizabeth Forman: And Elks in Hudson Street.

Jerry Forman: In Hudson Street.

Elizabeth Forman: What's that place? Now's it's condos over there. Oh my God, I can't remember.

Jerry Forman: You're not thinking, thinking we had the dances in Stevens University up there?

Elizabeth Forman: No, that's different. Now it was Hudson Street.

Jerry Forman: The church.

Elizabeth Forman: No.

Jerry Forman: We had it in the-

Elizabeth Forman: The mayor lives around, the mayor lives on this side, and then on the other side was the, it was a big club.

I think I know what you're talking about, the old, what used to be the German Club
[Union Club, 600 Hudson Street, Hoboken]

Jerry Forman: Yes

Elizabeth Forman: Yes.

It used to be the German club, yes, I think I know what you're talking about. It's at 6th and Hudson.

Jerry Forman: And then we had, and then we used 8th Street, we used, what is it, the Baptist Church? Oh, that was about 40 years ago, we ran dances in there. Also we ran dances in Stevens Institute of Technology in Stevens, remember the big dances we ran?

Elizabeth Forman: Yeah.

Jerry Forman: With two large, we would get two large Hispanic bands to play, Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez, Jenny Ventura....

Elizabeth Forman: We still have pictures around, I don't know where you put them.

Jerry Forman: I don't know myself.

Elizabeth Forman: Everything is mixed up around here. Look around (unintelligible).
Did you do anything at the Hispanic Catholic Center on Washington Street?

Elizabeth Forman: In Washington Street.

Jerry Forman: In Washington Street was the Spanish American Catholic Center.

Yes, that's right.

Jerry Forman: Organization.

Elizabeth Forman: That was on Washington right over here.

Jerry Forman: Right over here.

Elizabeth Forman: Between Third and Second.

Jerry Forman: That was the Spanish American and that used to be a Jewish place. Yes.

Let me go up for a minute, let me see if I can find it.

Elizabeth Forman: What do you go to find?

Jerry Forman: Let me look in your wallet.

(Tape stopped briefly)

Elizabeth Forman: The Clam Broth House, it was nice. But it was Luigi, he went upstairs at Clam Broth House years and years and years, and Mr. Podesta said to me, I said, 'I can make my pastellas today and we can put it outside for the people, you know, like a Sunday, to invite people to come to the place.' And he said, 'why don't you send Luigi, why are you upstairs?' because he don't want nobody upstairs in his kitchen. And I was like this (gesturing), I was pregnant, I went upstairs and said, 'Hi Luigi, how you doing?' He says, 'sit down, sit down, what's your name, what's your name?' He was very nice. And I told him, I said, 'I want to come down here and work with you.' He said to me, 'I cook Italian, not Spanish.' I said, 'I cook Spanish, you cook Italian.' I started making the pastellas and he says, 'this is nice to learn it.'

So how did you and Mr. Forman come to live in Hoboken, why did you decide to move here?

Elizabeth Forman: Well, I live with my mother-in-law over there and it was too, you know, she was very nice woman, but you know, you have babies, children,

(unintelligible), you know. And then my brother-in-law finds this apartment here and my husband was working in Hudson Street with Zaco [sp?] making false teeth, you know, and that's when they find this apartment here, and then we move here, and from here, it was a furnished room, and from here we move in the project [public housing], because in those years, the project was beautiful, not now, but in those years, it was beautiful. It was one Puerto Rican family, one Italian, one black, you know, they don't put all together like now, now they do, now they throw everything in there, before it was very nice and everybody keep their apartment and the whole place nice and clean and beautiful. And then, later on, we save a little money here and there, you know, I like to save, he's too good with everybody. I'm good too but I like to save. Saving and saving and saving, and we bought a house. Our first house was in Hudson Street, in Bloomfield Street, between, over here, between 210 and 208, between Second and Third. And then he started renting to Spanish-speaking people, you know.

[Mr. Forman returns to the interview]

Jerry Forman: This is one of our great grand children (showing photos)

That's very cute, nice

Jerry Forman: Typical Pollack. Believe me when I tell you, typical Pollack

Elizabeth Forman: (unintelligible, laughing)

Jerry Forman: this is my daughter Esther, she's the one that fought in the Israeli Army, she fought in Shel Meshek.

Elizabeth Forman: And you find other pictures over there.

Jerry Forman: I forgot she was coming.

I'm curious, did you go to church, to synagogue or practice both?

Jerry Forman: Synagogue.

Elizabeth Forman: Synagogue, yeah, now lately (unintelligible)

Jerry Forman: I can't find that picture, if I can find that picture....

Elizabeth Forman: I can't find no one to go with, since I get old, you know, the situation, you know.

Jerry Forman: Here, this is one of the- (showing card)

"Latin American Softball League"

Elizabeth Forman: Yeah, it was the first one started with my husband.

When was this? Oh, that's a nice photo.

Elizabeth Forman: What year was that, Jerry?

Jerry Forman: I organized-

Elizabeth Forman: Look at the other side.

Jerry Forman: This was 442 Second Street, the Café Elisa, the place that was under her name, and we owned that building and the hotel and I did another stupid thing.

Elizabeth Forman: when it was no time to sell, when I wanted to, he-

Jerry Forman: this was one of the nicest fellows you ever wanted to meet, Noel

Rodriguez, oh, what a wonderful guy. Let me see. Noel.

(To Mrs. Forman): So how was it for you learning to practice Judaism? You had been raised Catholic?

Elizabeth Forman: Well, the rabbi was very nice and we used to go Thursday to his house, and his wife taught me, you know (unintelligible).

Did you ever go to St. Joseph's?

Jerry Forman: Oh yes, all their affairs.

Elizabeth Forman: And we do the-

Jerry Forman: Oh, and we ran the dances there too. That's right, I forgot, we ran the dances there.

Elizabeth Forman: Yes, with, what's his name, Father Eugene.

Jerry Forman: That's right, did you ever hear of Father Eugene?

Oh yes. I'm wondering if you could tell me some stories about Father Eugene? I've heard that he was very, very popular, very well loved.

Elizabeth Forman: Yes.

Jerry Forman: I brought him to Hoboken from Pennsylvania.

Elizabeth Forman: He was the one, he was the one, wanting to, Mayor Grogan, he went to Mayor Grogan and he said, 'who can I get to organize the Spanish?', you know.

Jerry Forman: The man called me.

Elizabeth Forman: And the mayor called Jerry right away and he says [about Mr. Forman], 'he's a Jewish guy but he's close to them. And he's wife is Puerto Rican too.' And that's when Father Eugene-

Jerry Forman: They used to call her Jew Rican.

So, what kinds of things can you tell me about Father Eugene? What was it like to work with him?

Jerry Forman: He was a hard-working man of the Church.

Elizabeth Forman: Very hard worker.

Jerry Forman: And then he left and went back to Pennsylvania. I don't know why, I had no idea. I was as surprised as surprised could be, why he packed up Hoboken. And you know something, you talking, we got him the Jewish War Veterans headquarters.

Elizabeth Forman: Right (unintelligible)

Jerry Forman: Remember?

Elizabeth Forman: Right.

Jerry Forman: Jeez, I forgot all about that.

Elizabeth Forman: And we used to do the club (unintelligible) in the club, remember? You went to ask all the stores for television, for things, they have gym for the children over there.

Jerry Forman: Who was the first president that we made?

Elizabeth Forman: And Father Eugene told you, this is off the (unintelligible), I'm telling you, how people is (unintelligible)

Jerry Forman: This is my grandson.

Elizabeth Forman: How people, Jerry, wait a minute, how people that, how you have been we are (unintelligible). We build the club, the Catholic Club, you know, right there by, it was Sealy Paint downstairs and upstairs was the club, and I'm telling you for the

church, and they Jerry said, 'I can't be a president because first of all, I'm Jewish, and this is the Catholic, I will help you, anything you want.' And we're helping with everything, we fix up nice. We put Georgie Torres to be the president and when they have the inauguration, they don't even invite us. They next day, we didn't even know what's going on, it was so, the next day, I went to Father Eugene and said, 'Father Eugene, you know, it's still religion and it has nothing to do, because when you need us, we went, you come to us, and we help you. Now when you make a party for, make what you call it, the president, you don't have the decency,' he said, 'Mr. Forman, Mrs. Forman, you want to come over to see,' you know.

Jerry Forman: And then (unintelligible)

Elizabeth Forman: 'Because that don't have nothing to do with religion. We organize here, so the ladies can be here, the young guys bring the children here, and things like that.' He says, 'it not my fault, it was Torres.' I talk to Torres, and he says, 'it's not my fault, it was Father Eugene.' I said, I called the two together and said, 'you, a liar, and so are you, excuse me, Father.' And I left (laughs).

Jerry Forman: Here's another priest that I worked with very hard to organize for him.

Andres Reyes.

Jerry Forman: I got an award from them.

Was he only in Jersey City or did he come to Hoboken also?

Jerry Forman: He used to come, but mainly Jersey City.

Did you ever work with Father [Frederick] Eid?

Jerry Forman: No. You know, I forget the names of some of the priests we worked with.

I'm telling you, quite a few.

Elizabeth Forman: I'm very bad remembering names.

I'm wondering about what other things were going on with the Puerto Rican community here in Hoboken in the Fifties.

Jerry Forman: Buying houses. It was very, very tough for them to get into buying houses.

So I would go down and put the money down.

They couldn't get loans or what was the problem?

Jerry Forman: Yeah.

Elizabeth Forman: And they couldn't get no apartments either.

Jerry Forman: Couldn't get apartments, it was tough. You see that street down there, on Bloomfield Street, from Newark to Observer Highway, I had to lie and go up and get apartments for people. I'd say, 'that's for my sister-in-law.' 'OK, Jerry, OK, OK.' And then when I would move my sister-in-law in, everybody, everybody was my sister-in-law or my brother-in-law. And then on Washington-

Elizabeth Forman: if they were Italian or American or Irish-

Jerry Forman: from my right hand to God, right over there, I was stopped by-

Elizabeth Forman: no, you weren't stopped by there, it was right over in front of the house. They got two guys, big guys come down, and said 'Jerry, you better stop bringing the Puerto Ricans to the town, because we're going to dump you and your wife and the

children in the Hudson River.’ And Jerry said to him, ‘you know, I was in Korea, I never got scared, and I’m not going to get scared now, do whatever you want.’ I remember it just like it was now, I see those two guys, one was a Jewish guy, was a detective at (unintelligible) and the other was a detective. And he (unintelligible) because Jerry had to look at him because he was very tall, Jerry had to look at him and said, ‘I’m telling you the honest truth, I was in Korea.’

Jerry Forman: Yeah, they got mad at me, what was his name?

(3rd party entered the room)

Jerry Forman: That’s my campaign manager.

Child: Malique.

Jerry Forman: Malique, from West Africa. What hurt me is that the other guy-

Elizabeth Forman: was a Jewish guy-

Jerry Forman: was a Jewish fellow, what was his name? He had a big, Tammerent?

Elizabeth Forman: Tammerent.

Jerry Forman: Tammeran [cataloguers note: Tamarin] real estate

(Unintelligible)

Jerry Forman: Stop bringing the Puerto Ricans into Hoboken.

Elizabeth Forman: Otherwise you’re going to be in Hudson River, you and your children and your wife.

Jerry Forman: And she was-

Elizabeth Forman: and Jerry says like that, Jerry looked like that because he had to look at him because he was tall. He said ‘I was in Korea and never was scared and I have to be scared now.’

When you were living here, did you ever go to the Feast of St. John's in New York?

Elizabeth Forman: Yeah, we did.

Do you remember about when?

Elizabeth Forman: I don't remember, when I was young, I was young at the time, I used to go with the kids.

Jerry Forman: Yeah, that's right, I forgot about that.

Elizabeth Forman: Yeah, I love it.

It was a big Puerto Rican (unintelligible, people talking over each other) in Puerto Rico.

Elizabeth Forman: Yes, it was nice.

Jerry Forman: I forgot about that, you're bringing back memories.

I'm wondering in your town, what kinds of feast days did you have, you had the Feast of St. John's presumably but what other ones?

Jerry Forman: This is for you (speaking to 3rd party), OK, you want one more for Mommy?

So when you think about when you were growing up in Puerto Rico, the kinds of church festivals.

Elizabeth Forman: I never, I never went, always I was alone. How do you say in English, a loner? My mother passed away and my grandfather, that's the only thing, you know, I never was.

Was your family religious growing up?

Elizabeth Forman: Not that I know.

Did you attend church in Puerto Rico?

Elizabeth Forman: No.

So, it wasn't a big adjustment when you came here.

Elizabeth Forman: No, it wasn't a big thing for me when I get here because I was all alone all the time because my mother passed away and my grandfather passed away, that was the one that raised me-

Jerry Forman: What's funny is, you know where else we used to go? We used to take the bus and we used to go with the group where they had tango night, we used to go, we organized the tango club, the Roseland.

Elizabeth Forman: Roseland.

Jerry Forman: The Roseland in New York, I used to bring a whole group over there from here, two buses loads and we would go tango night over there in the Roseland. Jeez, I forgot all about that. Where else was it? Then we organized in Newark.

Elizabeth Forman: He was always organizing because he was the first one, he started-

Jerry Forman: And then we organized, remember Newark, we organized the first Hispanic group in Newark.

Elizabeth Forman: Yes, but I wasn't involved.

Jerry Forman: What was his name in Newark?

Elizabeth Forman: We had a business in First Street, its name was Victorian Record Shop and-

Jerry Forman: She's got a better brain than me.

Elizabeth Forman: It was big and it was phonograph records, Spanish records.

Jerry Forman: Because there was no place here that had that kind of music.

Elizabeth Forman: And socks with, you know, you have the socks with the little flowers around here, and beautiful blouses and everything, you know. Then this fellow comes down and says to Jerry, 'Jerry, you're very popular here with the Spanish-speaking people,' this was a Puerto Rican guy himself, and he said, 'I go talk to them, they don't want to listen to me, they only come to you, how about you help me to make this club.' And Jerry said, 'you want a club? yeah, yeah, OK,' and in the back of the business it was empty, it was a big store, I said, 'temporary, we could do it here,' and I used to have a nice crowd buying records, Spanish records.

Jerry Forman: You know, from Spain and Argentina.

Elizabeth Forman: Because they sound like (unintelligible), it was tango, it was pachanga in those years, you know, the mambo.

Jerry Forman: Would you like some water?

No, thank you.

Jerry Forman: I forgot that.

Elizabeth Forman: And I said to Jerry, (unintelligible), 'why don't we go and register the Spanish American Social Club.' Then he went and what happened, I have a problem then, because you know Spanish-speaking people, some of them (talking loudly) 'hey, me, oh boy,' and the Italian people started getting scared, he said 'me think you Italia,

you Puerto Rica,' and the business going down and going down and going down. I says to Jerry, 'you have to move the club up someplace else because some people they don't like us,' some people come and they (talking loudly), 'hey, you, come here,' you know.

Jerry Forman: Didn't we, didn't they have a club on Willow Avenue?

Elizabeth Forman: Yes, yes, wait a minute. That's what I come to. Then Jerry went and take the people from (unintelligible) on Willow Avenue, a store around there, I forgot the number, and they moved there. So now the business was already going and I said, 'well, now you, we don't have no more business' (laughs).

Jerry Forman: People resented to come in, because it was Spanish-speaking people.

So there wasn't many people from other-

Jerry Forman: We had bars over here.

Elizabeth Forman: Wait a minute, Jerry, let me finish. Jerry put the club over there, and that was the first Spanish American Club in Hoboken, all the United-

Jerry Forman: in Hudson County-

Elizabeth Forman: in Hudson County.

What kinds of activities did you have?

Elizabeth Forman: We used to have dances, we used to have baseball, like Jerry show you, we used to have lots of things.

Could anyone be a member, did you have to become a member?

Elizabeth Forman: You had to become a member.

Did it cost anything to become a member?

Elizabeth Forman: Yeah.

How much did it cost to be a member, do you remember?

Elizabeth Forman: (unintelligible), \$2, \$3, I don't remember (laughs).

Jerry Forman: I swear I don't remember.

Elizabeth Forman: Some of them didn't have the money, and he said, don't worry, we'll put it up for you. He's too good. And I said, 'Jerry, your paycheck is going,' I have other kids, we have children.' I used to hold him back because it's good to be good but, you know. Anyway,

I'm wondering if you remember, I've heard that there were several Spanish grocery stores in Hoboken.

Elizabeth Forman: Yes, (unintelligible)

Jerry Forman (unintelligible) Over here.

Elizabeth Forman: Na Bula was first-

Jerry Forman: Bula.

Where was that?

Elizabeth Forman: In Garden Street between-

Jerry Forman: Garden Street between First and Newark-

Elizabeth Forman: and Newark-

Jerry Forman: On the east side of the street.

Elizabeth Forman: Between First and Newark.

Jerry Forman: There's condos there now.

Was it owned by Puerto Ricans?

Jerry Forman: Yeah, Puerto Rican family.

Elizabeth Forman: then that other one-

Jerry Forman: Where were they from in Puerto Rico, they weren't from Aricibo.

Elizabeth Forman: No, from Eduado. Then, what you call it, was over here, with the Cuban fellow, a Puerto Rican fellow first and then sell it to a Cuban. Then another one-

Jerry Forman: on Willow Avenue.

Elizabeth Forman: on Willow Avenue.

Jerry Forman: Second and Willow.

Elizabeth Forman: Second and Willow. No, the other one was on Jefferson, a skinny, tall guy, I don't remember his name but he was skinny.

Do you remember when these stores opened? In the Sixties? Or the Fifties.

Jerry Forman: In the Fifties.

Elizabeth Forman: No, later on, by the Sixties, something like that. Sixties, because when we come here, in the Fifties, there were no Puerto Ricans around here, only Bula. And they, you would never take them for Puerto Rican or anything because they never spoke Spanish.

Jerry Forman: You'd never believe it, they were whiter than white. In Puerto Rico, they'd say, *gente blanco*. Did you ever hear that expression?

Yes.

Elizabeth Forman: And I'm telling you-

Jerry Forman: In Puerto Rico, *in chao blanco*.

Elizabeth Forman: Anyway, that was the only one that was here, and then I come in, then Jerry and I started bringing people down to come and look for apartments or something like that.

Jerry Forman: And we never made a nickel on the apartments.

Elizabeth Forman: And never, never, (unintelligible) today, like today, today everybody, we used to have a thing to mention, no names, they used to use them, like if you need a lawyer, you talk to the lawyer, half for you, half for me, you know what I mean? You get an accident or you get something. I slap him one day in the face in my house because one day he tried to get Jerry to do stuff, that kind of business, and Jerry said 'no, they come over for better living. And try prove yourself, like your mother come here or your great grandmother come here and like my great-grandmother come here, try to better ourselves.'

Jerry Forman: You know there are still streets in Hoboken that didn't allow Puerto Ricans, on Jackson Street between Second and First, that street didn't allow any Puerto Ricans to rent apartments. Until today there isn't a Puerto Rican there.

Elizabeth Forman: On Madison Street I used to have one, two, three, four houses.

Jerry Forman: We owned there.

Elizabeth Forman: Wait a minute, let me explain it. Four houses we have there, and I want to tell you something, the politics made me lose my houses. They used to go there and-

Jerry Forman: the inspectors-

Elizabeth Forman: (unintelligible) the city water drop in. And the people don't want to pay no rent. They leave the water, drip, drip, 'oh, they tell me I don't pay no rent, you have to fix that.' I said, 'close the thing,' I close it, no drip, drip anymore. 'yeah, after you go, it goes drip, drip again.' I said, 'you live alone?' 'Yes, but I don't pay no rent until you fix it.' And then this month, the following month, the following month, I said, 'Jerry, I'm sick and tired of these people.'

Jerry Forman: The politics gave us a bad time.

The politics with who? Any particular groups?

Elizabeth Forman: No, I don't want to mention no names, I don't want to get beaten up (laughs). I'm sorry. But what you call it, if you say something, they can pick it up where it comes from. But then I said, 'no more for me.' Then I had to go down there, I had a big operation, and I was so mad because the judge said to me, 'if you don't pay this fine or something,' something broke down, and when I fix it, they broke it again. And I said, I won't fix it anymore, then they called me from City Hall, they called City Hall and the judge gives me a fine, and I said, 'your Honor, I pay the fine but I want to tell you something, I don't want nothing to do with houses, I go to condemn.'

Jerry Forman: Yeah, we closed it up.

Elizabeth Forman: The window, the window, and I went and I have a big operation, I tie myself good, I (unintelligible) and I went and I put, and I told them, 'get out.' Then they come down, they move all of them over there to Jefferson to the all black neighborhood, the (unintelligible) project-

Jerry Forman: Jeez, I forgot that.

Elizabeth Forman: and then they come down over here crying, 'Oh, Mrs. Forman, oh Elisa, can you lend me a place, I won't do it, I have to fix the house, I won't do it no more, I pay all your rent.' I say, 'I don't want nothing to do with none of you.'

And all your tenants were from Puerto Rico or from other places? The people who were living there.

Elizabeth Forman: They were Puerto Rican, and white and black and everything. It was nice people, it was nice after they went there and they started, they leave, the politicians went there.

Jerry Forman: City Hall.

Elizabeth Forman: Can you imagine, I close the door, I get my (unintelligible) only, I get cold, I close the door, and I lock the door, after I lock the door, one Italian friend of mine, he was closer to it, he was real estate, Fenizio.

Jerry Forman: Fenizio, Nicky Fenizio.

Elizabeth Forman: And I said to Fenizio, I said, 'Fenizio, can I stay over here for one night?' because I close the door and I went to court and the fire department said the door was open.

Was this in the Seventies or Eighties?

Elizabeth Forman: Seventies, I think it was, right, Jerry?

Jerry Forman: I don't remember.

Elizabeth Forman: And you know what happened? He said, 'you want to stay, you can sleep on the couch over there or if it's too cold, whatever, I put a heater for you, Mrs. Forman, does your husband know you're going to stay here.' I say, 'yeah, he knows. I tell him, this time I'm going to get it with a picture.' Because I went to court and he said to me, the door was open.' And then on top of that they give me another fine. Everybody in City Hall was scared.

Jerry Forman: Because we were renting to Puerto Ricans.

Elizabeth Forman: And you know what happened? I went with the, the window was not close, the door was locked too, and everything was locked. I see a man coming down with the thing, and put a big thing, how do you call those things? And open the door. They picked the lock that I put there. And I took pictures with no trouble over here. I get up from the couch over there and I sit up by the window like this and (phone rings) say, 'oh, now I have you.' And I took the picture. 'now, I have you, you go to the judge-

Jerry Forman (speaking on the phone): Hello?

Elizabeth Forman: Tomorrow that you know that the back door was locked, not locked. And that was the only time they leave them, they come down (unintelligible).

Jerry Forman: At that time that neighborhood was all Italian.

Elizabeth Forman: Italian, and the mayor live around there. [Steve] Cappiello [Hoboken mayor from 1973-1985].

Jerry Forman: Cappiello, that's right, I forgot.

Elizabeth Forman: And the fire department's mother was there.

Jerry Forman: Yeah, you're right.

Elizabeth Forman: I chase up to her, (wagging her finger) with a broom, trying to hit everybody.

Jerry Forman: And we had the house next to Biggie's [Clam Bar, 318 Madison Street, Hoboken].

Elizabeth Forman: That's what I'm talking about.

Jerry Forman: And they didn't like the idea that we had Puerto Ricans living there. Next to Biggie's over there.

Elizabeth Forman: Next to Biggie's was a (unintelligible), because Puerto Rican people they was more cooled down, 328. At that house, I bought it when nobody lived there.

And I went and I fix it. I put tiles, brand new tiles on the floor, I put everything was beautiful, I'm telling you, what they did to that apartment, because everybody used to go down there, don't pay no rent, see anything that is broke, don't pay no rent see anything, see anything like this (unintelligible), and they take advantage.

Jerry Forman: Who was mayor then? I forgot.

Elizabeth Forman: (unintelligible)

Cappiello. Now, was that the first time he was mayor?

Jerry Forman: Let me tell you, the first time he was mayor, he got to thank her, because it was her district that brought him in. The Fourth Ward.

Elizabeth Forman: The second, the second time, that's when the other guy win [Mayor Tom Vezzetti, in 1985] because I went to work it down.

Jerry Forman: Envy and jealousy, they were scared we were going to get strong politically.

Elizabeth Forman: And I won't let my husband be running for mayor of anything. Oh no, he's too good. Any person that is too good, always gets hurt.

So were you politically involved?

Elizabeth Forman: yes, we, I am a committee lady and he's a committee man.

For which party?

Elizabeth Forman: Republican.

Jerry Forman: That's why I left the Democratic party, we were getting slaughtered by them constantly.

Elizabeth Forman: I lost all the houses around there, the four houses, I lost them, and thank God, to them.

Did you have any involvement with the Vezzetti election? [in 1985 against Capiello]

Jerry Forman: Who?

Tom Vezzetti election.

Elizabeth Forman: Yes, I get involved with him. That's why he lost it, Capiello lost it.

Jerry Forman: We backed Vezzetti.

Elizabeth Forman: We backed Vezzetti.

Jerry Forman: We backed Vezzetti.

I understand most people from Puerto Rico supported him.

Elizabeth Forman: Yes, yes.

Jerry Forman: Yes, but we had no friends. All of them were against us.

Elizabeth Forman: They said, they want (unintelligible), let's put this guy out. Then they know, the project in that time, the project down there, (unintelligible) I don't work there anymore, but 'I'm telling you, I have them in my hand like this.' And when he lost, Cappiello lost, that time, there had to be a run off and the only way to get is to come to me. He come down and he would pay me any kind of money to go down there and talk for him. I said, 'look my face, you say you would buy the Puerto Rican people with one bottle of wine, you go buy whoever you want, you don't buy this one. And I don't care if he says anything to you, this one you won't buy.' Remember when you tell in my face like this, 'I put you in jail, I put you in jail.' I remember those days. By City Hall, in my face, 'I put you in jail,' I said, 'you touch my face and see what you get.' Because he tried to say I don't live here, because I have another house in Jersey City. I said, 'on the weekend, I'm over there, (unintelligible) this is my residential. And you or the judge or anybody cannot say different.'

Jerry Forman: So envious, so envious of us, of what we were making and then we owned the farm in Flemington and we went out weekends, and they would have a car following us to say that we didn't live in town.

Elizabeth Forman: Oh yes.

[end]

Hoboken Historical Museum catalog information

4: archives catalog 2010.019.0001.04

Date: December 14, 2009

Single cassette tape; dubbed to digital file.

Interviewer: Christina Ziegler-McPherson

Interviewees: Jerry Forman, 116 Bloomfield St, Hoboken, N.J.

Elizabeth Forman

Place: 116 Bloomfield St, Hoboken, N.J.

Transcription made by Christina Ziegler-McPherson, 2009.