

Charlotte Bartruff  
Latino Roots II  
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4:10

Q. (Charlotte Bartruff) But you mentioned you were living with domestic violence, so when he came home that wasn't really a happy time?

A. (Martha Morales) Oh yeah, it was exciting to see him of course, but we knew you know that it wasn't going to be...it was just going to be that happy moment to see him a little bit the first time. But then after that things were not going to go right. He used to hit my mom and he is working on recovering from... you know, he's an alcoholic. And I think he has...He's doing a good job, but he still has a long way to go, I think. But, we did suffer from domestic violence. And it wasn't fun.

Q. What got your dad into... Do you happen to know how he got involved in landscaping in San Diego?

A. Oh , I have no idea.

Q. Was that before you were born?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. So can you tell me a little about your siblings? How old are they?

A. My siblings... Well, I have an oldest sister. Her name is Claudia. She's going, she's going to be 32 . And then it's me, I'm going to be 30 this year. September. And then I have a brother, he's going to be 28 in August. And my sister, her name is Alisia, she is going to be, let me see... 24, July I believe, 24.

Q. Okay, and what's your brother's name?

A. Carlos

Q. So you were born in 1981 then? 1981, september?

A. Yes.

Q. Were you close with them (your siblings) when you were child?

A. I think so, we were pretty close. We lost contact when they decided to go back with my mom, after being here for a few months with my dad. And that's when we lost contact. We... It was hard not growing up with them because i knew, you know, I knew i had siblings, but they weren't with me. So It was tough when i was growing up when up

when i was in Middle School and High School and knowing that i had siblings but they were there in mexico. It was.. It was sad. there was some times where I was pretty sad.

And That's why I think consider my friends from mexico as part of my family because they were there when my siblings weren't there. The rest of my family wasn't there when they were, so they, like I said I do consider them part of my family, and i miss them, especially two of my friends, my girlfriends, they're like my sisters.

Q. From mexico?

A. Yeah, oh yeah, they live in san diego, but they're hispanic, Mexicans.

Q. Oh I see. But they weren't your friends before. They weren't your friends in Baja California?

A. No.

Q. Okay. You lost touch with most of the people from there?

A. Oh yeah.

Q. What can you tell me about your town in Mexico? What was it called?

A. It's called San Quintin.

Q. San Quintin. And is that... that's a small town, right?

A. Yes it is very small.

Q. Did your family live there ever since your were born?

A. Yes.

Q. And is that...did your parents grow up there also? Or where did they come from?

A. They came from this other part of mexico it's called Oaxaca. I've heard it's really poor but it's very pretty at the same time. I've never been there I would like to visit of course someday but, I don't know when that is that going to happen. Both of my parents are from oaxaca, like I said. They...this place called um tecomaslaxuaca. It's funny, but that's how it's called. Tecomaslaxucaca, Oaxaca. But I don't even know how to spell it—i could try.

Q. Oh that's okay.

A. But it, um, it just sounds funny to me but they... both of them were born there.

Q. Do you know what years they were born?

A. Let's see. My dad is going to be 54 or 53 I'm not sure. My mom is going to be...she's 52.

Q. 52. And what are their names?

A. Socorro, s-o-c-o-r-r-o, and Gerardo, g-e-r-a-r-d-o.

Q. And uh, do you know how...what their lives were like in Oaxaca?

A. Oh, I think it was, it was...well, from what they have, they have told me... my mom, she used to work, since she was little. She used to, you know, her mom and her dad used to wake her up really early in the morning, maybe 4 in the morning every day. just to cook for everybody you know, it wasn't easy. She still remembers that she had to cook, you know, tortillas by hand. Everything was by hand. It's not like you can now go to the store and buy just a bag or a pack of tortillas or whatever, you know. And she had a hard time growing up, because they were very strict with her. She wasn't allowed to go out you know, with boyfriends, just with girls, you know. And hardly, really, because she had a lot of chores to get done daily. So and then I guess she met my dad and she just didn't want to live... she just wanted to leave home. She wasn't happy, I don't think she was really happy. Her brother, older brothers used to make her do extra work at home and she just had to I guess, follow whatever they, the family, told her to do or whatever she needed to do during the day, every day. And my dad, he, his mom died when he was like, I don't really know how old he was, but he was really young. And she, I think she had a heart attack by the river she was carrying two what are they called, like waters, not gallons, but those buckets of water. And from what I heard she stopped and she just took her hands to her chest and then she just passed out and that was it. My dad was right next to her and she died in his arms basically. It was pretty sad.

Q. So what brought them to San Quintin?

A. They just... well they were looking for opportunities. They needed jobs and they heard that, you know, San Quintín had some. Like a lot of people from Oaxaca where they lived moved to San Quintín because they, you know, they heard that they could find a good job over there and things like that-- a better life, better opportunities. And that's why they decided to go there and started their family.

Q. And, your experience in San Quintin, is it a beautiful place? Is it...do you think about it fondly?

A. Yes. Haha. I think it was fun, it was fun, you know, living there, because that's all I knew when I was there. You know I didn't really, like I said before, I didn't really picture myself doing other things, or living somewhere else or having better things in life. You just don't have dreams basically when you're there. You don't see further, you know. And it was a lot of fun, you know, being a kid and just being with my siblings and, you know, playing with the neighbors. I always remember going to the neighbors house to... just to play. We did that a lot, we visited our neighbors' houses and sometimes we ate there. And

those are, those are good memories that, good memories that i have.

Q. You told me last time a little bit about how you made, you were able to make games out of simple things. You told me some stories about, yeah, you mentioned making toys out of leaves or playing with the puddles. You told me some things like that. Can you go into some detail about that?

A. Oh, well, yes. We basically just used what we had. I guess we used our recycling materials wisely. I guess. I mean, we, like I said, we didn't have money. We, during Christmas we didn't get any gifts from other people, except from my dad. I remember getting this barbie. Oh my god i'll never forget. It had a blue dress. It was amazing. I just couldn't believe I had a barbie. and I kept it until you know, we moved here and, because it was really precious to me. . And Like I said I kept it and someone took it. Someone broke into our house and took it along with other things that my dad had gotten us.

Q. When was that?

A. That was, it's been ,I don't know, 15 years. It happened a while ago. But, um, when you go to Mexico, especially, I think, just any part of Mexico where a lot of poor families live in and if you give them something like. Especially to the little girls-- if you give them a small doll or something. Oh my god they will keep it forever and ever and it's because it's very precious when you get things like that, because you don't get that every day.

Q. You said that Americans would sometimes come and bring gifts.

A. Oh yeah oh yes. oh my god it was...That's why, I don't know, that's why I want to go back and do the same things, even though I did it once. But it just brought so much, like so many good memories. It just felt good just doing that and i would like to do it again. I want those kids to feel happy and to feel that they could...they could have dreams, you know, basically. And they could... like I kind of see myself in their eyes, because that was me before. So it makes me really really happy when I see them smile, and you know, opening their presents and it's very, very... it makes me really , really happy, like i said, i don't know. I also wanted to do those kind of things. Hopefully I'll get a chance to go back soon and visit. Like I said, I don't have any family members there anymore but I just want to visit. And, you know, that was my hometown. I don't consider it to be my hometown anymore but I just have so many memories even though most of my memories might not be good memories, but of course I would like to visit again and see those kids and visit my old school . Yeah, It was good going back. I was really happy to be back, but that was like 6 years ago. so It's time to go back again.

Q. So in San Quintín you said you went to school and you also told me before that you had some experience working on the cosecha with your mom. So how was that?

A. It's tough but you just want to help your parents sometimes, when the only thing you can do I guess is go out in the fields and pick up tomatoes or...they're really happy though. I was just so skinny and so small and so petite and I just couldn't lift the tomato

bucket I had tother grownups help me I remember. I guess they felt sorry for me.

Q. How old were you at that point?

A. I think was about 9. 9 years old and they did pay me I remember but I just couldn't handle it. That one day was enough for me it was so hard.

Q. So it wasn't necessary for you and your siblings to work to support the family?

A.No, not really. But I just wanted to help my mom.

Q. She worked hard?

A. Yes she did. Very, very hard.

Q. So you ended up coming to San Diego because your dad was already living there. And there's some story about your parents, or your mom, wanted to get a divorce and that's how you ended up here. Can you tell me that story again?

A. Yes, my mom, and my dad...okay my mom, she wanted to go visit my grandma in Oaxaca. And, so, I guess, she told my dad, and they decided that my dad was going to to take us over here with him you know to the U.S. while my mom was visiting my grandma. And I think my dad didn't even know what my mom's plans were because she... Now I do think that she was thinking about leaving him, you know, at the time, but she was afraid to tell him. So when she visited my grandma and she came back to San Quintin, she called. My dad called her actually, and asked her, you know, to get her things ready because she was going to come live with us and with him of course. That's when my mom decided she did not want to be with him. And so...what else? That was devastating for us, or for me, because you know I didn't know what was happening really. You know they never talked about, you know, them separating or, you know, nothing at all, and we were in shock in a way and, you know, i do remember crying because i didn't know what was going on but ... but now I am a grown-up woman and I have my own kids and my family, and I do believe that my mom made the best decision to not, you know, go back with my dad. And, you know, it was, she suffered a lot with my dad, so even though back then i didn't really understand what was going on or I do remember that all I wanted was to have my family together, but you know it didn't happen. And I'm glad that didn't. I'm so glad it didn't happen, because my mom in a way she had the opportunity to be free, like i said, in a way, because she did suffer from, like i said, from domestic violence, we all did, but like when you're a kid all you want to have a family, be part of a family. And that's what i didn't understand when I was 11 or 12 years old. But like I said, now I always tell my mom that that was the best decision she made, you know, when she decided to leave my dad. And I think she was a little afraid because she had 4 kids and it's like, you know, she probably thought, what am i going to do with my kids, with 4 kids with me, how am i going to provide for them or whatever. She was a little afraid i believe. But somehow she did it and she never went back. She never went back with my dad.

Q. Did she stay in Oaxaca for a while ?

A. In Mexico, in San Quintin.

Q. In San Quintin, okay. But all your siblings... So she didn't live with any of your siblings then, after that?

A. For a couple, a few months until my oldest sister and my brother Carlos they decided that they didn't want to live with my dad and they wanted to go back to my mom.

Q. Why did...why did you and your siblings not stay in San Quintin with your mom if she was going to be separate from your dad anyway? Did she want you to live in the U.S. ?

A. Well, my sister Claudia and my brother Carlos they I mean, they really really missed my mom and I did too. But for some reason, they my dad used to hit them. Used to hit them more than...he used to beat them up, basically, you know. Especially to my oldest sister. She wasn't allowed to, Even though we were here in the U.S. Already, she wasn't allowed to go out, you know. She used to cook she was kind of like a mom in a way. Mom slash sister or sister slash mom. She used to cook and clean and used to do those chores and She had a lot of responsibilities and I guess she didn't like that. And I remember one time that she went to visit a friend of hers-- it was a family-- and my dad came back from work and she wasn't home. And when she got home she... my dad was really upset and he started hitting her like really bad. And I think that was what made her leave. She asked me if I wanted to go with them back to my mom in San Quintin, but for some reason I decided to stay. Because I really, I loved my dad, even though he was not a good dad. He wasn't a good dad at all and I truly believe that. I guess he didn't know how to raise us or how to become the father that we wanted him to be I guess.

Q. You don't know exactly what made you stay even though he was, even though he was being violent or abusive toward you?

A. I just knew that even though I missed my mom and I really wanted to be with her, I knew that the opportunities were here I guess and like I said I didn't want my dad to just come home from work and just not see us there because I knew he was going to do something. By that I mean he was going to. I didn't know if he was going to hurt himself or if he was going to drink until, well I don't know what would happen really. But I knew it was better to stay. For some reason I just knew...

Q. To take care of him?

A. I guess, yeah, because I was, like I said, I knew he wasn't a good dad. And even though he's not a good dad, and he wasn't a good dad to us, I still loved him.

Q. So you and your dad lived alone or maybe with a roommate in San Diego for a few years, right, while you were in school? How was your relationship with him during that time, when your siblings were gone, was it better?

A. I remember that day when they left, i was there. He came home and he started drinking because he, he, he... I told him they were gone and he started drinking and drinking. And i guess the following day he never came home from work and I was there until I remember like 2 or 3 in the morning and i was like so scared because I didn't know what was going on. And that day he got into an accident. He was driving drunk and a police officer, or one of the police officers from San Diego he came and knocked on the door and told me that day he had run into somebody. And there I was by myself for almost a year.

Q. And you were how old at that point?

A. I think I was, let's see, 14 years old or so, or maybe 13. I can't remember. When that happened, when my dad ended up in jail, at that time I remember i was in middle school. I went to live with a friend and then another friend and I was like going around with my friends, you know, living with one for a month and another for another for a month and I was like going everywhere.

Q. And when the policeman came to the door and told you your dad is gone, and he knew you were 13 or 14 years old, did he take any steps to help you find a place to live, or did they just kind of say your dad's gone, he's not coming home, and kind of let you figure that out by yourself?

A. No, I guess they didn't know I was there by myself, because I was living with other people. We were sharing with other roommates. But yeah I was by myself.

Q. And you made that work by living with friends? Did you still have that apartment where your dad had... where you had been living with your dad?

A. No, we just left it alone. The people that were renting with us, who had been living with me, they took over the apartment basically, and I moved to the apartment with some friends.

Q. How did you feel at that point? Were you really frightened? Were you angry with your dad?

A. No I was just sort of sad he made the wrong decision. There was nothing I could have done, really. He's been making wrong decisions in his life and it's up to him to change, to make better decisions. I wasn't afraid at all. I had good friends. Somehow it worked. He got out of jail, he found an apartment for us, but he never changed. He kept drinking. He did hit me every now and then. Until I was 16. that's when I, well it's funny I still remember that day. I don't know why he wanted to hit me with the belt, but he...I just had to stop him somehow. And I did. I took the belt out of his hands and I told him that that was enough.

Q. That's brave of you for a 16 year old. And how did he handle that?

A. He was surprised. But he never did it again. He, he, he was just surprised that I took the belt out of his hands and told him that it was enough and I remember I told him, why do you hit me if you cry afterwards. And he just kept quiet. He didn't know what to say anymore because that's what happened. He used to hit me and then he used to cry. But I was just tired of it. But he never did it again. That was it. That was it.

Q. At any point did you regret having stayed instead of going with the rest of your family?

A. No, I didn't regret it at all. I think my future changed in a good way after I met my husband. I met him in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. He was a manager at taco bell. He was working in one of the restaurants near the high school I was going to and one time he was at the register and he took my order, and that's when everything changed, you know.