

[00:00:00.3]

Renee Alexander Craft: Tell me, what is your name?

[00:00:04.9]

Simona Esquina: My name in Congo?

[00:00:06.1]

RC: You have a Congo name?

[00:00:07.8]

SE: Yes.

[00:00:08.6]

RC: Yes.

[00:00:08.9]

SE: Uh huh. Revellín (an insect similar to a cricket).

[00:00:11.5]

RC: Oh! Because you sing . . .

[00:00:13.7]

SE: Revellín.

[00:00:18.4]

RC: Yes. Wonderful. And . . . um?

[00:00:20.8]

SE: Yes. Do you want to know what a Revellín is?

[00:00:22.7]

RC: The lead singer, right?

[00:00:24.2]

SE: No. Mi Congo name is Revellín. I sing out front.

[00:00:27.0]

RC: Why?

[00:00:28.2]

SE: Because there's an insect like a cricket that sings and sings and sings. It's called a Revellín. It's an insect that looks like a cricket.

[00:00:29.0]

RC: Yes?

[00:00:39.7]

SE: It sings and sings all day and doesn't get tired. That's why they named me Revellin.

[00:00:46.9]

RC: Oh! How great.

[00:00:48.1]

SE: Because all day it sings.

[00:00:50.0]

RC: Yes.

[00:00:51.0]

SE: Yes. It's an insect. Yes.

[00:00:53.4]

RC: That's? It's? What type of insect is it? It's . . .

[00:00:57.2]

SE: Yes. It's similar to a cricket. It's like a cricket.

[00:01:00.2]

RC: Yes?

[00:01:02.3]

SE: It's like a cricket but they call it Revellin.

[00:01:06.4]

RC: When were you born?

[00:01:08.7]

SE: When was I born?

[00:01:09.7]

RC: Yes.

[00:01:10.1]

SE: The April 21, 1931.

[00:01:16.7]

RC: 1931.

[00:01:17.7]

SE: April 21, 1931.

[00:01:19.7]

RC: Yes? My mother, the 2nd of October 1932. Yes. It's close.

[00:01:28.8]

SE: It's close. She's about to be 73.

[00:01:31.0]

RC: Uh huh.

[00:01:31.7]

SE: I was in '31.

[00:01:36.0]

RC: Where were your parents born? In Portobelo also?

[00:01:39.0]

SE: My Parents? Here.

[00:01:40.8]

RC: And you too?

[00:01:41.8]

SE: Yes. I was also born here. We're all native to here.

[00:01:49.9]

RC: Yes! How great. How long have you played Congo?

[00:01:54.4]

SE: Every since I was a little girl I liked Congo.

[00:01:59.3]

RC: But how long have you been playing in total?

[00:02:03.3]

SE: Well look, every since I was a little girl I liked Congo but when I was seven years old, I went to Panama (the capitol) to study. I came back when I was 22 years old and ever since I came back from Panama I continued playing Congo.

[00:02:23.3]

RC: Yeah?

[00:02:24.4]

SE: Yes because I like Congo.

[00:02:28.5]

RC: What is your first childhood memory of the Congos?

[00:02:33.0]

SE: It's because of my father. All of my life from the time I peeled opened my eyes he was Juan de Dios of the Congos. He was the King of the Congos.

[00:02:43.0]

RC: Your father?

[00:02:43.7]

SE: My father. He was, ever since I peeled opened my eyes, Juan de Dios of the Congos. He was the King of the Congos. His Congo name was Juan de Dios but his birth name was Vicente Esquina.

[00:03:02.9]

RC: Vicente?

[00:03:03.5]

SE: Esquina. That was my father's name.

[00:03:09.0]

RC: And what is the first memory of your father as a Congo?

[00:03:12.9]

SE: When I would see him. I was a little girl.

[00:03:15.7]

RC: Yes?

[00:03:12.9]

SE: I would see him dress as a Congo with his clothes and rope, lots of banana leaves tied on.

[00:03:27.0]

RC: Yes. Yes.

[00:03:27.4]

SE: Yes. His crown and face painted blue-black.

[00:03:33.6]

RC: Uh huh! Blue black?

[00:03:35.0]

SE: Blue. The blue, when you put it on, then you put on black circles and your red lips.

[00:03:39.8]

RC: Is that the same thing as, how do you say, charcoal?

[00:03:43.8]

SE: He would use charcoal, yes. But first he would put on the blue that was use for clothes.

[00:03:48.0]

Gustavo Esquina: With indigo.

[00:03:48.8]

RC: With indigo?

[00:03:49.3]

SE: With indigo, yes.

[00:03:50.5]

RC: It's the same as . . . ?

[00:03:51.0]

GE: As what they use to wash (clothes) with.

[00:03:52.2]

RC: Uh huh! I can use it with the whites, right?

[00:03:55.0]

SE: Yes. What they use to wash with. He would get a little bit of water. He would paint his whole face with that, then he would put on black circles with charcoal. I would watch him as a child.

[00:04:06.4]

RC: Yes?

[00:04:07.3]

SE: Yes.

[00:04:08.0]

RC: What did you feel or think when you would see him dress Congo?

[00:04:16.4]

SE: When I would see him painting his face I would ask him, daddy where are you going?

[00:04:20.2]

RC: Yes!

[00:04:20.7]

SE: He would say, daughter I'm going to the Congo. I'm going to the Congo because I'm Juan de Dios (the King).

[00:04:25.6]

RC: Yes.

[00:04:26.0]

SE: And I have to be there together with my women.

[00:04:28.3]

RC: Uh huh! How wonderful!

[00:04:29.8]

SE: So then as a child I would go. I would see them dancing Congo and that's how I began. I enjoyed it.

[00:04:38.8]

RC: Yes.

[00:04:39.7]

SE: I liked the Congo dance and that's how I began. When I was a little girl I got a bunch of kids together with cans and we made a Congo (dance). And the drums were the cans. The cans were the drums.

[00:04:53.0]

RC: Yes.

[00:04:53.3]

SE: Little kids and we began to make Congo (dances).

[00:04:59.0]

RC: And among all the memory of the Congo, which is your favorite?

[00:05:07.2]

SE: My best memory was when . . . My mother never danced Congo. Never. But one time, one time we were at a Congo (dance), and other groups of Congos had come from outside. From Cacique. From Garrote. Groups had come. When all of a sudden, I'm with my mother and all of a sudden I see that my mother lets go of me and she enters in the ring to dance Congo. Until the day I die, that's my best memory.

[00:05:40.5]

RC: Yeah?

[00:05:40.8]

SE: I saw my mother dancing Congo and I said, hey! I have never seen my mother dancing Congo and it made me so happy to see her dancing Congo. And I never saw her dance Congo again. She never danced Congo again.

[00:05:53.3]

RC: Yeah? And why not?

[00:05:55.7]

SE: I don't know! She didn't want to dance again. That was the first time that she danced and I never saw her dance Congo again.

[00:06:02.7]

RC: Oh wow!

[00:06:03.5]

SE: Congo.

[00:06:04.0]

RC: How old is she now?

[00:06:06.4]

SE: My mother's been dead for 10 years.

[00:06:09.0]

RC: Ok. And how old were you then?

[00:06:15.0]

SE: Yes. I was about six years old or so.

[00:06:19.5]

RC: Yes!

[00:06:19.9]

SE: When that happened, yes.

[00:06:20.5]

RC: You were a little girl then!

[00:06:21.0]

SE: Yes. Yes. I was a little girl. Yes.

[00:06:23.6]

RC: How great. What does it mean to you . . .

[00:06:30.5]

GE: The (Congo) game.

[00:06:31.4]

RC: The (Congo) game. Thanks.

[00:06:33.2]

SE: The game?

[00:06:33.8]

RC: Uh huh.

[00:06:36.1]

SE: The Congo game means a lot in what is the history of the black Africans and the Spanish, no? With the Spanish because that is where the Congo came from. Yes. The game came from the Spanish and the Black Africans.

[00:07:04.8]

RC: What do you think it means in the life of Portobelo?

[00:07:09.7]

SE: It means a lot because it's a part of the history. It's the history of Portobelo and when tourists come, they understand the reason behind the Congo and Portobelo has this boom (in popularity) of the Congo.

[00:07:34.0]

RC: And do you know anything about how the tradition started?

[00:07:40.0]

SE: How did it begin?

[00:07:41.0]

RC: Uh huh.

[00:07:42.0]

SE: The tradition?

[00:07:43.0]

RC: Uh huh.

[00:07:44.1]

SE: Well I can't know how it started because that is . . . I know the history that my parents told me years ago, that is. And from the books that I've read. It started with the Spanish and the Africans. It was like a joke that the Africans were making on the Spanish. Because they treated them so badly, they (the Congos) would dress up like that. They costumed themselves, making fun of the Spanish for the mistreatment that they received.

[00:08:23.9]

RC: And how has it changed? Is it ok? How has the Congo game changed in your lifetime.

[00:08:33.5]

SE: Yes. It has changed?

[00:08:33.6]

GE: How has the Congo game changed in your lifetime?

[00:08:35.0]

RC: Uh huh.

[00:08:35.6]

SE: It's changed a lot.

[00:08:37.5]

RC: How?

[00:08:38.4]

SE: Because back when my father, who was the oldest Congo, would play, and certainly his (GE's) grandfather Zacarias Esquina -- that's what his grandfather was called. He was my father's brother. They played a different way. They had a responsibility to the Congo women. To the Congo women. They had a big responsibility to the Congo women. They went from house to house picking up the women for the Congo. And the same way when the Congo ended, they took each woman back to the house where they had picked her up. The King had a responsibility to the Congo women. Wherever he went, he would take them and he would drop them off. But not today. Today the King doesn't have, he doesn't take responsibility for the Congo women. There isn't that responsibility that they Congos had before. Today no. The King is where he is. The Queen is where she is and the Congos are where they are. There's no formal organization. Because before, the King and the Queen -- named Merced -- would go out together. They organized themselves and they worked together to take care of the Congos, taking care of the Congo women and the palace.

[00:10:21.6]

RC: Wow.

[00:10:22.6]

SE: But not today. There's not that responsibility nor that seriousness. Yes. I've seen it very different from the way my father played to the way it's played now. You know.

[00:10:36.7]

RC: And why did it change? Why? What do you think of that? And when?

[00:10:43.2]

SE: It's been years already since it changed.

[00:10:45.8]

RC: Yes?

[00:10:46.5]

SE: The Congo tradition changed years ago. Now is when it's again, forming again and being revived because the Congo (tradition) was being lost. Now with the arrival of tourism the Congo (tradition) is being revived. Yes because the tradition was being lost.

[00:11:10.4]

RC: Ok. Are there things that you miss about the Congo game like the treatment of the Congos by the King? What other kinds of things do you miss?

[00:11:34.2]

SE: Well there's the Congo King. There's the Queen. There used to be, there's the Princess. The Princess is the girl that accompanies the Queen.

[00:11:45.2]

RC: The Princess?

[00:11:46.2]

SE: The Princess. She's younger than the Queen. She's always at the foot of the Queen. In case the Queen cannot, the princess takes her place.

[00:12:02.1]

RC: There's no princess now?

[00:12:04.2]

SE: Huh?

[00:12:04.7]

RC: There is no princess?

[00:12:05.3]

SE: Now they don't name a princess.

[00:12:08.0]

RC: No?

[00:12:08.6]

SE: Now they don't use a princess. Just a Queen and a King.

[00:12:11.5]

RC: Ok.

[00:12:12.1]

SE: Now . . .

[00:12:12.5]

RC: Ok. When did they lose that part of the tradition?

[00:12:16.6]

SE: Awhile ago. They lost that part of the tradition awhile ago.

[00:12:20.3]

RC: More than 10 years ago.

[00:12:21.6]

SE: No. No. No.

[00:12:22.8]

RC: Less?

[00:12:23.1]

SE: Yes. Yes. Well a little more or less. Maybe 10 years ago or so the tradition of the Princess was lost. Now they don't use a Princess. Just like the Congos always had someone that would guard the money. They called that person Mama Guardian. She would guard the money that the Congos made in what we call going to take a collection. The people give money. Then there was someone who took responsibility to guard the money and they called that person Mama Guardian.

[00:13:12.9]

RC: But there's no (Mama Guarda) from around the same time that there's no princess? More or less?

[00:13:19.0]

SE: That's over now. Now who we have someone like a Mama Guarda who we have a lot of faith in because she's a serious person. Her name is Mrs. Mata. Juana de Mata.

[00:13:31.8]

RC: Yes. Yes.

[00:13:33.0]

SE: We give her the money and she guards it and then turns it in to us.

[00:13:36.6]

RC: Ok.

[00:13:37.3]

SE: Yes. But the Congo (tradition) has always had a King, a Queen, a Princess and a Mama Guarda.

[00:13:54.4]

RC: What other characters have changed?

[00:14:01.0]

SE: Yes. A lot of them have changed.

[00:14:03.0]

RC: Yes?

[00:14:04.5]

SE: What other characters are there in Congo? Wait a second.

[00:14:09.9]

GE: The Little Bird? (The Messenger)

[00:14:11.0]

SE: Yes! The Little Bird. The Little Bird. He's the one that keeps abreast of everything that's going on in the Congo. When we're going out on a trip, The Little Bird is the one that goes out with his whistle to advise everyone and to take a tour of the other palace.

[00:14:35.2]

RC: Ah! Yes? And there are other forts in Portobelo?

[00:14:40.4]

SE: Yes. Other palaces inside Portobelo or outside of Portobelo.

[00:14:45.0]

RC: Ok.

[00:14:45.4]

SE: Yes. The Little Bird goes out to tour those palaces. All of the palaces The Little Bird goes out to tour to then later advise us as to the grouping of the (other) Congos. That palace is unoccupied, let's go there and rob it.

[00:15:00.5]

RC: Uh huh!

[00:15:01.4]

SE: So we would go there and we would rob their palace. We would go there and rob them. When they finally realized we would already have been in their palace. And that's The Little Bird's job.

[00:15:11.2]

RC: Ok.

[00:15:11.8]

SE: To go out touring and advise the King and the Queen about everything that is happening.

[00:15:17.6]

RC: Wow. And this year I've seen two palaces but before were there always two or more, or just one?

[00:15:27.6]

SE: Before there was just one palace. All my life, just one.

[00:15:31.0]

RC: Ok.

[00:15:31.8]

SE: Just one. Now there are like two or three palaces because the Congos are having, like a rivalry.

[00:15:41.2]

RC: Ok.

[00:15:42.5]

SE: But before forever there was only one palace in the village.

[00:15:48.0]

RC: And it's also common in other towns to only have one fort?

[00:15:53.3]

SE: Yes sir. Only one palace.

[00:15:56.0]

RC: So this was the first year that there were two?

[00:16:00.2]

SE: Yes. This year. But a long time ago there was another palace around there. Up there. In the Campaña neighborhood. That was years ago and there wasn't another one. Until now, this year, that there are two.

[00:16:13.0]

RC: And in your opinion what kinds of changes are there in the tradition -- the good and the bad?

[00:16:24.9]

SE: Look the Congos have always had a group of women. These women committed themselves to party with the King and Queen until Carnival was over. Those that were front singers, sang and the others answered them (call and response) but they were always willing to be inside the palace. But not nowadays.

[00:16:57.1]

RC: What happens now?

[00:17:01.0]

SE: Today whoever wants to go to the Congo goes . . .

[00:17:03.2]

RC: Ok.

[00:17:03.8]

SE: It's not like before when the Congos committed themselves to it.

[00:17:06.6]

RC: Yes.

[00:17:07.5]

SE: If they want to go, they go. If they don't, they don't. They come for awhile, sing if they feel like it and from there go off somewhere. When they're tired of doing whatever they were doing they come back and that's how it goes. But in reality Congo shouldn't be like that. Congo is a commitment.

[00:17:25.5]

RC: Yes.

[00:17:26.0]

SE: In the old days Congo was a commitment.

[00:17:35.2]

RC: Has it also changed in respect to the Congos and the Devils?

[00:17:46.0]

SE: That's also changed a lot.

[00:17:47.5]

RC: Really? How?

[00:17:50.8]

SE: The game between the Devils and the Congos has changed a lot. Because look, before the Devil played on Ash Wednesday only.

[00:18:08.3]

RC: Uh huh. Only on Ash Wednesday.

[00:18:09.8]

SE: Ash Wednesday. Before you didn't see the Devil all throughout Carnival. You didn't see the Devil. Now what happens? From the moment the Congos begin, the Devils are out playing with the Congos and it shouldn't be that way. The Devil should just be for Ash Wednesday. That's it. So the Devil can play with the Congos that want to play. You understand? That's the commitment that the Devil has. But now the Devils is out everyday. Everyday they're playing Devil. The Devils were just out on Wednesday. That's it. Until six in the evening. At six in the evening the Devil would retire to his house and everyone went to their homes. The Devil played with the Congos and Angels. When the Angel tied up (the Devil), the last Angel tied up (the Devil), that's where it ended. At six pm. And after that they didn't keep going. Because the next day was Lent.

[00:19:01.4]

GE: Do you think that costume, the way of dressing and making the mask and all that has changed also?

[00:19:06.5]

SE: Well the masks today are exaggerated. The masks today are exaggerated. Before the costume was red. You would never see a black devil, nor any other color. Red costume.

[00:19:19.9]

RC: Just red?

[00:19:20.5]

SE: Just red. You didn't see a black outfit.

[00:19:23.8]

GE: The only black one was the Major Devil?

[00:19:25.3]

SE: Exactly. To distinguish himself.

[00:19:27.8]

RC: The only black one was the Major (Devil)?

[00:19:29.8]

SE: Black. The Major (Devil). All the rest were red. But now you see them of all colors. And the masks are extravagant. The masks are so extravagant that they choke themselves putting them on. Please. So the Devil. Before, the Devil played with the Congo men and women, he played in such a way that he didn't go around giving blows. The devil didn't hit so much. The Devil played with the Congos. If a Congo woman threw herself to the ground, a Congo, the Devil would do his feet like this and he did like that and he played. It was a game the Devil played with the Congos. But not now. The moment the Devil arrives it's whip, whip, whip, whip. That's not how you play Devil. Please. It's a game. But now the Devil doesn't play. No, sir. The Devil doesn't play. Now from the moment they arrive it's whipping. They're so enraged as if they carry some hate inside for that person, they give it to them so. No. It's not like that. They don't know how to play Devil. The truth is that they don't know. Ask Celedonio.

[00:20:41.4]

RC: Yes.

[00:20:41.8]

SE: That man knows how to play Devil. He doesn't go beating people.

[00:20:46.0]

RC: Yes he tells me the same thing. He says that before the game of the Devil was something much more than a dance.

[00:20:52.0]

SE: Yes. He knows. Yes. Yes. The Devil used to dance and play with his Congo and he danced but not now. Now they're at it from the moment they come out. No. No. It's not like that. I get so mad on Ash Wednesday when I see those young guys working themselves into a rage with all that hitting. No. The Devil should play with the Congo men and women. It's about playing. It's a game. They should work themselves up with hitting, hitting and hitting.

[00:21:23.8]

GE: What's the meaning of the Devil inside of the Congo tradition?

[00:21:32.2]

SE: Well the game of Devils with the Congos is -- as already it's closing down the Congo -- and, and. Well I've forgotten that part. I know it but I've forgotten it. I'll tell you later!

[00:21:53.6]

GE: You've forgotten it?

[00:21:54.9]

SE: I've forgotten. I know it but I've forgotten. I know it but I've forgotten. I'll tell you later.

[00:21:58.2]

RC: Ok. Ok.

[00:21:59.0]

SE: I don't know what's going on with me. I don't know.

[00:22:03.9]

RC: And when, more or less, did the Devil change for the worse?

[00:22:12.8]

SE: Years ago, honey. Years ago.

[00:22:15.7]

RC: Really?

[00:22:16.5]

SE: It's been like this for years. Look, you know what the Devils do now? They even put razor blades on the end of their whips.

[00:22:25.0]

RC: Really?!?

[00:22:25.7]

SE: Yes sir. Over there in Nombre de Dios they've had to take the whips away from the Devils because they put razorblades on the tip and it cuts people. And it (the game) isn't like that. That's not the tradition. That's not the game.

[00:22:38.6]

RC: No. No it's not. A Gillete? For real?

[00:22:40.8]

SE: Yes. They tie little razor blades to the whips.

[00:22:43.5]

RC: How awful!

[00:22:49.8]

SE: Yes, sir. And it's just to cut people. No.

[00:22:46.6]

RC: Is that new in Nombre de Dios?

[00:22:49.0]

SE: Yes. It's been like this for a while but it's over now because the Queen took it upon herself to check all the devils' whips. So now you have to check all of the whips of the devils. That's why I'm saying that everything has changed. Now they've got the bad heart to put razor blades on the ends of their whips to cut people.

[00:23:07.0]

RC: Wow. That's not the game.

[00:23:08.1]

SE: No. No. No. No. The tradition is being lost. It's being lost because of that and that's bad.

[00:23:15.5]

RC: In your opinion, what's caused these changes?

[00:23:21.6]

SE: Truthfully, I don't know what has caused these changes. Perhaps it's the civilization. I say that it's the civilization that has these changes now that everything is changing.

[00:23:31.5]

RC: Yes.

[00:23:32.3]

SE: Yes. Because now they don't play for tradition but just to play.

[00:23:49.0]

GE: Yes there are a lot of people that don't even know what they're playing they just play to play because they see others playing.

[00:23:53.0]

SE: That's what I'm telling you. They play to play, nothing more but they don't know the rules of the game of the Devil. That's all. And they get in it just because they see others playing but not because they're familiar. That's why I would say that here in Portobelo when Carnival comes they should name a Queen that has knowledge of what the Congo game is. They should have a meeting with everyone that comes to play Devil. A forceful meeting. They should talk to them about how you play Devil; how the tradition is here in Portobelo.

[00:24:32.0]

GE: That is give them, like, a lecture?

[00:24:33.8]

SE; Exactly and not just a few lectures because devils come from outside to play here and perhaps the young guys from here have more familiarity with the game of the Devil but the ones that come from outside -- they come from Pilon, Cativa, Colon -- and as they don't know (the tradition) they come here to damage it.

[00:24:51.7]

RC: And in Portobelo, Carnival and Congo Season mean the same? They are one in the same?

[00:25:02.2]

SE: Carnival and what?

[00:25:03.8]

RC: Carnival and Congo Season. They're the same or different things?

[00:25:07.4]

SE: Yes. Yes. Yes. No, they're the same. The same. Carnival and Congo (season) are the same.

[00:25:13.7]

RC: In what month of the year do you start to prepare your costume, your polleras (skirt) and everything?

[00:25:25.2]

SE: Well here on January 20th, which is the day of St. Sebastian, that's the day that they raise the Congo flag. The Congo flag is black and white. That's the Congo flag and that's the day they raise the flag. The day of St. Sebastian. From that day, Carnival starts. That's the day that Carnival starts and you have to have your skirts ready. You should already have your costume. That's the day they raise the flag and they start to have Congos every Saturday and Sunday. Every Saturday and Sunday.

[00:26:07.5]

RC: What is the meaning of the day of St. Sebastian and why that day and not another?

[00:26:17.5]

SE: Well on the calendar that's the day of St. Sebastian, he's a saint. Saint Sebastian. But in truth I've never had the curiosity to investigate why is that the day they raise the flag. I haven't been curious but I'll be curious now, in order to tell you.

[00:26:39.0]

RC: Ok. Do you think I can ask Father Venancio? Is that his name?

[00:26:47.0]

GE: Venancio.

[00:26:47.5]

RC: Venancio. Father Venancio.

[00:26:48.2]

SE: Venancio.

[00:26:50.5]

SE: Yes ask to find out the reason that that's the day that they raise the Congo flag all over.

[00:26:56.2]

RC: Yes and it's the same day everywhere?

[00:26:58.2]

SE: Yes. The day of St. Sebastian. Yes.

[00:27:04.6]

RC: And this year -- I don't know if it's the same each year -- but the flag was . . .

[00:27:21.1]

SE: Yes. Yes. Yes.

[00:27:21.8]

RC: Yes? The 19th.

[00:27:23.9]

SE: The 19th. Yes. Here they raised it, all over they raised it on the 19th.

[00:27:27.2]

RC: And why the 19th and not the 20th or some other day?

[00:27:32.1]

SE: Because the day of St. Sebastian, the 20th, is the day they raise (the flag), but they raise it at midnight on the day before, that is, on the eve of the morning of the 20th.

[00:27:41.2]

RC: At 12 at night?

[00:27:43.0]

SE: Yes on the eve of the 20th.

[00:27:48.2]

RC: And do you make your own skirt and all your other stuff? Yes?

[00:27:53.8]

SE: Yes.

[00:27:55.8]

RC: And how long can you use it for?

[00:28:01.0]

SE: Well as long as they're good you can keep using them. I have a few because you change them, you know?

[00:28:05.5]

RC: Yes. Yes. Yes.

[00:28:06.4]

SE: You always change skirts.

[00:28:07.8]

RC: How many skirts do you have?

[00:28:09.0]

SE: Now I have five or six outside of the ones that I lost which have been like three.

[00:28:14.0]

RC: Yes.

[00:28:14.3]

SE: Yes.

[00:28:17.0]

GE: How many events do the Congos participate inside and outside of the community each year?

[00:28:22.8]

SE: (Exclamation)

[00:28:24.6]

GE: That depends?

[00:28:25.4]

SE: Yes. It depends. Yes.

[00:28:28.4]

RC: Does it change each year?

[00:28:30.5]

SE: It depends because there have been so many, there are so many, some times there are so many events that . . .

[00:28:40.0]

GE: There's not enough of you all?

[00:28:41.0]

SE: Yes, there's not enough of us. There are years when there are so many events. Last year there were a lot of events. There were so many last year.

[00:28:52.1]

RC: Here in town and outside of town also?

[00:28:54.2]

SE: Yes. In town and out of town. A lot of trips. Look, we've gone all the way to Costa Rica. We were doing Congo presentations.

[00:29:01.0]

RC: Yes?

[00:29:01.5]

SE: In Costa Rica last year.

[00:29:03.8]

RC: In what part of Costa Rica?

[00:29:06.0]

SE: There in capital of Costa Rica and in San Juan.

[00:29:09.0]

RC: Yes? Ok.

[00:29:11.5]

SE: Yes and we were in various parts. Various parts. In the University of Costa Rica.

[00:29:25.2]

GE: How do you think the community perceived the Congo tradition? And the tourists also? How do you believe they perceive it?

[00:29:34.0]

SE: Well I believe that they perceive it well. Very well because when it's Congo season so many people come. A lot of people come to see the Congos. The tourists also. The tourists like it. So much so that we always have a lot of presentations when the cruise ships come. It's what they ask for. The Congo.

[00:30:03.0]

GE: How do you think that the tradition is changing in respect to tourism?

[00:30:10.2]

SE: Well tourism is coming more into Portobelo now.

[00:30:14.0]

GE: Is it helping rescue the tradition a little?

[00:30:16.8]

SE: Yes. It's helping rescue the tradition. Yes.

[00:30:20.0]

RC: Yes? How?

[00:30:22.8]

SE: Because at least when tourism comes, they ask for Congo. We present Congo to them and they see it and they dance Congo also -- in their way -- but they dance and they enjoy themselves.

[00:30:36.2]

RC: Yes.

[00:30:36.6]

SE: Yes. In their way.

[00:30:37.5]

RC: Yes.

[00:30:38.4]

GE: Like Renee.

[00:30:39.0]

SE: Yes. No Renee is a Congo woman. Renee is a Congo woman now because she knows the dance.

[00:30:45.7]

RC: (Laughs) Thanks!

[00:30:46.4]

SE: Yes. And so much so that they carry their pictures outside of the country so that Congo is even abroad. The Congo is happening and it has a new boom (in popularity). Yes. That's how it is.

[00:31:03.6]

GE: What do you think is the most important element of the tradition? I'm referring to if it's the dance, the Congo characters, or the Congo game of the Devils?

[00:31:18.4]

SE: Which is the most significant? Well I would say that the Congo dance has a lot of meaning and the Congo game also. After one learns how to play the game it has a lot of meaning.

[00:31:41.4]

GE: Can you explain to me what the Congo dance means more or less? The movements and . . .

[00:31:49.0]

SE: The movements. It's like what I'm telling you, the Congo movements, the Congo dance, comes out of a joke that they were making on the Spanish. The Blacks. The Black Africans. They created their own drums. They created their own music themselves and from there the Congo women created the waist movement. Because the Congo (dance) is a waist movement. Yes and they created their dance. Yes. They created their dance. Yes it was a joke that they were making on the Spanish for the harsh treatment that they received from them. They painted themselves and all that and they danced. The women danced and the men . . .

[00:32:36.6]

RC: Yes.

[00:32:37.3]

SE: Yes.

[00:32:41.5]

GE: Would it affect your life in some way if you couldn't participate in the tradition?

[00:32:50.0]

SE: Me?

[00:32:50.5]

GE: Affirmative.

[00:32:52.0]

SE: That will be when I can no longer move my feet. That's why I don't dance much now. You haven't noticed that I don't dance a lot. I know how to dance Congo well.

[00:33:02.4]

RC: Yes!

[00:33:03.0]

SE: . . . but I don't because one, I get tired and two, I have a knee that bothers me. But at least I can still sing Congo. I stay singing in the Congo all night.

[00:33:15.5]

RC: And when did you begin to sing?

[00:33:18.6]

SE: Well since I was a girl I liked Congo. I was a girl when I began to sing. Since I was a child. And Congo spoiled me because the people liked how I sang. Since I was a young girl I had a voice. Since I was a young girl I had a voice and the gift for (singing) Congo. So from there I've been doing it till now. I'm an old woman and the people still like to hear me sing. (Laughs.)

[00:33:42.1]

RC: Because you have a voice. I need to tell you . . . Remember my fiancé Charles?

[00:33:53.9]

SE: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

[00:33:54.8]

RC: He has a CD of your voice.

[00:33:58.8]

SE: Yes?

[00:33:59.2]

RC: Remember the other interviews? I think it was done two or three years ago.

[00:34:03.9]

SE: Yes. Yes.

[00:34:04.8]

RC: I gave the tape to Charles and he fell in love with it. So he put it on CD.

[00:34:14.6]

SE: He put it on a CD?

[00:34:15.4]

RC: Yes. And he told me that when he came here, he had to . . .

[00:34:23.4]

GE: To meet her.

[00:34:24.0]

SE: Meet the person.

[00:34:24.2]

RC: Yes. The person with that voice. He is in love with your voice. It's the truth and me too. But he plays the bass.

[00:34:32.5]

SE: Oh yeah?

[00:34:32.8]

RC: And he heard your voice and said I need to meet that person.

[00:34:39.2]

SE: If he only knew the old lady that has that voice. He would think it would be a young person, no?

[00:34:44.7]

RC: No it's just a very strong woman. He really liked your voice. Yes. Yes. Yes. And the music. He likes the music.

[00:34:53.2]

GE: Do you feel proud of this tradition?

[00:34:56.5]

SE: Yes.

[00:34:57.0]

GE: And why?

[00:34:58.0]

SE: Yes I feel proud of the Congo tradition because I was born in Portobelo. My father was a Congo all his life. All of my family were Congos and I grew up with Congo. Yes.

[00:35:17.8]

GE: At any time have you felt unhappy with the tradition?

[00:35:24.0]

SE: Well, I have felt unhappy in the way that they Congo is not being played like before. There have been a lot of changes and that makes me unhappy because I'm a 72 year old woman and I know full well how they used to play Congo before. Now there have been a lot of changes. That makes me feel unhappy sometimes.

[00:35:49.0]

GE: How do you think the participation is in the political, social, religious and touristic aspects? That is, the Congos. Speaking about the Congos.

[00:36:07.0]

SE: The people of the village?

[00:36:09.0]

GE: Including the Congos also.

[00:36:11.0]

SE: Including the Congos? Well, look. As a person from Portobelo hears a drum he comes out. It seems like a lie but the moment a person from Portobelo hears a drum, the people come running to see where the Congo (dance) is. Everyone comes.

[00:36:29.6]

RC: Yes.

[00:36:30.0]

SE: Yes. Everyone comes out. Yes. It's the truth. It's that the people of Portobelo like Congo. Of the person from the coast, that is. Because it's not just Portobelo. It's the coast. The Atlantic coast likes Congo.

[00:36:56.5]

GE: What do the Congos from Portobelo do differently from ones in other places and why?

[00:37:02.7]

SE: Yes. Because the outfit of the Congos of Portobelo is very different from the outfit of the Congos of Colon, Costa Abajo and Panama (city).

[00:37:15.6]

RC: How?

[00:37:17.0]

SE: Because the Congos there dress, they use lots of bits of torn pieces of fabrics (on their costumes).

[00:37:23.5]

RC: The men and the women also?

[00:37:25.0]

SE: The men. The women put on their skirts.

[00:37:26.5]

RC: Yes. I've seen it. I've seen it.

[00:37:28.9]

SE: The men have the torn fabric.

[00:37:30.8]

RC: And this part also?

[00:37:32.0]

SE: Also, they put on the torn bits of fabric.

[00:37:33.4]

GE: I heard that that was an agreement between the government and the university so that internationally Congo would be accepted as a culture dance of Panama. I heard something like that and that's why they do it that way there. See, the way that we dress here is not how they do it when they go to different abroad -- there's even a group like a ballet and they practice the steps.

[00:38:07.0]

RC: In Colon?

[00:38:07.7]

GE: In Panama (City), the capital. That's what represents Panama when they go abroad but it's not anything, it's not anything spontaneous, it's a dance they themselves have choreographed.

[00:38:21.2]

SE: It's a dance that they've invented. But that's not the reality of the Congo. The Congo here dresses very distinct.

[00:38:28.0]

RC: Yes.

[00:38:30.0]

GE: And they play according to what they feel and it's something very spontaneous and real.

[00:38:31.8]

SE: Exactly.

[00:38:35.0]

GE: There it's like some kind of ballet.

[00:38:36.4]

SE: The dance is like a ballet. Yes. It's really different. It's really different.

[00:38:41.0]

RC: Are there other groups in Colon that use the torn fabrics (on their costumes) or just in Panama City? Because I saw one . . .

[00:38:52.0]

SE: No, in Colon there are also . . .

[00:38:53.0]

GE: There are various groups. The Congos from 4th street and others.

[00:38:53.8]

SE: In Colon also there are various groups that dress like that. In Colon the Congos dress like that. Everybody with that little bits of torn fabric. In Panama City they also dress like that. But not here. When you see a Congo here dressed with those pieces of torn fabric you know that he's not from Portobelo. He's not from the high coast.

[00:39:09.6]

RC: Yes. Yes.

[00:39:10.2]

SE: Yes.

[00:39:10.6]

RC: Not those?

[00:39:10.8]

SE: They are from down there. Yes.

[00:39:18.8]

RC: And also I don't know where he was from but I saw one (a Congo) with a colorful outfit, a few things covered with color, and a colorful hat.

[00:39:34.7]

SE: Look normally here the Congo hat has been the "Kafucula."

[00:39:38.7]

RC: Yes.

[00:39:41.0]

SE: The kafucula is the leaf of a coconut tree. That's the original Congo hat. The Congo adorns the kafucula. He puts on his decorations, feathers and colorful objects. So the kafucula is the hat but Congos from other places use regular hats and that's an exaggeration.

[00:40:02.0]

GE: Yes they even uses hard hats and whatever the find.

[00:40:04.6]

SE: They put on hardhats. Yes. The Congo hat isn't a hardhat. The Congo hat is the kafucula. Yes.

[00:40:15.0]

RC: The only other question I have is this: Which is your favorite Congo song?

[00:40:22.6]

SE: My favorite Congo song.

[00:40:24.8]

RC: Please! I want to hear it!

[00:40:29.0]

SE: Well all the ones I sing are favorites. You don't have the tape that I gave you?

[00:40:39.4]

RC: Yes I have it but I know what . . . in the other (tape) you sing Pajarito Vola Vola, and Micaela and Palma Soriana. Is one of those your favorite?

[00:40:55.4]

SE: Micaela.

[00:40:56.4]

RC: Micaela is your favorite? I like Micaela and Palma Soriana. Those have a lot of . . . Ah!

[00:41:05.7]

SE: Palma Soriana and Micaela. Micaela is my favorite. I like that song.

[00:41:09.7]

RC: Yes. Yes.

[00:41:10.3]

SE: Micaela. Yes.

[00:41:12.6]

RC: Ah! How great. Thanks so much.

[00:41:15.7]

SE: Your welcome. Thanks. At your service.

[00:41:19.0]