

[00:00:00.2]

Renee Alexander Craft: To begin. What is your name?

[00:00:03.1]

Carlos Chavarría: My name is Carlos Chavarría.

[00:00:05.8]

RC: And what is your position here?

[00:00:08.2]

CC: Well right now I am Mayor of Portobelo. Since 2004 until now, I am the Mayor.

[00:00:15.5]

RC: What does the Congo tradition mean?

[00:00:18.0]

CC: Well for us the Congo tradition is a culture. It was born during the colonial times with the arrival of black slaves from Africa to Panama, to the American continent and they were first unloaded in Portobelo as slaves. And there would be moments when the Spanish would give them a moment of freedom to have their festivities, and they would start their chants and their dances precisely to celebrate their tradition and they would sing their songs, their Congo rhythms. And what is more, I had the opportunity to be in France in 2010 and I was having a conversation with a few colleagues from the Congo, I had gone to UNESCO to look for . . . I went to look for some information and was chatting with some colleagues from the Congo -- he was the secretary general in the Congolese government. From Africa, the Dominican Republic, I mean the Democratic Republic of Congo. We were speaking and I gave him some posters on which the Nazarene was shown, Jesus of Nazareth that we have here. I told him, here is Jesus of Nazareth, the Black Christ of Portobelo, and he said to me, "No, that does not exist." I said yes it does and he said no it does not. So then I asked him, "Why do you say it does not exist?" He told me, "Because our ancestors expressed clearly that they were going to the land of the Black Christ." And I said to him, "Well yes it exists." And I showed him and we were there looking at a door, an arched door where there was a silhouette looking at the horizon of the sea. They called it the Door of No Return, because their ancestors when through that door and never came back again. So they said they went off to the land of the Black Christ and I told him it does indeed exist. It is Portobelo. My village. They invited me to come to the Congo in 2011 and I could not go because during that time there was a hurricane, no a volcano, excuse me. It was erupting and we could not go because they had the airspace completely closed off due because the fog and ashes would not let anyone land. So I decided not to go but I did have the invitation to go and was going to go learn more about the Congo culture. So yes, it is the tradition of ours from all over the coast of Colon, but most of all the High Coast is where it is really celebrated and lived. It is mostly used during carnival.

[00:03:11.0]

RC: And what is the significance of the Devil?

[00:03:13.0]

CC: Well the Devil in our tradition represents nothing more than the Spanish with his whip that he was always abusing the slave with so that he would work. They were always subjecting the blacks to the whip, and that is the part (of the Congo tradition) that they have directly maintained as if it were, that is, he is the Congos' enemy as it relates to the culture of the race. But when we look at it strictly within the context of the Congo tradition -- it is the evil of man, the devil that we search out amongst ourselves. It is celebrated on Ash Wednesday. That is when you can see clearly the fight between good and evil and that is the moment that everything ends. Good beats out evil. And that is when they baptize me (the Major Devil). And that is celebrated. It comes to pass that good imposes itself on evil and we arrive at a moment of joy. That is what the tradition recreates. But looking at it from the perspective of the Blacks and the Spanish, it is nothing more than (showing) the Spanish that were always whipping the blacks to enslave them.

[00:04:28.1]

RC: Tell me about your first memories of the Congos of Portobelo -- the Congos and Devils of Portobelo.

[00:04:35.0]

CC: Well I was born in Portobelo. I am originally from here. We would see that on January 20th it would begin -- it was the day of Saint Sebastian -- they would raise the carnival flag here and from there on the people of the village . . . in those days there was no highway -- so everyone always came out (to participate). They worked a lot in agriculture and at night when the Congo groups would begin everyone in the community participated. But when the carnival weeks would arrive -- those were Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Ash Wednesday -- then it was a completely closed party, that is to say strictly for the people of the village. Then no one would go up into the mountain. No one would do anything. Everyone quit working and did everything in their own houses -- so as not to have to go into the mountain. No one went to clean (their farms). No one did anything and they had their vegetable, their food. There was a lot of hunting. Lots of smoked, salted meats that they would cut and put out to dry. A lot of people went up in the mountains. Others went out to fish. We would eat a lot of salted smoked meats and fish. And when carnival time arrived they went out strong to "confiar." "Confiar" is nothing more than getting everyone together that was dressed as Congos and going out and take up a collection in the village. That is what was used to get the food in the fort. They would seek contributions of vegetables, hens, fish, and they even got iguana eggs that they would see drying. They would take them to the fort and cook them for everyone and all those people would sit there until Ash Wednesday, until the game of the Devil would end. Then everyone would go back to their houses like normal. Those were the moments of the tradition that I experienced a lot, me and the older people. The Congos would use purely animal names for themselves for example, Ocelot, Fox, Pig, Rabbit. Even though some would also use names like Doctor, others Lawyer, but that was really unusual because most people used strictly animal names. And for those that would use professional names, if they called themselves Lawyer you would see them with a book. If they were an engineer, you would see them with their tape measure. If they were a doctor, they had a stethoscope. That is to say they were always imitating (whatever profession they were). But it was really something that I lived to see. Today we're trying to teach the young people to uphold the value of their tradition. Because when you go out into the world you'll realize the richness that there is out there. In the little that I've traveled, I've realized that we are also rich in culture

and that makes you want to maintain your tradition, your culture, as it was something that was given to us by our ancestors. We have to continue with it as much as we can.

[00:07:38.4]

RC: Uh huh. And why did you choose to play the Devil?

[00:07:41.6]

CC: Well. I will tell you, when I was a kid in school I dressed as a Congo. But one day I decided to play as Devil and my mom told me no, she was not on board with that. And I told her that I wanted to play and I wanted it so much that I had to go out to the mangrove to make coal with a guy called Ricardo Robles. We cut wood and we made an oven. We put out the oven and from that I bought my first bells and everything else. A sack of coal cost fifty cents. A woman named Melida Jimenez, may she rest in peace, was the one that bought the coal and from there I bought (what I needed). I made my first attempt to dress as the Devil. Later, an Aunt named Antonia Solís sewed my costume for the first time. She made my costume because my mother was not in agreement. The second year I had to work shoveling as a mason's assistant at the house over there to earn enough to make my costume. After that my mother began to help me and I began dressing in my costume and, well, I enjoyed it. Well I think my interest was more because some of my friends dressed as Devil and I wanted to play too so that is where I stayed. Playing devil.

[00:08:55.4]

RC: What was what most caught your attention after that first time?

[00:09:04.6]

CC: Well when I played Devil the first time what most caught my attention were the masks. When I wore the mask I saw people run and be afraid and inside of the mask I laughed. From the outside one cannot see the face inside. You can enjoy what is happening. Also, when one sees the Congo playing with you, it is graceful and you see how the community celebrates it. That fills me with satisfaction and emotion. That is the great thing that this tradition has given me. So that is what most attracted me to it and what most makes me play devil.

[00:09:55.5]

RC: And the masks of the Devils have changed a lot or no?

[00:10:03.4]

CC: Yes.

[00:10:04.2]

RC: How have they changed?

[00:10:05.4]

CC: Before we used to make the masks, that is, I still stay with a traditional mask, a mask resembling an animal or any other kind of design but small. It let in good ventilation so you can breathe well. But nowadays we have seen . . . we used to make . . . We would get a mold of mud. We would make a mud mold. We would cover it with newspaper and a paste that we made from wheat -- we would boil it and make a paste -- We would use that to stick on the newspaper.

Afterwards we would put the mask in the sun for one or two days. We would take out the mold and leave the paper mask drying until it hardened. From there we would cut it and start to decorate it, paint it and put whatever we wanted on it. That is the way our masks were. Nowadays the young guys . . . Later there are faces that you put directly on the cardboard. After that I decided not to make the ones from mud molds as they take a lot of time. I would get cardboard, it takes up half my face and from there I would design it and add decoration to it. I would go out with my mask, it was more lightweight and that is how I would go out to play. Lately I hardly make masks. The guys Dani (brother of Gustavo Esquina) and Carlos, they make the masks and they tell me, “We have a mask for you this year.” But you know my masks are small. And so they bring me one and my son and daughter decorate it because me myself I hardly do it anymore. Although if I had to do it I would put myself to doing it because thank God I learned how. But the kids feel happy making the masks I play with for me. They know my masks are small so they make mine that way. My son and daughter decorate them and that is how I go out to play. In respect to the masks, I have seen that they have made a lot of changes. You will see big, extravagant masks that the young people are creating. I do not criticize them because the creativity of the old days is not the same as now and that is good. That is what I tell the older people. They ask me, “Why do not I play with a bigger mask? (Laughs) I tell them that I see when you all lower your head.”

[00:13:05.2]

RC: That is it!

[00:13:05.6]

CC: And raise them, and lower it two . . . raise it two or three times and afterwards that have problems with their neck. Not me, with my mask I can raise and lower it and I do not feel a thing.

[00:13:13.0]

RC: Because they weigh a lot, right?

[00:13:13.7]

CC: Yes. They weigh a lot. It is for that reason that I do not want a big mask. Leave me with my traditional small mask and I play all I want. I have kept it this way and they respect my decision and what is more, sometimes after I am finished playing devil, some of them come to borrow my mask to go do a (Congo) presentation. Even my son has borrowed my mask. He takes mine and he takes his. When he is tired he takes his off and puts mine on. But yes, the ones of today are exaggerated. You have seen them in the Festival of the Devils, those big extravagant masks that the young guys make. And we have told them. Six hundred and something guys will come here dressed as Devil and truthfully one mask looks like the other but they are not the same. You can see the difference in creativity that the guys have. You understand? There are people that take up to two or three months making their masks because a lot of them sew the decorations with a sewing machine. They do have their creativity.

[00:14:14.4]

CC: And I have seen when they are making them. I sat right down with them just to watch them and a few have asked, “You think you can make a mask like this?” And I tell them I could make

one for you too but I am not going to use that kind. The first thing is to have the mold and after the mold you find your creativity. To the young folks I congratulate them and I tell them, they have their imagination. They have their creativity. It is because of that I tell them, "Sirs you know how this game is. We do it with respect. Do not abuse it." And that is why truly you have seen here that no one gets hit here during the Festival of the Devils. I think you have been here for the Festival of the Devils, right? You have seen the quantity of people that come here to play and they do not hit anyone. It is really a game with a different style. It is not like our Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday is the game where the whip comes into it.

[00:14:59.6]

RC: Yes!

[00:15:01.7]

CC: (Laughs) That is how it is.

[00:15:04.9]

RC: Yes. Uh-hmm. You have a unique position as the Mayor of the city and the Major Devil of the village. Tell me about that.

[00:15:13.8]

CC: Well honestly, I have always liked politics but I had never taken part in it. I had supported other people. So when I came back from studying abroad I decided to get into politics in 1989, but I could not because in that moment they were all handpicked. So in 1994 I signed up as a candidate. It was between eight candidates. There were seven other candidates for Mayor and I entered as number eight. I was the last to enter among the eight and even though I entered among the last, I ended up among the four finalists. That got me really excited because it meant that I had a good following. So then in 1999 I again entered the game of politics. I won with 1,890 votes to 1,832 votes. I won by 58 votes. The next day I lost by 120 votes, that is, I was blatantly defrauded with 1,921 to 1,801 votes. It was a blatant fraud and everyone realized it. The votes were taken out in Isla Grande and never turned in so there was the fraud. I took documentation to the party and they did not do anything about it. I said I was not going to run again but politics is like a virus. It is contagious. So in 2004 I ran again.

[00:17:01.0]

CC: And I had a good following and I won. I came out in opposition of the government and later they did not support me. In 2009 I said, "Ok well, let's run again." I ran and won again, with a much bigger margin. In 2004 I beat the closest other candidate by 565 votes and in 2009 I beat the next closest person by 100 more votes, that is 665 votes. It was the same person I beat in 2004. The same one had run again but I beat him by an additional 100 votes. So once again I thought this government was going to support me. They have already approved all of my projects and we are waiting for the president to come to Portobelo to do the groundbreaking. We are doing big projects in Portobelo to create this as a tourist area. It will be the paving of the streets, cleaning the bay, a levee, a dock for cruise ships, that is to say good things are coming to the village. Water treatment facility. All that stuff. You are going to find a well-maintained highway from Maria Chiquita to Portobelo. There are 16 big projects which will involve sixty three micro-projects at the district level. Isla Grande, Juan Gallego, La Guaira, Puerto Lindo o Garrote,

Cacique, José Pobre, Valle Estilla, San Antonio, Nuevo Tonosi, Portobelo, La Escucha, Buenaventura, Guanche, Mechi, Alto de la Cruz, Playa Langosta, Rio Piedra, María Chiquita, Las Mercedes y Las Merceditas. It will involve all those communities. There are 168 million dollars that will be invested in those projects. The majority of the investment will be here in the village (Portobelo) as it is a colonial area but things have to be done well. We are going along calmly but with lots of details. We are waiting to see if everything goes as planned to decide if we will run again in 2014, God willing. God willing he will give me the opportunity to be re-elected in 2014.

[00:19:33.2]

CC: Speaking on being the Major Devil. I became Major Devil in 1980 and that was because Mr. Celedonio decided to retire because in 1979 as he had played Devil for 49 years. So in 1980 he decided not to play anymore as he had served seven seven-year cycles and I did not know that. So when we were playing devil there was a man called Francisco Amoreti, and it was thought that he was the one to be the next Major Devil. When we were getting baptized there was no one left but him and I. So I went out to play with the angels and the Congos and they said to me -- Not him, you. And the angles said to me -- Not him, you. And I am asking them, what is going on? And they tell me there is going to be duel between you and "Pancho" (Francisco Amoreti), with the last man still in carnival. When I am dressing as Devil I see him and I greet him, giving him his respect and recognizing him as Major Devil since he is the one next in line. Later Celedonio puts me next in line. So they created a duel between him and me. The advantage that I had over him was that he was deaf, but I knew that he still played Devil very well and I recognized that, so I told the Congos render unto Ceaser that which is Ceasers, if he is the Major Devil. And they said no. There is a duel. And when we started playing he did not hear the music and could not follow the rhythm. And that was my advantage, and I have been able to play (Devil) from 1980 until now as the Major Devil. In 1982 I went abroad to study.

[00:21:21.1]

CHATTER

[00:21:35.6]

CC: Yes. In 1982 I went to Russia to study. So I did not play in 1983, 1984, and 1985 until I came back in 1986 and was motivated again to play devil. I knew that there was another person playing Major Devil for me and I gave it to him but the Congos told me, no, you were on vacation. You have come back to your culture and these years count. I told them, no. Raul is here. They said, no. You are the Major Devil. It was like they gave me a license to study and they kept counting the years. This year I am going on 42 years of playing devil. Unfortunately (this year) we had to suspend the games because of a few security problems that happened in the district. There was a certain insecurity. It was possible that with 42 years of playing (Devil) I was going to retire but now I say only God knows why carnival did not happen. This year they paid homage to me during the Festival of the Devils, something that I did not know they were going to do. So I did not play in this event but I decided that I will play next year and, God willing, I will reach 42 years of playing devil.

[00:23:00.0]

CC: I do not know if I will achieve 49 years of playing devil like my ancestor Celedonio, may God keep him in his glory. He played seven-year cycles in a row.  $7 \times 7 = 49$ . So I do not know if I will achieve it seeing as how he had more strength and everything. But you know that the minute you dress as Devil and you have the gift and responsibility to be the Major Devil, you have to try to do it as best as possible. Maintain the tradition so that the people respect you and you respect them. And you have seen it when I have dressed as Devil. I laugh inside the mask to see how the people run and are scared.

[00:23:46.6]

RC: Yes.

[00:23:47.0]

CC: A lot of people ask me if I have some kind of covenant. I tell them no. I play for emotion. I play for emotion but I do not know, a lot of people say my appearance changes totally and they feel a magnetism and a radiance. Things that I do not feel. I only go out to play. But I have seen that I maintain a certain respect in that area. When all the young people come to play devil for the Festival of the Devils they all know who the Major Devil of Portobelo is and we all talk and play together. But if I was to go to another community I cannot be the Major Devil because that community has one already so I have to be under the rules of the Major Devil of that community. In that moment I would be a junior to him. That is each community has its own Major Devil. Because in spite of the fact that I have 42, 41 years playing and the Major of that community only has seven, he's still the Major Devil of that community and I have to respect him just the same. I have to ask him how they play devil there; what are rules and I have to stick to them. It is the same as every community having a fort and you have to follow the rules of the King and Queen (of that fort). So that is why I always try not to play in any other place, so I retain my rank. When others come here they ask me what the rules are. They submit to the style that the Congo reign has given me directly because the (rules of) devil play is what the Congo reign has outlined. We submit to whatever the Queen and King say in order to maintain the tradition.

[00:25:26.0]

RC: What is the best and most important memory that you have of Mr. Celedonio?

[00:25:32.9]

CC: Well when I was young I would see that the older people were scared of Celedonio. They were scared of him when he played devil. Even the youngest among us, we would go running away from him. Later, I noticed all of the houses here in Portobelo were right next to each other. So here in front of the church there were various houses that people would play in front of and I do not know how he came to jump on top of the roof but he went running from roof to roof. I was surprised. Everyone in village said he could fly and I did not see that, but I did see him running from roof to roof. Well of course between the houses there were alleys so he would jump from one roof and land on the other side. Yes. I witnessed that personally. One year when I went dressed as Devil to his house to play with him. He would always get dressed up in the mountain but this year he said he was getting dressed at home. He said, when you come to get me, when I give the second grunt move away from the door. He grunted the first time, grunted the second time and it was normal, but when he grunted the third time it was like a force shot out of him. Like a spring that he had pushed outward and it left me wondering, what was that? I greeted him

with my grunt and he told me, when you go out to play devil, salute the four cardinal directions - North, South, East and West -- because remember that you are imitating the man of darkness. And try to play always with your feet crossed. I did not understand what he wanted to say to me and he said, that way, you always play under the cross. That is why you always see my play like that. Here and I go like this. (Showing the step). I always try to make a cross with my body.

[00:27:30.5]

CC: Or the same thing changed like this. I go like this, or at least I am always trying to make a cross with my body and that is what he was trying to say. And I said why. He would say no. No. No. You always have to create a cross and walk, do not walk straight. Walk bent over, because then you are in a better position to create a cross with the body and that gives the game greater acceptance because when you walk straight up like that it loses respect. Since adopting that position, I have maintained a really strong respect (amongst the people). He told me not to run after anyone because the people come out to play with you. You do not have to go out looking for them. They come to play with you. If you run after someone it is because you want to mistreat them. Do not run after them. And I have seen it myself since I have taken his advice. Certain people come out to play with me. I do not have to go looking for them. They come to me and they respect me. It is something I have noticed. He would also tell me, "When you go out to play devil you can eat normally until noon but do not eat heavy foods in the evening because that can give you indigestion or congestion. And try to drink lots of liquids and drink hot eggnog." And I said, why eggnog. He said because it hydrates you. As you are sweating a lot, losing a lot of water, you have to rehydrate yourself. That is why I drink eggnog. When I go out to play my mother brings a thermos of hot eggnog and that is what I drink in order to play and to not get weak. There are a lot of people that drink water but not me. I always try to keep nutmeg in my mouth. Other people use sulfur, but I use nutmeg.

[00:29:20.4]

CC: He would tell me, "Use nutmeg so when you take your mask off it will not give you lead, that is to say, you will not be hoarse. Since you are constantly grunting you are damaging your throat and that can affect you. So when I go out to play I always have nutmeg in my mouth and thank God I have never had any problem and I have always played problem free. I also do not take my mask off in front of the public. I walk backwards into my house and I take off the mask and because of that I have always maintained the respect (of the people) because I only take my mask off in public after I have been baptized. I mean the local people all know who I am but the tourists ask, who is that? Who is that? Why does not he take it off? Not until the moment I am done do they see me. During the game I try to remain incognito with people because it is important to retain that respect. And I have noted that since I took my position as Major Devil I have maintained my respect. The people sincerely respect me as devil and I have seen that sometimes I am here in my house not dressed (as Devil). People will be playing up there (the fort.) I will go up there to watch for a while and the kids will come by while I am there. The moment I dress as Devil and go out, I see that everyone moves aside and I wonder why is that. It is because the people are scared of me. I do not know why because I do not mistreat them I just go out to play with them and they start to . . . they fear me and when the game begins they come out to play with me. But they fear me from the smallest ones to the biggest. Why? I do not know. I have acquired the respect of the group and I have maintained it, thank God. In terms of the tradition, I have maintained it.

[00:31:14.9]

CC: I also remember that Celedonio, may he rest in peace, told me one time, "You play very good but something is missing." And I asked him, "What is it?" And he said, "I'm going to tell you a secret." And I told him, "No. No. No. No. I play from emotion." And he said, "Yes but I am going to tell you a secret." And I said, "but a secret about what?" He said, "A secret prayer." And I told him, "No. No. No. No. Excuse me, I do not know about kind of prayer you want to give. No. No. I play from emotion. I do not use any prayer. I play from emotion and when I do not want to play anymore, I will quit. I do not want to make a pact with anyone." He said, "No, but . . ." I told him, "Excuse me. I respect you and everything but I play for emotion. When I do not want to play anymore I will simply retire and not have any commitment with anyone." And that is how I have kept playing. Yes. That is exactly how I have stayed, thank God.

[00:31:59.5]

RC: You have already answered part of this question but what are the differences in the way that you and Celedonio play devil?

[00:32:11.1]

CC: Yes. I also had a moment when I was playing with Celedonio and the moment of baptism would arrive, we would find ourselves together, and I would try not to find myself next to him. When we were playing on Ash Wednesday I would try to find myself as little as possible with him. When the moment of baptism would arise I would find myself with him by force.

[00:32:34.8]

CC: I had to give him reverence as Major Devil, that is we would always greet each other and everyone wanted to see what that greeting was. Because of that we would both kind of shun each other in that moment but at the time of baptism there would be him, Francisco Amoreti (Pancho) and me, and as I was the youngest I would greet Pancho and Celedonio. I would arrive and go directly to Pancho and Celedonio because the greeting went by hierarchy. Later Pancho would salute me and Celedonio would salute me and I would leave, but if I greeted them wrong they would give me the whip. Each one -- Pow! Pow! -- for not having greeted them well, so I always tried to avoid that until the moment arrived. Thank God I gained that experience, from them to know. I have told the young guys, you have to learn how to greet. It is not just playing to play. When you dress as Devil, when you arrive home you have to enter backwards. That is to say, always find a way to make (your body or movements) the cross since you are imitating the man of darkness. As you are imitating him, you should do everything (to protect yourself). Because we are looking, I do not know, we are always looking for a way to better understand the game. We would look for that with Celedonio. He only dressed (as Devil) on Ash Wednesday and likewise I only get dressed (as Devil) on Ash Wednesday. Some people have told me that is not right. Some people get dressed at midnight on Fat Tuesday, but Celedonio did not. He did not do it because he tried to remain as hidden as possible and his masks were small.

[00:34:19.4]

RC: Uh huh. Better.

[00:34:20.7]

CC: And they were made of “totumo” (a kind of squash) and he stayed with his small traditional masks, thank God.

[00:34:33.4]

RC: Tell me your memories about the last time that Celedonio dressed as Devil.

[00:34:43.1]

CC: Ok. Well the last time that he played with us was for a Festival of the Devils there in Fort San Jeronimo. They did an homage to him. I do not remember if it was the first year that I played. I do not remember if it was the first. I do not know if it was the first or second year that we played together, that we were playing and he became emotional. He was so emotional in that moment to see all of his colleagues that had come from all around to play with him and when the group from Portobelo entered to play with him it was so emotional for him that he began to cry. He cried. The man cried. His son, brother-in-law and brother arrived to grab him and they told him, Cele, calm down. It was really strong, the emotion that he felt. The next year we played again and he was a judge. He judged the dance and cross of the devil and the young people who were playing did not know what he was judging them on so he explained, it is not about the mask. It is the dance and the cross. The kids did not know. So we suggested they did not give out prizes because that was going to damage the essence of the game. It is better not to give out first, second or third prize. It is better that it just be about participation. So this year, he was playing, I mean he was a juror and he was very excited. I was outside. I was not dressed (as Devil). I was not dressed and they sent me in to look for him. He was totally possessed by the game. In plain clothes, totally possessed. Transformed. You saw the transformation in his face. And they called me, hey, you, careful. They said since you are replacing Celedonio you go and play with him. When I arrived and saw him I asked myself, “What happened to Celedonio?” He did not answer me. Cele! I saw that he heard me but he did not answer. Yes the man was totally possessed in that moment and we played together in plain clothes. In plain clothes. I was in shorts, like this with, with black. I had an undershirt, a shirt. I had on socks and black sneakers and we both started to play. And that was a sight. Him in his shirt and I (Cannot hear) because I had already played. I had opened the stage for later. That was a sight when we both had to get up on the platform to play in plain clothes. The two of us playing close like the distance from you (Renee) to you (Roni). Me in plain clothes and him in plain clothes but we kept up the grunts and behaving as Devils. And there came the moment when the encounter was so strong that -- he had taught me some things, some steps -- I had to use them with him directly and I do remember what he said to me. “Hot water.” I said to him, “Hot water.” Hot water. Hot water. Hot water in the Congo culture, excuse me, devil culture, means I am angry. I am mad. He ended by telling me that he was mad. I am hot! So it was a challenge between us. We looked at each other intensely and when the pressure lessened he said to me, “You are ready to replace me.” I did not think that was what was going to happen but it is what he wanted -- to shed himself of his power and transmit it to me, but I do not play with secrets. A lot of people cried that day. I played and I lived it, but I did not feel it in that moment and he left. They carried him to his house and after a while, like an hour, he came back more relaxed and he resumed judging and he did not play anymore. After that he did not play anymore. Occasionally he would do a short presentation on Ash Wednesday with his sons and he had leave but he did not keep up the tradition of playing every year because he had retired, like if I retire next year.

[00:39:32.5]

CC: And later I, perhaps, still want to play for three more years I will go out and play but I will not have the position of the Major Devil. Because I will have retired so there will be someone else playing as the Major Devil and I will have to greet him but I could not get baptized. I would have to leave because I am retired and that is exactly what he (Celedonio) did. When he arrived, he got emotional. He says, I want to play. He went out. He greeted me and he left. That is a part of the tradition that are always that way and have remained.

[00:40:03.5]

RC: What is the legacy that Mr. Celedonio has left the Congo tradition of Portobelo and generally to the village of Portobelo?

[00:40:22.8]

CC: Celedonio as . . . His legacy was to keep up the devil tradition. To participate in it directly. I at least, we, play it as simply as possible. He was the kind of person, as I mentioned to you before, when he went out (as Devil) he imprinted that seal of respect on you. The whole world respected him. They went running. And as a citizen of the village he was a marvelous person. What is more, he was a Deacon in the Catholic Church and worked with the Boy Scouts. He was always trying to instill it in the kids. On Sundays you could always find him at the Church as a Deacon and outside of that he was a person always on the move. You never saw him sitting around. He was always active. He was a very admired person in the village. He was respectful and was always respect by the people. They took care of him. They respected him. We, the Devils during that time, all knew who he was. So we would all give him respect whenever we would see him coming. He always said to me, "Carlos, when you play devil, as I have told you, do not waiver."

[00:42:13.6]

CC: Enjoy it. Play with it. Look and see what you are doing. That is what I do. I enjoy it. I live it. I play with it. That is what I always try to do. That they maintain their traditions.

[00:42:27.8]

CC: Those of us that have had the chance to travel have seen that tradition is tradition and culture is culture and it is what enriches a village. If they have the opportunity to travel they are going to realize when they are abroad the richness that their village has. And they will see later that no one can buy that from them once they maintain their idiosyncrasies and know where they come from. That is what I always tell the young people. At least my son, my son plays devil. What is more he has set to replace me as Major Devil and my grandson plays devil too. I never thought that they would follow in my steps but I see them doing it. So my son also dances Congo. He beats me at dancing Congo. My daughter dances Congo. That is why I always say to the young people, look at where you were born -- where you are from. Regardless of if you grow up one day to be Mr. or Mrs. Somebody. Keep your roots because that is what makes you, you, and it identifies you. Wherever you are, you are who you are. You came from Portobelo. You live it firsthand and . . . That is what I always tell the young people. I always tell them to maintain the tradition. Well I have seen that my kids maintain it and the majority of the young people in the village maintain it and, as I told you earlier, in Portobelo everyone dances Congo.

[00:44:00.5]

CC: You see that a lot of people will tell you, no. That they do not dance (Congo). Even the little girls you will see dancing. You see them when carnival is happening, the little kids with their tin can or little drums playing and singing. Everybody dances. It is in the blood and I would like to see it continue. What I try to tell the young people now is to try and save the Congo dialect, which is very difficult. I am, and I still keep a few Congo words, but if they cannot rescue it -- because the majority of it has been lost -- they can try to speak backwards. At least say, Good morning, if it is night. If it is night time, then say Good morning or say it is raining, if it is sunny. If the moon is out, say the sun is out, that is, look for a way . . . if you have to go out, say enter. Look for the way so that they people still . . . that is, try to keep it up so that something is maintained. But do not kill the Congo tradition because it is a rich one. Then when I see the guys in the street with their ropes and everything else and collecting (money), I have told them, look it is not prohibited to collect money but it is not just doing it to do it. If you are going to charge me for passing by with a car, that has a reason. It is not just charging to charge, it is that I am coming onto your land and I have to pay a tax for that. But to charge me for that you have to entertain me so that I feel placated with something. They say, ohhh. I tell them, it is just not charging for no reason. You see a lot of young people putting on their rope and I see them with their little cans and they start to dance and it is for that reason. Because they know they have to entertain so the people get excited. And you will see a lot of them afterwards settling accounts -- I earned 15 or 20 dollars -- and that is because the tourists already know after being detained in Pilon to here that they are going to be a lot of Congos so they come with the change ready to donate. They know that from Pilon all the way to Palenque they are going to find more than 20 collection points. But there are tourists that do not know why and you have to explain how it is to them, including police that have come and I have told them, "No. No. No. No." I start explaining to the police and they are like, they did not know. I tell them it is a tradition when carnival arrives in the villages. Then there is a relationship there. Those are the things that I tell the young people. And as I say, I was born in this house.

[00:46:45.8]

CC: And at the age that I am at now, I have seen a lot of what is Congo. Some friends from back in the day who dressed Congo called Congo Fox and Congo Margay, the came to my grandmother and said, "Hey Florentina. You want us to help you round up the hens?" And my grandmother said, "No. No. No. I do not need help." And my grandmother gathered up the hens and when she counted them one or two were missing. They had taken that as a tax for helping her round up the hens even though she did not want their help. Afterwards when she said, "Hey! They robbed me." They said, "No. We needed them for the fort. We helped you round up the hens so we had to collect a tax." That ended up being her donation to the Fort. Also, I remember one time my grandmother bought an iguana from a Congo, let's say it was last year. So this year the Congo comes back and says to her, "Pay me for my stick hen." Because people call an iguana a stick hen. "I sold you my stick hen yesterday. No, I sold it to you." And he will keep talking because that is the game and the tradition. Those are things that people maintain and so the people that are familiar with the tradition they give up their 50 cents or whatever and everything is cool. And that is how they maintain the tradition and the game. And I tell the young people if they maintain the tradition, it will go on for a while more. And I think it is going to be maintained because, I do not know, this village has something special. I do not know.

[00:48:10.8]

CC: But there are moments when I have had to . . . One time here they celebrated the Passions of Christ live and I had to play Jesus Christ. Me being the Devil and they put a wig and everything else on me and when I did the invocation that said, "ELHI ELHI LLAMHA SABATANI, that is, My God. My God why have you abandoned me?" And I supposedly expired. A lot of people saw it and there were pictures that show that the sky darkened. The whole space got dark. That is what I say that they are something other wordly here. What is it? I do not know. There is something special here. I think, perhaps, it is because they sacrificed so many people and so many black slaves died here that there is something here. This land has maintained something. You know. Of course. Well this is what I think, that the tradition, as I see the game, I do not think it will disappear. If that is it then I think the tradition will always continue and will not get lost. You see them do all the modern dances and stuff but Congo is Congo.

[00:49:28.0]

RC: So this question is similar to the other but a little more open ended.

[00:49:31.6]

CC: Ok. Go ahead.

[00:49:33.2]

RC: The last question -- 100 years in the future when scholars are studying the Congo tradition in Portobelo, what are the most important things that they should know?

[00:49:49.0]

CC: Ok. Where it was born and why it is celebrated. So that they know exactly, where the Congo tradition was born and why it is celebrated. It is what I think they should know so they can understand it. Because if they do not know where it is from they will be celebrating something they do not know, but if they know where it is from, they will understand why it is celebrated. That should be the . . . and that is what I always tell the young people. Remember where you come from. You can become the President but remember where you are from. So that is what I always tell the young people. I have tried to instill that in them. What is more is that you have seen that when they are dancing Congo I come and I dance Congo and I do not care anything about me being the Mayor. I dance Congo all the same. I take off my shoes and I dance Congo. That is who I am, it does not make me any different. I stay the same. I am still the same Carlos Chavarria. I am still the Mayor Devil. I am still the Mayor. I am still the same. You have to enjoy the moment. So that is what I ask of the young people that they stay that way, independent of whatever they are. The people that you see around here, when carnival arrives they say no, no, no, but when carnival arrives they transform themselves so much that you do not even believe it is them. For example, look at Yaneka. Yaneka, when you least expect it. Look at the other guy, Ariel. You see him normal but when he dresses as Congo his appearance changes totally. That is what happens. Even though there are a lot of young people that do not like to dress as Congo but they still dance. Right? Others do not want to have their faces painted but they still dance. That is what happens. That is the way it is.

[00:51:30.7]

RC: Perfect. Thanks so much!

[00:51:33.1]

CC: At your service, always.

[00:51:33.4]