

THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE OF A PUERTO RICAN
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Alexis Tunstall: Good morning Pedro, my name is Alexis and I will be conducting an interview with you to find out why your parents left Puerto Rico.

Pedro: Okay sure.

Alexis: Aside from finding out why they left Puerto Rico, I also want to find out if it was easy to adjust to life in the Connecticut River Valley.

Alexis: Okay. So what particular circumstances led your parents to leave their home in Puerto Rico and settle down in the Connecticut River Valley?

Pedro: My father was a farmer and my mother was a homemaker. Our family was poor because my father mainly grew sugarcane. Due to hurricanes constantly occurring and destroying the farm my dad was no longer able to produce natural goods. My parents started looking for jobs but it was hard for them to stay employed. Due to unemployment, my parents found that living in Puerto Rico was too much of a struggle along with raising me. They decided that they would move to the Connecticut River Valley.

Alexis: Did your parents have hopes, aspirations, and or expectations for the Connecticut River Valley when they moved?

Pedro: Yes they did. They felt that by moving to the Connecticut River Valley they could escape poverty and unemployment on the island. By moving to the Connecticut River Valley my parents expected to build a better life for me.

Alexis: Were there any obstacles you and your family had to overcome to adjust to life in the Connecticut River Valley?

Pedro: When we came to the Connecticut River Valley we could not speak English very well. Therefore it was hard for them to find jobs that they could easily adjust to because of the language barrier. They could not understand what their employers were saying. My problem was in school, I isolated myself from the other kids because we could not communicate with one another.

Alexis: Where did your family settle down? Were you able to interact with people from a similar background?

Pedro: We settled down in a ghetto area that was small and crowded. What made it easy for us to settle down was that we met a lot of people who were from Puerto Rico. We felt like we were at home again because we made a lot of friends with people from our culture. It felt good to meet people who understood what we were going through, and it gave us a break from all the confusion we faced while trying to settle in a new country.

Alexis: What aspects of your culture do they regard as most important? Were you able to maintain some cultural link to your home region?

Pedro: The one thing we find most important in our culture is following our religion. My family is Catholic and we attended church a lot. The one thing that my mom wanted us to do was live our life by the Bible. We went to church on holidays as well as Sundays and my mom still did her yearly rituals.

Alexis: What are "yearly rituals"?

Pedro: Every New Years Eve my mom blessed the house to ensure that we were always safe from harm. She bought candles, roses, and this special cleaner that would get rid of the bad in our house and bring in the good. Usually she buys the items from a store called a "Botanica". This store has every thing you will ever need to bless your house.

Alexis: That sounds interesting. So basically, even though you moved to the Connecticut River Valley you were still able to keep your normal traditions and eventually adjust to your new setting?

Pedro: Yes. But at first it was hard and it did take some time but no matter what we still kept a part of our Puerto Rican culture.

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