

Centro oral history interview protocol

George and Carmen Guzman, December 11, 2009 (note: Mrs. Guzman suffered an aneurysm in November 2009 and sometimes has memory problems as a result, so Mr. Guzman often speaks for her).

Interviewer: Christina Ziegler-McPherson

Interviewees: George Guzman, 1202 Hudson St., Hoboken, N.J.

Carmen Guzman

Place: 1202 Hudson St., Hoboken, N.J

Transcription made by Christina Ziegler-McPherson, 2009.

Consent: do you give your consent to record this interview/conversation for the purpose of preserving the history of the Puerto Rican community in Hoboken?

George Guzman: Yes.

Carmen Guzman: Yes.

Biographical:

Where were you born? When?

George Guzman: I was born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, in April 19, 1942, and my wife was born in Santurce, Puerto Rico, in September 22, 1942. We moved to the United States from Puerto Rico in 1950. I moved in 1950, my wife Carmen came to the United States in 1954. She came to live in Swiss Borough, New Jersey, and lived there for a few months and then they moved from Swiss Borough, New Jersey, to Hoboken. We came to

live in Manhattan in 1950 and from Manhattan we were there until 1954 and then in 1954 we moved to Hoboken and we've been here since.

Carmen, When you came, did you come with your parents?

Carmen Guzman: My mother. Well, my father was here, he was here first, and I came with my mother, yes, just my mother, not my father, to Hoboken.

George Guzman: And your brother, Papito?

Carmen Guzman: No, he didn't come with us, he stayed with my grandma and my older sister.

Where did your family live in Hoboken? (What street, was this a Puerto Rican, Italian, Irish, etc. neighborhood?)

Carmen Guzman: Hoboken, I remember, 215 Willow Avenue, that was the first place we moved to, from there, the whole building, it was Puerto Rican, most of the families, and we came together, everybody was at home with each other, we met each other, we like each other, kids went to school, we went to school, and in the evenings, after school, we would get together downstairs in front of the building and we would talk there for a while.

George, did you come over with your parents?

George Guzman: We came, my father came first, he had been coming back and forth, he used to come to work in the farms, OK? And in 1948 he came and he stayed and then he sent, he wanted to send for my mother but my mother said, no, that if the whole family

didn't come, that she wouldn't come, so in 1950, September of 1950, we migrated from Puerto Rico to the United States, we came in a 4-engine prop plane and we went from Puerto Rico to Miami and from Miami to Newark. We lived in New York. It was very, very difficult. They would not rent an apartment to us. We had to lived in furnished rooms for many years, for four years.

What streets did you live on?

George Guzman: Well, we were like gypsies in that time, because they wouldn't rent to us. We first came to live in, we stayed for a couple of weeks in 125 Street, my aunt's house, then we went to live in Brooklyn in my uncle's house and we were there for a couple of months, and then from there we moved to 125 Street again, there was a lady that had an apartment and she had lots of rooms and she rented out the rooms, so we rented a furnished room, in the apartment. From there we moved to 96th Street, 320 West 96th Street and that's when we first went to school, and that was around October or November. Then from there, from 96th Street we moved to 103 Street and 3rd Avenue.

In Spanish Harlem?

George Guzman: What?

In the neighborhood called Spanish Harlem?

George Guzman: Yes, yes. From there we moved to 79th Street, from 79th Street, we moved to 88th Street, from 88th Street we moved to 102nd Street, prior to that we lived in Brooklyn for a couple of months, you know, so we were going from place to place

because we couldn't find an apartment and they wouldn't rent to us because they said that they wouldn't rent to spics, exactly, that's exactly the term they used, or would not to rent to families with children, OK? And my father worked in Buffalo, New York, with the Erie Lackawanna, and he would send us money every week for rent and groceries and things and one day my mother didn't get the money in time and he called and she started crying over the phone and she hadn't been able to give us anything to eat, she had given us some beans with cornmeal, you know? And she started crying, and so my father, he was in the process of buying a house in Buffalo, New York, because he had a good job with the Erie Lackawanna.

Doing what? Do you know what he did for them?

George Guzman: He worked with the railroad.

But what kind of work did he do?

George Guzman: Oh, he worked as a laborer, as a laborer.

But it was a good paying job.

George Guzman: Oh, a very good paying job, and he was in the process of buying a house but when my mother called, when he called my mother and she started crying, he left all that and he came to New York and he stayed with us and then he became very ill. He was an asthmatic, and he was asthmatic for several years, well, he was asthmatic since he was a child but here when he became very ill and he wound up in the hospital. They continued to struggle. Finally in 1953, after moving all those places, we found an

apartment, they found an apartment, on 102nd Street between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenue and there was a railroad apartment, four rooms, and about a year after we were there the government came and said we had to move because they were going to take that area to develop housing projects, so they were sending my mother and father to different places for an apartment but my mother and father didn't like the areas they were sending us. So one day they met a friend that was shopping on 42nd Street, 41st Street, around Seventh Avenue, because they used to have all vegetables and you know, different stores around that area, and they met a friend from Puerto Rico and they started talking and they told him the problem that they were having and this friend, his name was Justo, Justo, he said, 'well, why don't you move to Hoboken?' And so my father says, 'where is that?' 'Well, I'll take you, I'll show you.' So my father came with him, and my mother, and they liked Hoboken, and there was an apartment next to him, right next door to him, and-
Carmen Guzman: to Justo's.

George Guzman: What?

Carmen Guzman: To Justo's.

George Guzman: Justo's, yes. So, he says, 'there's an apartment right next door to me, you could move in there,' so he brought my father to the building where, it was 502 Clinton Street, Church Towers is there now, OK? So we moved there, without even talking to the landlord, we moved in like squatters, and the next day after we moved in, my father went to speak to the landlord and Justo introduced my father to the landlord, and said we wanted to rent the apartment, so she rented the apartment and she said to him, 'when do you want to move in?' 'we're already moved in,' 'why do you come to tell me now after you've moved in already?' But that's how moved into Hoboken, without

talking to the landlord, we didn't know if the landlord would accept us living there and it was a four-room railroad cold water flat with shared toilet, with a third floor and Justo lived on one side and we lived on the other side. We lived there for about a year and then the government comes around again telling us we had to move to take that area around there to knock it down and develop projects. So then we had to look for another apartment and we moved to 1117 Willow Avenue in Hoboken and we lived there for about a year and then from there we moved to 1040 Willow Avenue and by that time it was around 1957, 1958, and my father had gotten better, my mother was working, he was working, we would help with delivering groceries, you know, we would make a few bucks or delivering newspapers, and that, and we were able to save money, the family was able to save money and the money that we had saved my father bought a house at 258 10th Street in 1958, he bought the house, it was a furnished room house, \$14,000 was the price of that house at that time. So from 1950, when we came here, 1958, we were able to buy that house and they were working and they were hard workers. They struggled, they struggled a lot, you know, we went to school, we went through the school system here and all that. There are three brothers and one sister, OK?

What are their names and order, in your family?

George Guzman: I'm the oldest and then my brother Julio, he's 65, my brother Joseph is 64 and my sister Ann is 60, she was born, yes, she's 60. She lives in Florida. My brother Joseph lives in Puerto Rico and my brother Julio lives in Jersey City.

What kind of work did your parents do?

George Guzman: They were laborers, my father worked in a, he worked in a corrugated box company close to Long Island, Staten Island, Coney Island, Coney Island and that's a story and a half because I was around 9, 10 years old, and my mother used to work in a rhinestone business, and she worked during the day and my father worked at night from 4 o'clock to 1 o'clock in the morning in Brooklyn, close to Coney Island, and my mother would go to work in the day and my father, he would sleep and take care of us and start the dinner and then when he had to go to work, I would take care of whatever he had, and then my mother would come home, finish the dinner, and I would take supper to him every day from 88th Street all the way to Busch Gardens in Brooklyn close to Coney Island, so I had to travel, I used to leave around 6 o'clock, get there around 8 o'clock, come back by 10 o'clock, you know? At that time the subway was 10 cents, 10 cents.

Did he ever get a job here in Hoboken?

George Guzman: Well, he worked in New York and when he, when we moved to Hoboken he continued to work there but then he got laid off from there and he started working back with the railroad because he had the experience with the Erie Lackawanna in Buffalo so they hired him with the Conrail, Conrail, so he worked with Conrail for many, many years. He worked as a carpenter building buildings and bridges.

Carmen, what did your father do for work?

Carmen Guzman: My father worked in, when we were living in Sweet Boro [Swiss Borough], New Jersey, he worked for Del Monte Company, he ran one of the machines.

We didn't there that long but he was working there. But there he had an accident on one of the machines, he lost a finger, and they gave him some money and with that money that's how we moved to Hoboken and we started out there. My mother didn't used to work at the time but once we settled in Hoboken she started working in factories.

What kind of factory work?

George Guzman: Lamps, lamp factories.

Carmen Guzman: Packing lamps up, and she was supposed to be one of the best. And my father was working in-

George Guzman: Tootsie Roll.

Carmen Guzman: in Tootsie Roll.

George Guzman: We had a Tootsie Roll company here at Willow Avenue, 15th and 16th Street, I don't know if you know, but he used to work there.

Carmen Guzman: Then my older sister, she also used to work here in-

George Guzman: Rigo, Rigo Wire.

Carmen Guzman: Yes, Rigo Wire. He has to remind me always because I don't, I don't, I have a problem with my memory.

I'm curious about what schools you went to here in Hoboken?

George Guzman: When we first moved into Hoboken, we went to Daniel S. Kealy School on Adams Street, Fifth and Adams, and then when we had to move uptown we went to Wallace School at 11th and Willow and I graduated from here. Carmen went-

Carmen Guzman: I went to David E. Rue, where Briana was started.

George Guzman: David E. Rue.

Carmen Guzman: And from there I also went to Kealy and I also went to Keline [?], there was also another school I went to that I don't remember.

George Guzman: Was it Connors? No.

Carmen Guzman: But I know the pre-school because we were moving at the time.

George Guzman: Also, we had it rough. We couldn't-

Carmen Guzman: we couldn't stay in a place-

George Guzman: in a place-

Carmen Guzman: because they would put us away.

George Guzman: It was very, very difficult.

And these were all public schools?

George Guzman: Public schools, yes.

When you think about the Puerto Rican community in Hoboken in this time period, in the 1950s and 1960s, what kinds of things come to your mind? (e.g., Tootsie Roll, St. Joseph's, job, housing services, community events, etc)

George Guzman: When we first moved to Hoboken, the Puerto Rican community was very, very small, OK? There was a cluster on 12th and 13th Street and Willow Avenue, a small cluster on 11th and 12th, there was another cluster on 8th and 9th, there was another cluster on Jefferson Street, a few families, you know, Jefferson Street, 5th and Jefferson, there was another cluster on 2nd and 3rd and Willow and then there were some on Hudson Street, OK? But there weren't that many families, you know, families were, Puerto Rican

families were very small. And then they started moving in in the 1960s, that's when the real growth of the Puerto Rican families came to Hoboken.

I wanted to ask you several questions about church, since that's the focus of the project.

I'm wondering what church did your family attend?

George Guzman: OK, we were involved with St. Joseph's Church in Hoboken. We had a Spanish American Catholic Center, Father Eugene Zwahl was the pastor, not the pastor, the priest in charge of the Spanish American Catholic Center, and he was the one that started working with the Puerto Rican or Hispanic in Hoboken. Eugene Zwahl.

Carmen Guzman: That was the only church that offered services in Spanish-

George Guzman: at that time.

Carmen Guzman: So everybody, every Hispanic person, go there-

George Guzman: would go to St. Joseph's. Then, after a while, Our Lady of Grace started to offer services to the Hispanic and that's when Father [Frederick] Eid came in.

When was that?

George Guzman: When was that? That was in the Sixties, I believe, because in the Fifties, Father Eugene was the one that first started working with the community, OK? And we had in the Spanish American Catholic Center, we had the Holy Names Society, we had the *Hija de Maria*, the Children of Mary.

Carmen Guzman: Daughters of Mary.

George Guzman: Daughters of Mary, we had the *Madres de Christiana*, we had the Holy Names Society, we had two floors, and we had all kinds of activities throughout the year,

for Christmas, and Thanksgiving, we had dances there, we had games, we had billiards, we had everything, it was really a fantastic, a fantastic place.

Carmen Guzman: The Church was very supportive, that church, especially that community.

George Guzman: St. Joseph's.

Carmen Guzman: St. Joseph's was very supportive of the Hispanics and they tried to get the children involved, the youth. Father Eugene used to take us on summer, summer trips to the beach and things like that.

George Guzman: On day trips.

Carmen Guzman: And we all fell in love with Father Eugene.

George Guzman: Father Eugene was German and he learned to speak Spanish, because he went to South America, and when he came he was a Franciscan Conventual, and he was a very stern priest but very, very lovable, extremely lovable, I mean, he would do anything and everything for the Hispanic community.

Carmen Guzman: He prepared many of us with the catechism. I remember I did my catechism with him and he prepared me for my first communion and confirmation at 10, 11 years old.

When you say he was very stern, do you mean in a religious sense?

George Guzman: Excuse me?

When you say he was very stern, was that in a religious sense in that he was exact about his religion?

George Guzman: Yeah, yeah. Oh yes, he was very, very rigid, but a fantastic, fantastic priest, fantastic priest.

Carmen Guzman: He used to, when we had our first child, I remember that I was feeding the baby one morning at 11 o'clock in the morning, somebody rang the bell, it was Father Eugene. So he used to come unannounced, he used to come to the houses, and have coffee with you, be there for a minute or so and then go.

George Guzman: Yeah, he would visit you, you know, he would come, unexpectedly, you know? Yeah, he was just fantastic, fantastic.

Carmen Guzman: You know he was so good to the point that about, I don't know, a few years ago, we got everybody from that old time together, maybe he can express it better.

George Guzman: His 85th, his 85th birthday.

Carmen Guzman: And we did something for him, and everybody came from Puerto Rico, everybody and we had a very, very good thing for him.

George Guzman: Yes, we celebrated his 85th birthday. This was back in 19-

Carmen Guzman: probably 10, maybe less than 10 years ago.

George Guzman: Yeah, yeah.

Carmen Guzman: He passed away already, right?

George Guzman: Yes, he passed away, Father Eugene passed away.

Carmen Guzman: When we found out that he was a little old, we all got together and did this for him.

George Guzman: I always used to try to maintain contact with him. When he was transferred from St. Joseph's, I always kept in contact with him, I always looked to find out where he was at and I would go visit him or I would call him and when his family had difficulties, when they passed away, I would go to their wakes and that, because he was just a marvelous man, a marvelous man, Father Eugene was, what came out of there flourished, it flourished so, it blossomed so great, that the people that were there, we've been married 47 years, so, and we came out of that Spanish American Catholic Center. Angel Padilla, Jose Peres and Ilsa, Ivonne Caravajo and Armenia, Juan and Nilda, they're in Puerto Rico-

Carmen Guzman: this fellow that just went to Puerto Rico-

George Guzman: Antonio Ortiz-

Carmen Guzman: this other fellow, from Willow Avenue, why can't I remember his name.

George Guzman: Tommy, Tommy Olivieri.

Carmen Guzman: Frankie and Yolanda.

George Guzman: Frankie and Yolanda Cruz.

Carmen Guzman: And they are still together, those couples.

George Guzman: We are all, we always try to keep in touch with each other. And if we lose contact we try to contact somebody that would know, and we, like for example, the other day, there was a friend of ours that was there, from Mayagüez, and he was in Florida, and from Florida he moved back to Puerto Rico and he's going all over the place. Anyway, I was able to find him the other day, his name is Jorge Venbenuite, and he lives in Mayagüez, you know, and we've been in contact, and Jose Perez, and there are so

many of them. But around there, Yvonne, she's from St. Joseph's now, the Cruz family, I don't know if, there's the Medina family, OK? There's the Tabarres family, Jose Tebarres.

Carmen Guzman: I was going to mention the Medina family, there was a lot next to the church and they bought that place and they had their own house right there next to the church.

George Guzman: Right next to the church.

Carmen: They felt so close.

George Guzman: They were very, very ... well, no there was a house next to the church and Ivonne Carabillo bought it, then Ivonne Carabillo sold it to Leopold, and then they had the fire and when they had the fire they had to, you know, knock the building down and they went to live in the projects and they lived there for a while until he was able to get money to build a new house and they have a house next door, right next door to the church.

When you were growing up here in Hoboken, how often did you attend church?

George Guzman: Every, every week. And during the week, during the week, whenever there was any holy day of obligation, we were always there, always.

Carmen Guzman: And we also got together at the Center. The Spanish American Catholic Center to hang out, like they say now.

George Guzman: Yeah, the Spanish American Catholic Center was at 222 Washington Street, 222 Washington Street, and we had two floors.

Would you call your family religious?

(end of tape, side A)

(side B)

George Guzman I've always been very, very deeply involved in the Church, my wife and I were team couple for the Marriage Encounter for about eight years. We gave, we participated in about 48 weekends, Marriage Encounter weekends.

When was this?

George Guzman: This was from 1976 through 1983 or something like that and we were team couples. We became from, we became to be the admin couple, there was the rookie couple, the second couple and the admin couple, and we came up the ladder. We went to give weekends in Puerto Rico, we went to California, we went to Chicago, Detroit, Michigan, we went with the Marriage Encounter many places. There were beautiful experiences, the weekends, it was three team couples and one priest and you know there would be 25, 25, 30 couples in the weekend. And it would be Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and we were doing that for about eight years. I was the trustee in St. Joseph's Church, OK? But then my oldest son went to St. Joseph's Church, then my second son, when he was born and he had to go to school, St. Joseph's, we lived up here and it was too far to go all the way down there and I had done that with my oldest son and it was difficult, you know. So what we did, we put George Christopher, we enrolled him in St. Peter and Paul's, when we enrolled him in St. Peter and Paul's, we had to, they told us, 'you know, if your son is going to come to school here, you have to be involved in the parish here,' so we had to leave St. Joseph's after so many years, we transferred to St.

Peter and Paul's, and I was a trustee in St. Joseph's, OK? So when the Spanish community started there, we became very, very active in St. Peter and Paul's, and we've been active there ever since it started.

You still attend at St. Peter and Paul's?

George Guzman: Excuse me?

You still attend at St. Peter and Paul's?

George Guzman: St. Peter and Paul's, yes, we still attend there, we go to Mass every Sunday.

Carmen Guzman: Over here we became lectors, we were in charge of the lectors, I was teaching catechism on Sunday, and our son Christopher, the one that was here, became an alter boy, he was there as an alter boy, to the point that now his daughter is an alter girl.

George Guzman: An alter server. Yeah, so-

Carmen Guzman: so we've always been, the Church has been, like our lives revolve-

George Guzman: the pillar, the pillar-

Carmen Guzman: around the Catholic religion, we really love the Catholic religion, no matter what.

George Guzman: We go, we are Catholics because that's our faith, OK? Doesn't make any difference what anything happens with the priests or anything, because we don't go there because of the priests or, we go there because that's our faith, that's our religion, you know, and we've been brought up since we were children in the Catholic faith.

I'm wondering how going to church here in Hoboken was different from going to church in Puerto Rico?

George Guzman: OK, in Puerto Rico, I remember my mother always used to try to get me, because my other brothers were smaller, she would send me to catechism but when we, when we moved, we were baptized in Puerto Rico and that, but when we moved here we lost that that sense of being involved in the Church but I still had the urge, the, you know, how can I put it? For the Church, I still had the love for the Church. There was a school that I went to and in the school, in the public school, they would send the children to catechism, from public school, they would send them to catechism in 96 Street, 96 Street and Broadway, a church on 96th and Broadway and I would go to get the catechism but then when we moved from there, I lost that again, and after two years of being here, I had a teacher, Miss O'Brien, who was very, very religious, very Catholic, and she would ask, you know, who had made their first communion, who had made their confirmation, who was Catholic, who was not Catholic, and all that, and when I raised my hand that I was a Catholic but I hadn't done my first communion or confirmation, she spoke to the principal of the school at Our Lady of Grace, OK? And she enrolled me to go to do my first communion and my confirmation and I went, and I went to do my first communion and my confirmation, by this time I was around 13 years old. And, you know, it was through Miss O'Brien that I made my first communion and confirmation, and Carmen, she was going to catechism and classes at St. Joseph's and she did her first communion and confirmation at St. Joseph's.

Did you ever attend the Fiesta of St. John the Baptist in New York in the 1950s and 1960s?

George Guzman: What?

Carmen Guzman: The feast.

The feast of St. John?

Carmen Guzman: He's losing it a little bit (referring to hearing)

The Feast of St. John the Baptist?

George Guzman: Yes, yes, at Randall's Island, we used to go from the Spanish American Catholic Center, we used to go to the Feast of St. John the Baptist at Randall Island every year. We used to take the bus, we used to take a bus from here and go to Randall Island. I don't know where Randall Island is in New York? That's where they used to celebrate the Feast of St. John the Baptist.

Do you remember what years these were?

George Guzman: In the Fifties and Sixties. We used to have a Holy Name parade here in Hoboken, OK, all the churches used to have, there were five Catholic parishes and each had a Holy Name Society and we used to have a parade every year.

Carmen Guzman: Since everybody was Catholic in Hoboken, all the churches were open about it, everybody, now you got to be hiding it, I mean, it's offending the other people's religions, you know? But at the time we were very open about it and we all celebrated-

George Guzman: well, we're still open about it, we are very open about our religious beliefs, you know.

Carmen Guzman: I don't mean it that way, I mean showing it the other way, because now you can't show, I mean, people might say something. I mean, we were very hurt when they took the "Our Father" from the schools, the school system, you know, that was very normal to us having to say the "Our Father" every morning, the children, and then they took that away.

George Guzman: We used to say the "Our Father" and the Pledge of Allegiance every morning.

Carmen Guzman: Every school you go to that was the first thing you do in the morning.

George Guzman: The Pledge of Allegiance and then the "Our Father."

I'm wondering why Hoboken doesn't have a Feast of St. John's here. We have Italian religious festivals at St. Ann's. I'm wondering why do you think there isn't a Feast of St. John's or another Puerto Rican religious festival.

George Guzman: We've never-

Carmen Guzman: they don't identify now with the Puerto Rican, you know, it's all Hispanics from every nationality, so we don't identify with the community in certain churches is all Puerto Rican. No, like in our community, most of the parishioners are Puerto Rican, of the Spanish Mass, but there are many Dominicans, many South Americans, you know.

George Guzman: Yes, Central Americans, from Central America, from South America, you know? Dominicans, there are a few Cubans, OK? That's in St. Peter and Paul. In St.

Joseph's and in Our Lady of Grace it's Dominicans and there's Puerto Ricans and you know, in both, you know, but the Puerto Rican community has dwindled quite a bit in Hoboken, there's not that many as there used to be back in the Sixties and Seventies.

Carmen Guzman: After all those fires that happened in Hoboken, everybody left.

I was told I should talk to you about the *Cursillos* and your experiences with that.

George Guzman: *Cursillos*. I made my *Cursillo* in 1960, 63, OK? I was 21 years old, we were married at that time.

When did you get married?

George Guzman: we got married in 1962, we were 20 years old, 20 years old. And as a matter of fact, let me show you (getting out photos). We were looking at pictures the other day, this, that's my beautiful baby (referring to wedding picture of Carmen Guzman).

I love the hair.

Carmen Guzman (laughing): That was the style.

George Guzman: We were looking at pictures and we came across some of the pictures there. We have a whole bunch of pictures all over the place, but that's special, special for me. But we were married in November 3, 1962 in St. Joseph's Church.

By Father Eugene?

George Guzman: Father Eugene Zwahl married us. And that was a story and a half, because he felt we were not an ideal couple, you know, and he didn't want us to get married and he said that we would not be married for no more than six months and here we are, 47 years later, and we're still madly in love with each other.

Was that hard, I mean, when Father Eugene, who was so important to you, said he didn't think you should get married?

George Guzman: No, no, because we were determined, we were 20 years old and we were very much in love and we were determined.

Carmen Guzman: It was because he (referring to George Guzman) was a good old boy who didn't smoke, didn't drink, didn't do anything and I was the girl who used to do my hair, paint my hair, I used to smoke, and dance a lot, I was very, very –

George Guzman: open-

Carmen Guzman: and he didn't like that. He didn't like that, so that's why he didn't like the idea of us two getting married. And when we were getting prepared for that, like the (unintelligible) sections, he was always telling us, 'are you sure? Are you sure?'

George Guzman: and he, he wanted me to become a priest.

Carmen Guzman: Yeah, that's how much involved he was.

George Guzman: That's, but that was not my calling. But then he also had another girl in mind for me, you know? And he didn't think that Carmen -

Carmen Guzman: Nilda.

George Guzman: Nilda, yeah, Nilda, yeah.

Carmen Guzman: Nilda was a very, very nice ...

George Guzman: Yeah. No, no, no, Nilsa, Nilda, Nilsa's sister, Nilda. But there was also the other Nilda, Antonio's sister-in-law, yeah. But there was a couple of Nildas and he wanted those, because Carmen was a little bit wild and I was so conservative in that, you know? He didn't feel that we would make-

Carmen Guzman: a good couple-

George Guzman: a good couple. But then after the years he was so much part of our lives, and Father Eugene was just fantastic, fantastic priest, fantastic priest.

So tell me about the *Cursillos*.

George Guzman: OK. I made the *Cursillo* in 196- we were married in 1962, 1963. It was the second *Cursillo* in Tagaste Monastery in upstate New York, OK. There was a group that had gone before, there was a large number that went from St. Joseph Church and when they came back they, you know, sent another large group from the parish and I went to the second *Cursillo*. And that was a fantastic, marvelous movement, and when I came back I was so enthused and so in love with my Church and I wanted to, you know, tear the world apart, you know. Unfortunately, Carmen, she was Catholic but she was not too much into it and I wanted to say the rosary-

Carmen Guzman: I was not as involved as he was, I had become a new mom and my life was the baby and the family, so he was involved in the Holy Name Society and now the *Cursillo* but I was not involved in anything like that and I did not want to be. And then later on I became involved in the Church.

George Guzman: Yes. So, but we were very deeply involved and we had every week, we had meetings at the Spanish American Catholic Center, we had meetings for the Holy Name Society, you know, I mean, that center flourished, it gave, it blossomed and it gave so much fruit from there, so much fruit came out of there that it was fantastic and the *Cursillo* helped me quite a lot, quite a lot, and I wanted to do more for my Church, I just wanted to do everything I possibly can for my Church. We used to go to visit people and apostolic visits, apostolic visits and apostolic work, and we did it until a few years ago, you know? So, but the *Cursillo* movement was very, very, in me, very, very effective, very effective. Then from the *Cursillo*, Father Terrence Pescator, from St. Joseph's, went to do a marriage encounter. And he, when he came back, he invited Carmen and I to go to a-

Carmen Guzman: Marriage Encounter weekend.

George Guzman: yeah, no but we went, first we went to a (unintelligible), remember? We went to a meeting in which they would speak to us about the Marriage Encounter? And then we signed up and we signed up for the weekend and that weekend was such, so special, so special for us, we had such a beautiful weekend that, and we became very deeply involved in the weekend, and in the weekend they observe the couples that are there, you know? And there were, there was two weekends, two different groups at that same weekend, and we were selected by the couple, the team couple, and we were selected to and asked to be part of a team couple. And it took a lot of, a lot of praying and a lot of meditating and that, and Carmen didn't want to because she didn't think she was prepared and I wanted to, you know? And in the long run we decided to accept to become

a team couple and then we went to do a *cadre*, we went with Chuck Gallagher who was the founder of the -

Carmen Guzman: the movement-

George Guzman; the movement, the Marriage Encounter movement, Chuck Gallagher, and he was the one who gave us the *cadre* in upstate New York, and it was a fantastic, fantastic weekend, and we had to prepare ourselves, we had to write our talks, we had around, what 22 talks?

Carmen Guzman: 15.

George Guzman: 15? 15 talks that we had to write. And there was three team couples and a priest, OK? And then we also become involved with the Charismatic movement. So we were *Cursillistas*, we were with the Marriage Encounter and we participated in the Charismatic movement, not so much with the Charismatic movement but we were, but we went to retreats, we still go to retreats, you know, we still go to retreats. After we left St. Joseph's we moved over, transferred over to Sts. Peter and Paul in 1976? 1976?

Carmen Guzman: What?

George Guzman: That we transferred from St. Joseph's?

Carmen Guzman: '76, '78, I don't know.

George Guzman: Somewhere's around there. That was because our son was going there and we had to become involved in the Church. And we became very deeply involved and we've gone through a lot of seminars and a lot of preparations for the movement in the Catholic Church.

I'm curious about when and why the Catholic Center was discontinued.

George Guzman: The Spanish American Catholic Center, after a certain time, they, the Franciscan, they decided to move it from Washington Street to St. Joseph's. They wanted to have, because it was like two different churches, OK? Two different, you know, and they wanted to put it together. And Father Eugene became the pastor of the parish at that time, so they transferred the Spanish American Catholic Center to St. Joseph's and they fixed the lower part of the church and we used to have our meetings for the Holy Names Society and the *Madre de Christianas* and the *Hijas de Marias*, but you know, they wanted to put it together and build bridges but it didn't work out that well, it didn't work out at that well. In the beginning it was very, very difficult because the non-Hispanic did not want the Hispanics involved, OK? But gradually we became involved and we started working together and we used to do bazaars, we used to do all kinds of activities. As a matter of fact, we used to have raffles and we started off with a small television and the first raffle for a small television, we won it, we won it, I'll never forget that, remember that little television that we won? You know. And then-

Carmen Guzman: flea markets also.

George Guzman: We used to have flea markets, yeah. Then, I used to think big, I've always thought big, you know? And I talked Father Eugene into raffling a car, OK? I got into contact with some friends of ours and we got a car, it was an Escort, a Ford Escort when they first came out? And we raffled it and we made quite a bit of money on that car.

When did the center move from Washington Street to St. Joseph's?

George Guzman: That was in the Seventies. Excuse me for a minute, could you turn it (referring to the tape recorder) off for a minute? (Excuses himself)

[Recording resumes]

George Guzman: The Spanish American Catholic Center moved from 222 Washington Street to the church on 63 Monroe Street in 1970, 1972, somewhere's around there. And Father Eugene, as I said, became the pastor of the church, and we tried to build bridges but it was very difficult because at that time St. Joseph's was mainly Italian, OK? It was a Franciscan Conventual. They had three Franciscan Conventuals here, they had St. Joseph's, St. Francis, and St. Ann's, which is a Capuchin, Capuchin order, St. Ann's is a Capuchin, St. Francis is Franciscan and or was Franciscan, and St. Joseph's was Franciscan, and then the Franciscan Order pulled out of here and the Archdiocese of Newark had to take over the churches and St. Joseph has been on the verge of being closed down, but they, the parishioners there are very, very hard workers, very faithful, very, and they are very determined that they do not want the church closed and they've maintained it open, although they don't have the activities that they used to have, because now Our Lady of Grace has merged with St. Joseph's, OK? So it's been, it's very, very difficult with our, our Catholic community, because like I said, there were five parishes, St. Joseph's, St. Francis, St. Ann's, Our Lady of Grace, and Sts. Peter and Paul in one square mile and in Weehawken, in lower Weehawken, St. Lawrence, so, you know, in basically a square mile there are six churches, plus all the other churches, all the other denominations, you know? But when we moved to St. Joseph's we continued to have the same activities that we continued to have in the Spanish American Catholic Center.

There, we started doing bazaars, and like I said, I talked the father into raffling a car, you know, which he was scared of doing it, you know? But I made some connections and we got a car, very reasonable, and we raffled it and we made you know, quite a bit of money on the raffle of that car. And from then on we started raffling other cars and from a small Ford, what was it? A small Ford Escort I think it was, when they first came out, we went into a Chevy, and then we went into bigger cars and we started raffling and we were doing very, very well, and this was all through St. Joseph's. You know, we used to have a bazaar Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday and we used to work very, very hard all that weekend, was from five o'clock (end of tape).

[end]

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Interviewer: Christina Ziegler-McPherson

Interviewees: George Guzman, 1202 Hudson St., Hoboken, N.J.

Carmen Guzman

Place: 1202 Hudson St., Hoboken, N.J

Transcription made by Christina Ziegler-McPherson, 2009.