



## **BRYCS Parenting Conversations: Caridad and Arturo, A Cuban-Chilean Family**

*On July 7, 2007, Caridad and Arturo [1] met with BRYCS staff to talk about their life and experiences as parents now living in the United States. Caridad and her daughter, Camilla, are originally from Cuba; Arturo is originally from Chile.*

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### **Coming to the U.S.**

*Wife:* I am Cuban, but my husband and I met in Chile.

It is very difficult to leave Cuba. I originally left Cuba temporarily for my job. I initially went to Chile for three months in January of 2001, in order to represent and sell the work of Cuban painters, but I did not return to Cuba. My daughter, Camilla, remained in Cuba with her father. It was difficult for me to be separated from her. Eventually, I got a tourist visa to return to Cuba, and I was able to arrange permission for Camilla to join me in Chile.

We lived in Chile for three years, where I met Arturo through my work, but I wanted to join my sister living in the United States.

My daughter and I first flew to Mexico City, waited there overnight, and then we took a bus to Matamoros, across the border from Brownsville, TX. Then we took a taxi from Matamoros to the border crossing at Brownsville, TX. The taxi ride only took about five minutes. It was so quick that I thought we were still in Mexico when the immigration officials began asking me questions. We were held in a U.S. immigration office for about six hours, before they transferred us to a shelter for mothers and children.

This was a very dramatic and anxious time for me. I thought I would be able to go directly to join family members already in the U.S., but my daughter and I had to remain in the immigration shelter for about three days, while the border officers checked out our papers and verified that we were Cuban and did not have any criminal history. I had to go through two interviews with immigration officials; they asked me many questions about Cuba - things that only a Cuban would know - and they asked me questions about my daughter and myself.

I was very worried while we waited in the shelter, but my daughter was fine. She was 13 at the time and enjoyed playing with the other children. She would say to me, "Mommy, calm down. We'll get out of here." Eventually they called out our names at the shelter and said that we were issued parole papers and could leave. Because of the **Cuban Adjustment Act**, Cubans like us are eligible for a work permit, a Social Security card, and after one year we can adjust to Legal Permanent Resident status.

After we left the shelter, we came north and joined Arturo, my sister, my aunt, and my cousin. My sister has been in the U.S. for about five years; she came here through "el bombo" - the U.S. visa lottery for Cubans. Most Cubans go to Miami, so there are very few Cubans in our city—maybe about 100.

### **Adjustment / Employment**

*Wife:* The first year here was the most difficult. We only received help from Catholic Charities by chance, since we did not come to the U.S. through a regular program. My husband was talking with a priest from church, who found out my daughter and I are Cuban. He told us to visit the Catholic Charities office, which then helped us put a down payment on an apartment, gave us furniture, and helped with orientation and school enrollment for my daughter. They also helped us to pay for our green card adjustment. My husband was the only one working at that time, so it was financially difficult.

Most of the Latinos in our area are from Mexico, and many are undocumented. They don't qualify for the refugee programs, so there are few refugee services for Spanish-speakers. For example, there is no program for helping Spanish-speakers learn to drive. There is a local Somali organization to help refugees, but we don't have that for Cubans.

Now I work in a daycare. Families in Cuba also use daycare while parents work. In the evenings and weekends, I also work by giving presentations within the Latino community on the dangers of smoking, and how to stop smoking. This is a program run by our Catholic church, along with a local Latino community organization. My husband is employed as a computer programmer for a company that makes credit card scanners.

## Religion

*Wife:* In Cuba, I didn't know what the Catholic religion was, because religion was prohibited before 1991. The churches were still there, but you couldn't go in them to practice your religion. For example, if you practiced your religion, you might lose the opportunity to go to university.

After 1991, I went to church sometimes, but I didn't understand it because I had never seen a Bible before. In Cuba, the churches still meet in people's homes; it is still more clandestine. Churches are educating people about different types of religion, but it is not as organized as in the U.S., it is more limited. The Catholic Church and Santeria are the most popular religions in Cuba.

People are more religious, more devoted in the U.S. Here we go to a Catholic Church, but it still feels new to me. I did not go through baptism or confirmation as a child, so now I am trying to prepare my daughter by raising her in the church.

*Husband:* In Chile, children are baptized at birth into the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has a lot of influence and is part of the culture. In Cuba, there is more African influence on the culture, but in Chile there is more Spanish influence. In Chile, Catholic religion is part of the educational system in both public and private schools.

## Education

*Wife:* When we first came here, I was learning about the schools here. I had heard about problems with drugs, delinquency, violence.

*Husband:* When you go to the high school, you can see people smoking marijuana just two blocks from the school.

*Wife:* But in school, nothing has happened to Camilla. The teachers support her, and she is someone who can rise above these things. She likes to study. She is away for six weeks this summer studying math and science at a university in another state. The university has paid for her travel, her room and board, and her summer classes. She is earning college credit while she is still in high school. She has also participated in an outdoor leadership program during the school year.

Education in Cuba is very good, and it is free. In Cuba, there were few resources, but it seems like more was expected of parents - helping with learning the alphabet, practicing multiplication - there was more collaboration and participation by parents to help with homework. My daughter usually had about one hour of homework per day. It was a habit. Here, it seems less common for parents to sit down with their children and help with homework.

Camilla's father and I separated when she was three years old, but he lived nearby and she always maintained a relationship with her father. He and I both maintained a relationship with her school and supported her in her studies.

She had been playing basketball through her school, but she is short, so she is going to start ice hockey this Fall. She enjoys rollerblading, so she thinks she may like ice skating also. But she never ice skated in Cuba - it's too hot and there are no ice skating rinks.

*Husband:* Camilla is going into 11th grade at a local high school. There are other Spanish speaking students at her school. There is even a Spanish speaking social worker at the school, because there has been a problem with Hispanic students not completing high school. We try to support her in her accomplishments and to help her develop her talents. My wife participates in all of Camilla's school events.

*Wife:* We arrived in the U.S. in early 2005. Camilla had studied some basic English in Cuba, but it seemed like she was about one year ahead of her classmates in other subjects. She was placed in ESL initially, went to summer school, and then she covered about one year of classwork in about three months. My daughter was surprised that students in the U.S. are allowed to use calculators in the classroom; in Cuba they were not.

Now, Camilla has all A's in her classes. She works very hard. She will be entering 11th grade this year. She enjoys writing stories - in English and Spanish - and she says she would like to study writing, but she also enjoys science - the kind you see on the "CSI" television program.

### Family Life in the U.S.

*Husband:* Here it seems like the top priority is paying the bills, but that takes a toll on family life. It seems like a big problem here is that both parents work full time and it leaves little time for family life.

*Wife:* If you work twelve hours to pay the bills, but your quality of life is not as good, then your family life suffers and you can't control your children. When you come here, your priorities change. If my husband works or has two jobs, and I work until 5:00 or 6:00 at night, then I have less time to spend with my daughter, I can only check homework - not help her with it - it is easier to put food into the microwave than to cook. For us, these changes are hard, but for children it is harder. We have tried to make the transition less abrupt for our daughter.

*Husband:* Camilla was 13 when we arrived, and now she is 15. We try to maintain good communication between the three of us, and to know who her friends are from school.

### Discipline / Child Rearing

*Wife:* Here there is a lot of protection of children, but they are also very independent. Children make their own decisions from a very young age. My daughter needs to consult with us on decisions.

*Husband:* She participates in decisions, she is included in decisions, but we have the ultimate say.

*Wife:* Here, if a mom does something to a child, the child might call "911" on the mother. It seems wrong for the child to threaten the parents. If your child cries and throws a fit at the store in order to get a toy, you can't give them a swat on the bottom, like you would in Cuba. Here you might get in trouble.

### TV / Limits

*Wife:* In Cuba, there is very little TV, only from 6:00 - 10:00 at night. From 6:00 - 7:00 is for children, with a half-hour of educational programming and a half-hour story. Here it seems like there are few limits on TV. Some families have a TV in every room, children may watch violent programs or video games; the parent is content that the child is occupied, but the violence makes the children aggressive.

*Husband:* We have a computer and video games, but they are in the living room where we can observe what our daughter is watching. She has her own music in her room, but not a TV.

### Allowance / Chores

*Wife:* We give our daughter a small allowance, so she can buy clothes or books that she wants, but in Cuba there was no money for this, and besides, what would you buy?

*Husband:* In Chile families also give children a little money to teach them how to manage money. An allowance also helps Camilla learn the cost and value of things you need for living.

*Wife:* Camilla helps out around the apartment, but it's flexible, depending on her schoolwork. She mostly helps out on weekends, with doing the wash, folding the laundry.

*Husband:* I help out with the housework also, so she sees that we all work together to keep the house clean.

### Contact with Family in Cuba

*Wife:* Camilla wanted to go back to Cuba to visit her father, so I suggested that she recycle aluminum cans to help save money for the trip. She agreed and she has worked hard at recycling cans. She didn't make a lot of money, but it helped her understand the cost of the trip. This will be her first trip back to Cuba - she is going for three weeks at the end of the summer. In addition to the airfare, the Cuban government charges \$400 for a passport to return to Cuba.

When we were living in Chile, I was able to buy Camilla's father a computer. So he has a computer, but it is illegal to access the Internet. Sometimes he is able to send e-mail, but it is very sporadic. If you get caught accessing the Internet, you could go to jail. In Cuba, most people do not have computers. They don't even sell computers in Cuba.

*Husband:* The government doesn't want people to have access to the rest of the world. It is also expensive to call Cuba - it costs about \$1.25 a minute. In order for my wife to call her mother in Cuba, she has to call another family who has to go and get her mother and bring her to the phone.

### Concerns for Daughter

*Wife:* In Cuba, I feared that my daughter would want for material things. I was afraid that at age 15 she would not want to study anymore, and would want to marry someone in order to leave Cuba. My priorities there were for her studies and for her basic needs.

Here, my fears are that she will find a boyfriend and not want to study or finish with her career. I have warned her that she may meet someone over the Internet who says he is 15 years old, but really he is much older; and that she will think she is just "chatting" when she is unknowingly giving out personal information over the Internet - such as, "My father will not get home until 3:00," "I play on this team, at that school" - and that this man will come looking for her. We have to "ceder y recoger" - give and take.

*Husband:* Mostly, she uses the Internet for educational purposes.

My fear here is the violence; the youth seem very violent. There is easy access to guns, pistols. Camilla walks ten blocks to school; there is no bus.

*Wife:* I fear something will happen on the way home from school. She calls me when she gets home, or I call her to make sure she is alright.

I think there can be a lack of communication here between parents and children. Parents don't seem to know what is going on with their children when they get home from school. When your child comes home, you have to make your child the first priority.

### Hopes for the Future

My hopes for the future are that my daughter becomes a professional and that we remain together as a family. Arturo and I also hope that we can adopt a child here in the U.S.

1 - Names have been changed to protect participants' privacy.

### Discussion Questions for Refugee Serving Agencies:

1. What do you know about the "bombo"? What services are available in your community for Cubans who come to the U.S. through the visa lottery?
2. What happens to foreign-born people who ask for refugee protection at the U.S. border? How are Cubans treated differently than other asylum seekers?
  - [Learn more about asylum](#)
3. Why might newcomer students drop out of school? What services are available in your area to help refugee and immigrant students finish high school?
  - National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, *Preventing Dropout: A Critical and Immediate National Goal*
  - Pew Hispanic Center Report: *Hispanic Youth Dropping Out of U.S. Schools*
4. What limit-setting advice would you give to refugee families about TV, the Internet, and video games?
  - Recommendations on Internet and media use with children, see [the American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
  - *A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety* from the Federal Bureau of Investigation
  - Federal Trade Commission fact sheets on *Social Networking Sites: A Parent's Guide* and *Social Networking Sites: Tips for Tweens and Teens*
  - English and Spanish resources on Internet safety, developed by the North East Independent School District in San Antonio, TX
5. What resources are available in your community to help Latino families with children and teens?
  - [BRYCS Multilingual Resources](#) (search BRYCS' clearinghouse by selecting Spanish in the language field and get over 250 results)
  - [Spanish/English resources](#) from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
  - For new parents, California has developed *New Parent's Kit Brochures* in English and Spanish, on topics such as safety, discipline and childcare