

On Common Ground: Latino Immigrant Community-Building in Somerville

Urban Borderlands Somerville Oral History Project

Tufts University and AHORA

Fall 2003



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...They wonder if there are elderly homes through which old people can come together to meet and discuss things. "No," says the old man, "if we need to meet and discuss things we simply meet and discuss." They wonder if there are food banks to help feed this man for he has nothing. "No," he says, "when I need food, people give me something to eat." They think he is homeless because he owns no house. But he doesn't feel homeless; people let him sleep on their floors at night.¹

¹ Personal communication, Nelson Salazar, 10/17/03.

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Acknowledgements

I want to express my gratefulness, first and foremost, to AHORA students Bich-Phuong Nguyen and Jessica Tejada (and Maria Tejada, Jessica's mother!!) who have been awesome to work with and whose help in conducting this project has been invaluable. You guys have been the best! I also want to thank again all the kind individuals who gave their time to be interviewed, everyone at Concilio Hispano (i.e. Silvia Saavedra and Antoinette B) who makes the Tufts/AHORA connection possible, Elena Letona from Centro Presente, and those at the Somerville Central Library who are archiving the research gathered. It is only with the cooperation of so many that the Urban Borderlands project is enabled. I also want to thank Nelson Salazar for his insights and friendly advice, and of course Deborah Pacini-Hernandez for all her time and understanding. Working with members of the Somerville community has been a great experience, and to all Tufts and AHORA students ~ get out and get involved!

Introductions

All cultures and languages socially construct their concepts and vocabulary. When we share common concepts and vocabulary, we can communicate fluently. However, when we communicate with and attempt to understand people of different cultural backgrounds, we are often at least partially blinded by our assumptions and cannot truly assess objectively. Therefore, I recognize that I cannot conduct research from an unbiased state of objectivity, and will begin by briefly introducing my background and the project through which I came to conduct research on Latino community-building in Somerville.

I am a twenty-one year old White female born and raised on the West coast of the United States, in Seattle, Washington. As a Tufts University senior undergraduate, majoring in anthropology and environmental studies, and the daughter of parents with graduate school degrees, I have been immersed in academia. Due to classroom education and the privilege of studying last semester in an ecology program in Ecuador, I am proficient in Spanish. With a desire to continue my education outside of the formal classroom, working with my surrounding community, I enrolled in the Tufts University Urban Borderlands Oral History Project.

Through interviews and field research the goal of the Oral History project is to develop histories of and from the Latino residents of Somerville, Massachusetts, with the aim that these histories will both enhance the general awareness and appreciation of Latino contributions to the city, and also empower Latinos through the acknowledgement and documentation of their voices. This project pairs Tufts undergraduate students, with high school students from Concilio Hispano's AHORA program. Along with the professor heading the project, Deborah Pacini-Hernandez, seven Tufts students and ten

AHORA students have participated in the Oral History Project this semester, fall 2003. I have been working with Bich-Phuong Nguyen, from Somerville High, and Jessica Tejada, from the Prospect Hill Academy Charter School, who live in the 530 Mystic Ave housing developments and are respectively seventeen and sixteen years-of-age. Both Bich and Jessica are children of immigrants; Bich's family is from Vietnam and Jessica's from El Salvador. Bich came to work on this project through her connections with the Welcome Project while Jessica took up this opportunity through the AHORA program directly. Both have expressed their gratefulness in getting to know members of their community through the execution of this investigation.

Project Topic

My topic has focused on how Somerville Latinos define community and what kind of community services, community-building activities, and community strengthening organizations Latinos organize and participate in.

Project Aims

Specifically, I am interested in the multiple ways community is constructed because I want to help build positive communities throughout my lifetime.

Another aim of this project has been the education of my AHORA students. I hope that they have gained both wider perspectives on their communities and confidence in their abilities to coordinate with people and speak formally with narrators, have learned from the oral histories of their neighbors, and have been inspired to someday soon take-on college projects.

For the greater Somerville community, my aim is to present a report (and make available taped interviews, interview reports, a web page, and digital photographs) to show how Latinos are helping to strengthen their communities and helping each other find peace and succeed - with the objective to provide a 'counternarrative' that opposes debilitating stereotypes of immigrants and is socially empowering. I want both the greater-Somerville population and individual Latinos to recognize and appreciate Latino communities. It is also vitally important that people, both outside of and within Latino immigrant communities, come to view themselves as part of common communities. The hope is not for strong segregated immigrant communities, but strong interconnected and inclusive communities.

Formulation of a Topic: Volunteerism and Community-Building

I decided to explore how Latinos in Somerville volunteer their time to improve their communities. However, it occurred to me that "volunteerism" itself is likely a cultural construction that everyone may not hold. At the first meeting of the Tufts and AHORA students who participated in this Oral History Project, I spoke to Nelson Salazar, who helped facilitate the Tufts / AHORA connection. He immigrated here from El Salvador and confirmed my suspicion that Latinos do not traditionally think of the community services they provide as "volunteerism." In response to my proposed topic he spoke about American volunteerism and philanthropy are not thought of as such in his culture. He warned me that if I were to ask people how they "volunteered" their time, I would probably get little response, regardless of ways they might use their unpaid time for community improvement.

With this in mind, I set out to conduct interviews asking how people spend their time outside of work, what programs or organizations they participate in, what opportunities they wish existed, and what barriers to community participation might be. Eventually, I also began asking a host of questions about definitions of community, who constitutes peoples' communities, how communities or their vision of them may have changed between their country of origin and the States, how the roles of men and women in communities might be similar and different (affecting community structure), and other variations on such questions as I tried to discover how community functions, and is envisioned and built in Latino Somerville.

Despite my initial sensitivity to the existence of socially constructed assumptions, I have found that differences in lifestyle and cultural perspective make obtaining information about “community-building” activities through verbal interviews challenging. However, by also participating in community events and speaking both to participants and organizers of community programs, an illustration (though by no means exhaustive) of Latino community-building in Somerville emerges.

Methods

For this project, I conducted taped interviews in English and/or Spanish with both Latino immigrants (from El Salvador and Nicaragua) and a U.S.-born couple (a Puerto Rican woman and her Italian husband), informal interviews with both my AHORA students and Latino residents of Somerville, participated in and observed CCD Sunday classes at the Little Flower Catholic elementary school and attended St Benedict's Sunday Mass. Additionally, through my Urban Borderlands course I have learned about

the Latino community in Somerville from staff at both Concilio Hispano and Centro Presente (two Latino organizations located here in Boston, MA).

Fortunately, my AHORA students have been able to attend many, though not all, of the above interviews and events. In addition to participating in many of the formal interviews I recorded, Bich and Jessica contacted narrators, helping to arrange interviews, and also conducted interviews on their own (based on questions about community I provided at their request).

Since both my AHORA students live in the Mystic View housing developments, we spent the majority of our time interviewing Latino residents within the 530 Mystic Ave developments. This is also where the Mystic Activity Center is located, housing The Welcome Project, which functions to provide services and organize events for residents of the housing developments. The aforementioned Nelson Salazar is also the coordinator of The Welcome Project, and one of my narrators (transcription available).

Social Constructions can Mislead any Investigator

As a project-specific example of how cultural assumptions can lead to a limited understanding of a narrator's testimony, I will explore the significance of the community garden. While researching how Latino's build community, I was interested in whether Latinos were participating in any kind of environmental or community-beautification projects, but I did not initially see how gardening may have widely different layers of significance than for myself, and may reveal environmental values directly relevant to visions of community.

As mentioned by several of my narrators and described in further detail by my AHORA student Bich-Phuong Nguyen and Welcome Project Director, Nelson Salazar,

the housing developments at 530 Mystic Ave have a “community” garden, consisting of a series of family garden plots. This garden is not solely worked by Latino residents, but also Haitian immigrants, and in fact the majority of the people who tend to and own the garden patches are Vietnamese.

Certainly the significance of such a community garden will vary by individual and likely ethnic group, and I have not done an in-depth study of the personal meanings of the Welcome Project garden for Latinos, so I cannot attempt to label its significance for their community (perhaps a project in the future could focus on the Latino garden). However, I did find that the community garden is a site of cultural importance. A paper I located on U.S. Latino environmental discourse may shed light on both the meanings of Latino community gardens, and also the American discourse that may have hindered my initial recognition of the garden as a site emblematic of important community values.

In the paper, “The Garden and the Sea: US Latino Environmental Discourses and mainstream Environmentalism,” by Barbara Deutsch Lynch, the American ideal landscapes of the “unpeopled frontier” or “pristine wilderness” are contrasted to the Latino ideal landscape of the “productive garden.”² According to this paper, for Latinos, in North American cities,

“the garden is a multipurpose Arcadian construction...it offers respite from the pressures of urban life, produces food to share with family and neighbors, offers its cultivators ties to the rural landscapes of other times and places, and is an act of rebellion against the North American definition of urban space with its clearly defined zones and segregated land uses.”³

Thus, gardens, such as the community garden at the Welcome Project, likely hold significance not understood by the casual glance of the Westernized eye, and are likely

² Lynch, “The Garden and the Sea,” 112.

³ Ibid.

sites of community-building and definition. While Americans' may view "true nature" landscapes "untouched by the hand of man," Latino culture may construct ideal landscapes where people are working in nature; producing *with* the land.⁴ This difference in environmental ideology can lead an American like myself to fail to ask the right questions to discover the importance of a garden, and the opportunities gardening creates for identification with both home in Central America and possibly with one's peers here in the U.S. Although my research ultimately explored other community-building activities, it is with the lesson that we can be blinded by our own assumptions that my findings unfold.

What is "Community"?: Latino Immigrant Perspectives

One of the most difficult parts of my research was defining terms with my narrators. Not only is the concept of community rather abstract (as observed by Nelson Salazar⁵) but I was often attempting to derive definitions through interviews in Spanish. Thus, not only was I speaking across possible cultural differences, but idiomatic differences as well. However, the consensus seemed to be that definitions of community are entirely personal. Here are the definitions and/or descriptions of personal community several narrators provided.

A young Salvadoran (age sixteen) who has been in the States for only a year, had significant trouble deciding how to define community. He finally said that school is part of the community, where different people come together. However when asked *who* his

⁴This idea I draw from Lynch. Although not all Latino's come from rural backgrounds, it is possible that they may still hold the rural landscape as an ideal. (Just as we might say "open frontier" is an American ideal even for those who never encountered the "untouched West.")

⁵ Nelson Salazar, Transcribed (Interview #4), 10/17/03.

community consisted of, he said his family, friends, and neighbors (those either close to him in physical vicinity or as social supports), both Latinos and non-Latinos.⁶

Another young Salvadoran male (age twenty), who also helped translate the informal interview with the sixteen-year-old, defined community partly in terms of racial or cultural communities and said his community consists of his family, friends, and also colleagues (referring to those with whom he works)⁷. He also made clear that his community is not limited to Latinos but includes people of other ethnic backgrounds.

A middle-aged Nicaraguan woman⁸ saw her street here in Somerville as a community (where there is a “SLOW” traffic sign and her children can play safely) but also, upon my questioning, defined all of Somerville as a community. She reported a stronger sense of community back at home in Nicaragua, which she attributes partly to language. In Central America everyone speaks Spanish and she was able to have meaningful friendships and full conversations with people, while here, her limited English ability leaves her somewhat isolated on her street where she mostly only smiles to and greets her American, Haitian, and Brazilian neighbors - for they share no common language. However, despite language differences, she does feel a strong sense of community in her immediate neighborhood. As an example she offered that if there were a stranger prowling around the houses on her street, her neighbors would call her to alert and warn her to be careful opening her house (as had happened). Thus, although her sense of local community is challenged by her inability to speak English, she still feels a sense of neighborhood friendliness and care that leads her to define her street as a community within the larger city of Somerville.

⁶ Gustavo Vivas, Informal Interview (conducted by Bich-Phuong Nguyen and Jessica Tejada), 11/02/03.

⁷ Olvidio C. Garcia, Informal Interview (conducted by Bich-Phuong Nguyen and Jessica Tejada), 11/02/03.

⁸ Anonymous Female, (Interview #5), 10/24/03.

A Salvadoran woman⁹ (forty-one years old), also the mother of one of the AHORA students, said that she feels a strong sense of community where she lives in the Mystic Ave housing development (she has lived there for six years). She spoke highly of her neighbors and said that when she first moved to Massachusetts she had a harder time and felt more isolated. She now lives near family, where as when she first came to Massachusetts, although she lived with Salvadorans, she did not know them personally and it was harder to feel a strong sense of community. About the Latino community's interaction with non-Latinos, she says that she does not feel any interracial tension, and says that the problems she has heard of have been within Latino male youth (especially in the summer) as opposed to between races. Overall she described her community as consisting of her family and a few close neighbors.

Another Salvadoran woman¹⁰ who lives in the Mystic Ave housing development said that she definitely feels a strong sense of community within the development. She positively cited her many friends and neighbors who help her take care of her children in case she is sick or has an appointment, and who generally are like "family" to her. For example, after she had her second child here in the States, a friend who lives in the development took care of her children during the afternoons so that she could work. People from the community also sent her new baby clothes for her most recent baby daughter. This narrator (unlike the previously mentioned) was also enthusiastic about programs in the Mystic Ave community and says she goes whenever she can afford to (temporally and monetarily).

Thus, in addition to definitions of community centered around friends and family, people describe community based on the spaces that they live and perceive themselves to

⁹ Alma Mejia, (Interview #3), 10/10/03.

¹⁰ Emma Ramos, (Interview #2), 10/10/03.

be sharing with others. Therefore not only do my narrators identify their immediate street or development as a community, but schools and workplaces where people come together contribute to their senses of community as well.

Perspective of a Latino Community Leader

For both an El Salvadoran immigrant perspective, and also the outlook of a community leader and organizer in the housing development where several of my narrators, and also many of the AHORA students, live, I interviewed Nelson Salazar.¹¹ Several of my previous narrators mentioned the community-building work of The Welcome Project, and since Salazar is both the coordinator and a Salvadoran native himself, I decided his insights would be valuable. Salazar had experience with the development's communities, and his own personal experiences from El Salvador to draw from. In combination with these assets, he has also attended college here in the United States and has used this academic framework to further his understanding of definitions and constructions of community.

About definitions of community in El Salvador, Salazar and I had the following conversation:

Narrator: I think that it's a concept that you don't really need to get to talk about, partly it's because you live in it, and you deal with it, so you don't really see the community in yourself, you see *within* the community. So the concept of it, you don't really think about it - not until you go to college, and then you start saying, "*the community*." I think that community for me is anything that is around you. There isn't a definition of community, because community is just defining what community is. It's not what people define for you what community is - you define it. I mean my community can be my family, and that's about it, but that's my community. And there is nothing wrong with that because that is MY community. But people will say, "oh no no no, community is also you neighbor, or community..." well what if I don't want my neighbor? you know, as my community... but they want to enforce you to believe that community is the combination of all the people, the different components

¹¹ Nelson Salazar, Transcribed (Interview #4), 10/17/03.

around you. But in reality, it is what YOU, as an individual... you think what is it. So there isn't, such a...

Interviewer: set definition...

Narrator: No, I don't think that there is. Sometimes we look at it from the terminology perspective, the meaning of it, but I think that it is more about what is it that you as the person define for yourself. For me community is what is around me. I think that there are other components outside that effect that community, but that doesn't mean they are part of that community, they are more like outsiders.

Interviewer: So, are you saying then that here that you would mostly consider your family your community, or...

Narrator: No, I think my community, at least for me, my community is my family, the people that I work with, the people I deal with, those are the community. People that I don't know ...the governor, you know, that's not my community. I think it is the people that I am around that are my community.

Thus, Nelson Salazar sees community as a fluid term that everyone defines, and should be able to define, for him or herself. For him, his community is composed of his family and the people he directly interacts with, but does not necessarily include people in his town with whom he has no personal connection. In response to his idea that there is no one definition of community, I suggested that in my interviews I should make sure to ask narrators to *define community*. However he said,

Uh, you probably wouldn't get much response... It is like, "what?" I mean if you talk about "*familia*"... what does "*familia*" mean to you... "oh my kids, my aunt, my cousins, my grandparent," and you know they start going with my gran-gran-grandfather, and my gran-gran-grandfather, and they start extending the whole family. Because it is not as abstract. It is actually there for them. They can relate to it.

Both my AHORA students' experiences with narrators and my own have shown this to be true. How does one define community? It is a hard question to answer and responses are often relative. As Salazar points out, how we identify ourselves (and our communities) is dependant on whom we are with, where we are, and who is asking for our identity.

If I am around Latinos and they ask, what are you, I say I am Salvadoran. If I am with other ethnic groups and they say, "what are you," I say, "I am

Latino.” Then when I am with Latinos, you know, “what are you,” “I am from El Salvador.” If I am with Salvadorans, “what are you,” I am from, lets say for example, San Salvador, and in San Salvador they say “where are you,” you identify yourself with your neighborhood. Then in the neighborhood if they ask you “where are you,” you identify with the street. Then on the street, you identify with your house. So how do you identify yourself depends on where you are.

He continues that he thinks it is harder for immigrants to define community here in the States than back in their countries of origin, because although they find themselves defined as “Latinos” like so many other people from some part of Latin America, this social designation does not mean that they initially share a common cultural identity or strong sense of community with other Latinos. To paraphrase Repak, author of Waiting on Washington the experiences of Latin American immigrants can hardly be viewed as homogenous.¹² Salazar illustrates,

just because you are Latino doesn’t mean that you know the person. You might be talking to a Colombian person and the only thing that you have in common with them is that Christopher Columbus came and raped our ancestors. People tend to say, “what unites us as Latinos is the language,” the language that we speak. But what people speak in Argentina and the language that we speak in El Salvador is different. It is not even the language (that unites us), it is just the history about our ancestors having been raped and killed, tortured, by the Europeans... that’s the only thing...

That Latinos are not a uniform social group is an important fact that challenges the stereotypes that uniformly label diverse peoples from all across the Americas. Salazar points out that immigrants often have a common history of oppression that unifies them. This was also voiced by Elena Letona, Executive of Centro Presente,¹³ who said that the oppression many Central Americans have faced leads to mistrust (barriers to community-building) but also creates common experiences from which to bond. That Latino immigrants see themselves as distinct from one another, by country, region, and

¹² Repak, Waiting on Washington, 6.

¹³ Centro Presente, located at 54 Essex Street in Cambridge, is an organization run primarily by Central Americans, whose mission is to help “Central and Latin American immigrants develop the ability to determine their individual and collective futures locally and nationally.” See www.cpresente.org.

community of origin, is important to keep in mind while researching community-building among “Latinos” in Somerville. As both Nelson Salazar and one of my female Salvadoran narrators¹⁴ mentioned, even when you are living in a “community” of people from your country of origin, it does not mean that you know them or feel community connection.

However it is also true that once people from Latin America settle in the US, they become labeled as “Latino” and often come to identify themselves as such. As Salazar stated, when interacting with non-Latino ethnic groups he often self-identifies as Latino. Because of the fluid and relative nature of identity, it is thus possible for individual Latinos to both feel distinct from immigrants of other Latin American countries and cities, and at the same time a sense of pride, common identity, and community with other Latinos here in the United States.

However for communities inclusive of all types of people to be built, it is important that Latinos feel connection, not only with other Latinos and other immigrants, but with settled Americans as well. If most people are like Salazar (and many of my other narrators) and understand members of their community to be people with whom they personally interact, we can see how interaction between different racial, cultural, and socioeconomic groups is essential to building inclusive communities. Likely we more easily care about and feel responsibility toward people whom we include in our concepts of personal community. Thus, it seems that the existence of common spaces where different types of people can gather and interact would help people feel connected to one another through a common sense of place and shared interactions.

¹⁴ Alma Mejia, (Interview #3), 10/10/03.

The Mystic Ave Housing Development as a “Community”

As Salazar explained in our formal interview,¹⁵ The Welcome Project functions as the epicenter of a definable “community” physically located by the buildings of the 530 Mystic Ave housing developments. Salazar observes that the development seems to be a community unto itself (although it also contains within it, the “Latino” community, “Haitian” community, “Vietnamese” community, etc). I asked Salazar if he thought people who live in the development see the development as their community:

Interviewer: Do you think it is that wide - it’s not just “my family and my neighbors,” but do people have that kind of sense?

Narrator: I think so. It is again, the fact that they are within the development.

Salazar goes on to say that even if a person lives just across the street from the housing development, they are not part of the community in the same way. This reiterates how important it is for people to feel connected to one other to develop a sense of shared community. In the Mystic housing developments example, while not every person in the development may know one another, the physical connectedness of the buildings (clustered in a definable place with uniform architecture) and the efforts of The Welcome Project (programs, services, and events) have resulted in a shared sense of place and community within the developments.

Salazar supports this assertion with a series of anecdotes about the informal social networks of support that he observes uniting members of the development. He says people bring their children to the community center and help drive one another’s kids to school in the mornings. People take care of each other when sick, tenants help other members of the development (even those who are not close friends and family) in

¹⁵ Nelson Salazar, Transcribed (Interview #4), 10/17/03.

planning parties, weddings, baby showers, etc, and if someone has not been seen for a while, Salazar says people will ask him about one another's whereabouts, showing general care and concern for one another. According to Salazar, this sense of community somewhat spans interethnic groups within the development. As a touching example, Salazar describes the Chinese New Year/Valentine's Day celebration in February and how his attempt to have a solely Vietnamese event turned out to be a mistake – they wanted everyone to be included.

Narrator: Before I came there was Christmas, then they changed the name for those who don't celebrate Christmas, but then I realized that with the Vietnamese group they celebrate the Chinese New Year. So I decided that we should celebrate the Chinese New Year - as a Welcome Project. So we celebrated it, and we had everybody come. Because it is in February, we call it the Chinese New Year/Valentines Day kind of thing. So we combine it, like the day of the friends - like a friendship day. So we have this party, the second year, after I started getting to know more people, I was told by some Vietnamese that the Chinese New Year - it was nice that we celebrate it, it's a good way that we acknowledge them - but some of them like to spend it with their family and friends. So the second year, we celebrated it but we decided that we should just do it within the Vietnamese community. So Vietnamese came and they brought the food, and we had everything there, and they were waiting and I said, "it is time to eat, and they said, "well, where's the other people?" I said "what other people?" They said, "the Latinos, the Haitians, where are they?" I go, "Oh my God, what a mistake!" I didn't tell them because I thought they wanted to have their own kind of party – "no," they said, "you go and call them." So I came to the office and I had to call some of them - some of them came - but they didn't feel good about it because they didn't have any food made. But it is interesting because...the fact that they are asking, ok, wait a minute, "where's the other people?" - so they do interact. They come here and you see Haitian and Vietnamese and Latina, "hi, how are you?" it's like the Welcome Project is the connection between all of them.

Certainly then, there is a sense of community even between immigrants from very different backgrounds who speak very different native languages. As Salazar points out, even though many immigrants living in the development speak only basic English, they do not expect one another to speak English well and communication, even with very limited common language, is possible. This is another example of how immigrants,

regardless of their different histories, share similar struggles here in the States and can bond despite, and perhaps because of, their hardships.

So although Latinos may be limited by their English abilities, and may at times feel little common identity even with other Latinos, simultaneously community is being built as diverse peoples face some of the same struggles in immigrating to, and living in, the United States. It should be noted here that the sense of community fostered by the development is likely crucial to the bringing together of these diverse ethnic groups. Certainly the physical proximity they have to one another, coupled with joint activities hosted by The Welcome Project, encourages residents to feel connected to one another. The Mystic Ave Community Center is then an example of a physical space where diverse peoples gather and as a result come to feel a common sense of community.

What is “Community”?: A Puerto Rican/Italian American Couple’s Perspective

In addition to these Central American immigrant personal definitions and experiences of community here in Somerville, I interviewed a Puerto Rican woman¹⁶ who was born in Florida (and her Somerville-born Italian husband, both in their fifties). She lived in Florida for the first half of her life (where she met her husband) and has since been living here in Somerville with him and their two children. She described her community in terms of extended family. She and her husband said that in Florida, their community largely consisted of her Puerto Rican family members (about eighty of them are scattered throughout Florida and the East coast), while here in Somerville, their community is mostly composed of his large Italian family. For this couple, who have been in the restaurant business for years, food is also an important ingredient in defining

¹⁶ Rosemarie Federico, (Interview #6), 10/24/03.

community. They raved about the Puerto Rican and Italian food of their families/communities as strong markers of cultural identity.

About immigrant Latino communities in Somerville, this couple says that their only interactions with Latino immigrant populations are through work (for her she works with the Tufts University SPELL program, teaching many children of immigrants, and for him he has contact with Latino immigrants through his work in his deli and at Delta airlines). However, the Italian husband did believe that Latino communities support themselves through loyalty to Latino businesses. He cited the opening of a Latino butcher shop and his early doubts that it would stay in business. Yet, he says, because of the faithfulness of the Latino community in supporting businesses of “their kind,” it has flourished (despite its proximity to a Brazilian butcher shop).

What is “Community”? AHORA Youth Perspectives

I also found that my two AHORA students were eager to comment on their understandings of community.¹⁷ They noted how, especially after conducting two unrecorded interviews on their own, there seems to be no universal definition of community. They found themselves asking, “how do you define community?” and then when their narrators seemed confused and unsure how to answer the question, they, the interviewers, proceeded to give examples and define community, to which the narrators responded, “yeah, sure, that’s it.” Bich and Jessica both learned, as I have been learning, that defining the term “community” is not simple, and that how one asks the question can very much affect a narrator’s response.

¹⁷ Personal Communication, 11/09/03.

As for their personal definitions of community, they emphasized that community is produced when different types of people join together for a common goal. Having just attended St Benedict's Mass that day, Bich and Jessica discussed how they feel a strong sense of community at Church. Bich, who is Vietnamese and does not come from a Christian household, enjoys attending the Spanish Mass even though she does not understand much of the language. She says that the energy and feeling of community is unlike anything she experiences as part of her cultural heritage. Both Bich and Jessica expressed how Mass produced a great sense of community because people were all coming together for the same purpose. Everyone becomes part of the same thing; clapping, singing, and jointly focused. They said that they like Mass because they can forget everything else in their lives and truly be present – they can just be there. I asked if there were any other instances of “coming together” that produced similar feelings. Jessica responded, “teams.” They agreed that sports were another situation where many different kinds of people, all of whom you may not like, come together for a common reason and the result is a strong sense of community.

Organized Sites of Community-Building: An Overview

My investigations identified four main organized sites of community-building. In addition to The Welcome Project's organized community-building opportunities, Church and Sport related activities, as identified by my AHORA students, constitute two organized sites of community-building. And finally, PROESA (Proyecto de Educacion Solidaridad y Accion), a membership program recently launched out of Cambridge based Centro Presente, additionally provides opportunities for Latinos to volunteer their time and give financial support to improve their communities. Latinos also engage in many

individual acts to strengthen their communities, which will be discussed in relation to these four organized centers of community-building.

Organized Sites of Community-Building: The Welcome Project

I learned about the activities sponsored by the Welcome Project¹⁸ through formal interviews with Latinos who live in the development, through informal conversations with my AHORA students and their families, and through both a formal interview¹⁹ and personal communication with Nelson Salazar.

As I quoted Salazar earlier, the common space of the Mystic Community Center is a meeting ground where inter-ethnic interactions can occur. In addition to Welcome Project celebrations (like the Chinese New Year/Valentine's Day party in February), the organization hosts several activities to help improve the lives of the development's residents. Many of my narrators cited the community work that Salazar and The Welcome Project do, and as one of my El Salvadoran narrators exclaimed (in Spanish), "whenever the Welcome Project has free events, and I can attend, I go!"²⁰

In addition to the community garden project discussed earlier, The Welcome Project also organizes "women's groups" for women within the development. Salazar says they were started before he began working with The Welcome Project and were organized as support groups because there were a lot of single mothers who were struggling with little children. Unlike the inter-ethnic programs of The Welcome Project, these groups are ethnicity specific (Latino, Vietnamese, Haitian) so that the women of the groups share a common language and can address their personal concerns. Maria Tejada, resident in the development, also mentioned these groups, adding that women in the community help

¹⁸ Contact Information: Phone: (617) 623-6635, Email: welcome@welcomeproject.org

¹⁹ Nelson Salazar, Transcribed (Interview #4), 10/17/03.

²⁰ Emma Ramos, (Interview #2), 10/10/03.

plan the meetings.²¹ Apparently these groups function as a forum for information sessions addressing community concerns (for example, when rent increased and people could not understand their letters from the housing authority, or now there have been concerns about safety in the development and so a security meeting has been planned). Additionally, the women's groups organize social events such as the Latina women's fieldtrip to go apple picking this last October. The Latina women's group thus functions to bring Latinas together both through efforts to educate and resolve immediate concerns, and also through collective events for the sake of having fun and strengthening their community.

In addition to these groups for the women of the development, The Welcome Project also sponsors various tutoring programs. According to Maria Tejada, older people from the Catholic Church come to tutor children in the development and assist them with their homework (a program which Nelson Salazar organizes). Several of my narrators²² also mentioned English classes hosted by The Welcome Project, though none of them were currently participating.

In summary, The Welcome Project provides a common space at the Mystic Community Center where people of different ethnic groups can interact and build community, and sponsors community garden patches, women's groups, tutoring programs, English classes (one narrator²³ even mentioned hearing about computer classes, crochet classes, and cooking classes). So, at least for the Latino residents of the Mystic Ave housing developments, in addition to Catholic Churches and Somerville

²¹ Maria Tejada, (Interview #1), 10/05/03.

²² Maria Tejada, (Interview #1), 10/05/03, Emma Ramos, (Interview #2), 10/10/03, Alma Mejia, (Interview #3), 10/10/03.

²³ Emma Ramos, (Interview #2), 10/10/03.

soccer teams, The Welcome Project provides organized community-building opportunities.

Organized Sites of Community-Building: The Catholic Church

As observed by my AHORA students, several narrators,²⁴ and previous Urban Borderlands students,²⁵ Catholic churches build a strong sense of community and additionally organize activities through which Latino residents can celebrate and better their communities. Different Churches provide different services and classes, however my research solely touches on Iglesia Dios Pentecostal (Pentecostal Church of God) and St Benedicto (St Benedict's Church). Most of my findings focus on St Benedicto as several of my narrators are members, and as part of my research I attended St Benedicto's Mass and some of their Continuing Christian Development (CCD) classes.

Iglesia Dios Pentecostal

One of my narrator's²⁶ attends Iglesia Dios Pentecostal, located in Somerville "by the Burger King on Somerville Ave," on Saturdays, Sundays, and Tuesdays, identifying it as a good opportunity for members of the Spanish-speaking community to come together. In addition to sermons in Spanish, on Tuesdays the church provides Bible studies in Spanish for children. Although Iglesia Dios Pentecostal does not have youth sport programs (as some other churches, including St Benedicto do), they do organize community events in celebration of various holidays, for example Mothers' and Fathers' days. Although these are not religious holidays, my narrator guessed that the Church

²⁴ For example, Maria Tejada, (Interview #1), 10/05/03.

²⁵ Briggs, Kerry, "Christian Latinos in Cambridge - Communities of Faith Rise Above," Spring 2003. Brannigan, Bridgid, et al. "Latino Cultural Expressions in Cambridge." Spring 2002.

²⁶ Emma Ramos, (Interview #2), 10/10/03.

celebrates them to build respect among family members and for opportunities to gather as a community. Though the Pastor and his wife (“*pastor y pastora*”) head the organization of these festive days, many people from the Latino church community contribute to the success of the planning and execution of events. For example, my narrator explained that for Mothers’ Day all the fathers and husbands get together to organize the celebration and they are the ones who, through donations, raise money to buy gifts and cakes and for the women in their communities. The women do the same for the men on Fathers’ Day which illustrates how people can strengthen their communities through the uniting structure of their neighborhood church.

In addition to the community-building programs and events sponsored by Iglesia Dios Pentecostal, individual members of the Latino community work to support the Church both through direct financial contributions, and, as my narrator offered, through the preparation and selling of food; the proceeds from which support the Church and its activities²⁷. This production of food by individual community members is also common practice at St Benedict’s Church (as I observed after Sunday Mass), and is a telling example of how Latinos spend their time, money, and creative energies to support community-building institutions like the Catholic Church.

Iglesia de St Benedicto

One of my previously mentioned El Salvadoran narrators, Maria Tejada, is a member of St Benedicto and also the mother of my AHORA student partner, Jessica Tejada. In addition to information about St Benedicto from formal interviews, I was able to learn about the Church and some of its activities by attending St Benedicto’s Sunday mass and

²⁷ Also see the Interview of Ana Braun, by Emily Chasan, fall 2003.

some of their CCD classes with the Tejadas. This participant experience allowed me both to learn through observation and also to transform what I was learning into more effective questioning.

Mass at St Benedict's Church

Through a formal interview in early October, Maria Tejada introduced me to some of the services St Benedict's provides to the Latino community. For example, on Sundays, after English Mass, there is Mass in Spanish (at 11:30 am). In conversation, Senora Tejada later communicated to me that she attended English Mass in the past but was unable to understand as much (though she speaks very good English). Thus, she really values the opportunity to participate in religious services in Spanish for, spirituality being so personal, it is difficult to cultivate the same sense of connection in a foreign language.

The priests who give the Spanish sermons at St Benedict's are themselves from Central America. In fact, for the last two weeks of October and the first two weeks of November (2003) a priest, Padre Hector, who currently lives in El Salvador, has been up in Somerville. In addition to hearing him speak at Mass, My Nicaraguan narrator mentioned him in our interview. She told me that he spoke of how Central Americans come to the States and forget their roots; "*olvida la costumbre.*" He spoke of community in El Salvador and how the family is always together, "*se reuna,*" however here, kids go one way and parents another. Here people forget the family and children watch television in their own rooms, while the adults watch a separate TV in the living room. Thus, he feels that family, and likely community, is tighter knit in El Salvador.

This same priest, Padre Hector, spoke at St Benedict's when I attended the Sunday Mass. My AHORA student partners told me that they know of two other priests who have come and spoken at St Benedict's in the past. The Catholic Church sponsors these

priests who come from El Salvador to speak at Mass here in the States. Church members personally contribute money to pay for the priests to fly up, and some even know the priests from communities back home in Central America. As Jessica Tejada mentioned; during a sermon one weekend, Padre Hector pointed out people he knew in the audience from back in El Salvador. Thus, these priests are personally connected with the Latino population of Somerville and for at least some immigrants they are an important link to their homelands. Many Latino immigrants have not been able to return to El Salvador since they emigrated and the presence of a priest here in Somerville who currently lives in their country of origin is a meaningful connection to home. Consequently, Latino immigrants are donating their hard-earned funds to bring community leaders from their neighborhoods abroad, to Somerville.

Continuing Christian Development (CCD)

In addition to Mass, St Benedicto has religious services specifically for Latino youth. Just across the street from St Benedict's Church is The Little Flower Catholic elementary school. The Little Flower houses in its classrooms youth CCD classes both in English, before the English Mass at St Benedict's, and in Spanish for the hour before the Spanish Mass. These classes are held from 10:30 to 11:30 on Sundays for elementary aged Spanish-speaking youth to assist parents in presenting their faith to their young children. Catechesis²⁸ of the Church's teachings is taught through stories, readings, picture books, coloring books, and other age appropriate activities. For example, for Halloween the children colored in pumpkins next to which were religious verses. These classes are free

²⁸ (Instruction in the basic doctrines of Christianity)

of charge and open to all children (not just those who attend the Little Flower Catholic elementary during the week).

One goal of these classes is to provide opportunities for the reception and celebration of the sacraments. Jessica Tejada recalls how in some of the CCD classes teachers made up a game to remember the sacraments. She had been most impressed at the children's retention of the information. Although the main focus of these classes is the education of religious teachings, my AHORA student partners told me that the teachers also use accounts of general history and Latino culture to help enforce and make clear the biblical teachings. For example, the history of the Christmas holiday and the various traditions surrounding how the day is celebrated build upon the teaching that Christmas celebrates the birth of Christ and, in the opinion of my AHORA students, help keep the traditions alive.

These classes provide a positive example of how community members come together for the improvement (via education) of their children's lives. The teachers of these classes are often parents from the community who volunteer their time to teach in the Sunday classroom. Maria Tejada (Jessica's mother), for example, spoke to me about how she often teaches CCD. She said one need not be a professional teacher, but simply knowledgeable in the values and practices of the Catholic faith and able to buy several religious texts with which to teach. Not only do adults from the Latino community step in to teach the Spanish CCD, but teenagers like Jessica also contribute as teachers' assistants. While I was present, Jessica read to the children (about five boys and six girls around the age of six), quizzing them on their retention of what she had said, and exclaiming, "que inteligente!" as they recalled almost every word. Both Jessica and her mother told me separately that many young people assist in these classes and that the

only requirement is that they have been confirmed (undergone the Catholic Sacrament of *confirmation*²⁹).

One asset that the teenage Latino assistants bring to the classroom is their bilingualism. Jessica recounted how last week she was called into a particular CCD classroom (many classes go on simultaneously) to help a young Latino boy who did not speak Spanish. His parents are Latino immigrants yet he was having a hard time in the classroom. Jessica, who is fluent in English, unlike many of the Latino parent-teachers, was able to help him understand. This incident led her to verbalize to me the concern some Latinos feel over the next generation losing its Spanish language and Latino culture³⁰. As an example of the validity of this concern, at one point the elementary students were sitting around drawing without any interaction from the teachers and I didn't hear a single one of them speaking Spanish – they were speaking to one another in only English. Later, the Latina teachers (there were two women running the classroom) were taking attendance (in Spanish) and asked a boy his name. He told her his first name and when she asked for his *apellido* (last name) he did not answer. Finally Jessica came over to help and asked the boy and his brother, “do you guys speak English?” They said yes and proceeded to tell her their last name after she asked in English. Thus, not only can language barriers challenge inter-generational community, but high school youth are helping to strengthen their communities by linking their parents' generation with the newest English-speaking Latino generation.

Cultural Celebrations

²⁹ Defined by the online Catholic Encyclopedia as: a sacrament in which the Holy Ghost is given to those already baptized in order to make them strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Jesus Christ.

³⁰ See also Lerone Lessner's report, Fall 2003.

In addition to religious services in Spanish, St Benedicto organizes festive events that cater to Latinos, such as the early fall celebration of El Salvadoran Independence Day on September 15th.³¹ These cultural festivals are important opportunities for Latinos (in this case, Salvadorans) to come together in the States and celebrate their Latino identities. As Maria Tejada emphasized in our formal interview, such events are also vital to the dissemination of the Salvadoran culture to the next generation. She says that she wishes Latinos had more time to celebrate Central American cultural traditions, like *Semana Santa*, and that such opportunities would be positive for her children's familiarity with their cultural roots. Although Senora Tejada would additionally like to celebrate traditions like the two-week *Semana Santa* festival here in Somerville, she appreciates the celebration of El Salvadoran Independence Day by St Benedicts as a positive contribution to the Latino community.

ESL Services

In addition to Latino-culture-promoting events, St Benedict's Church also offers English classes to adults two days per week. Unlike some English classes, these classes are not difficult to get into but they cost twenty-five dollars per session. The teachers of these classes are Latinos from the organization, Concilio Hispano, and come from multiple countries in Latin America including Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. However these classes are not considered classes of Concilio Hispano, though the teachers are still paid for their services. As described earlier by my Nicaraguan narrator, a lack of English skills can challenge one's ability to build strong communities where neighbors may be American, Haitian, Brazilian, etc. Thus the ESL services

³¹ According to my AHORA students, this El Salvadoran Independence Day celebration is organized by the Salvadoran ambassador along with people of the Church.

sponsored by St Benedict's Church and others are practical contributions to the improvement of Latino immigrant communities.

Youth Soccer

St Benedicto also organizes both girls' and boys' youth soccer practices and collects money from the community to sponsor games, uniforms, and other amenities necessary for the sport programs. These church-sponsored sport opportunities for youth are popular among the Latino community and provide a way for parents to participate in their children's activities.

Organized Sites of Community-Building: Team Soccer

In addition to the youth soccer opportunities available through the Church, both Cambridge and Somerville have Latino organized soccer leagues (however, only men play). Although there are no soccer leagues for adult women, participation in the games through support as fans is very popular among women, and it may be that as this younger generation of soccer-playing girls become older, opportunities for adult women to play soccer may be developed. For more information on the existing Somerville soccer teams, please see the Urban Borderlands report of Joel Cohen (fall 2003), whose investigation has focused on these leagues.

Just as I earlier described the "garden" as a site which can tie Latinos to "other times and places," evoking a sense of community life back in Central America, it seems that the act of participating in communal soccer games evokes a similar sense of home. I will draw from two interviews, conducted by Joel Cohen, to support this statement.

Soccer in Central America: An El Salvadoran Example

To understand the feelings soccer evokes for Latinos in the U.S., we must first understand its significance in much of the Americas. Roberto Velasquez,³² who emigrated from El Salvador to the U.S. in 1980, explained in a formal interview that soccer is the most popular sport in El Salvadoran culture, if not the most popular form of entertainment (according to my AHORA students, soccer is very popular for women as well as men). To further explain how soccer functions in daily life in his country of origin, Mr. Velasquez emphasized how the “style of life” in El Salvador differs from in the U.S. “In El Salvador, everybody knows their neighbors, and entire neighborhoods will often engage in large soccer games in the streets most nights lasting from 7 pm to 10 pm.” Here we can see how soccer and community merge in El Salvador. “When asked whether soccer holds the same significance to Latinos in Somerville as to those still living in El Salvador, Mr. Velasquez responded that while his body is in Somerville, his mind is in El Salvador.” Mr. Velasquez “described that for newly arrived Latino immigrants, playing in Latino soccer leagues is a great source of joy as it provokes memories and feelings of life back in their native country.” These quotes from Cohen’s interview report of Roberto Velasquez demonstrate how activities, like playing soccer, carry special significance for Latinos for whom playing soccer was tightly woven into community life back home. Not only is Mr. Velasquez’s mind in El Salvador when he is playing, but he also has soccer team flags from his hometown proudly displayed in his living room and he stays in contact with the teams back home through online soccer updates.

³² Roberto Velasquez, (Interview Report), 10/08/03.

Latino Soccer in the U.S.: Building and Strengthening Community in Somerville

In addition to emotionally linking one to home in Central America, playing soccer in Somerville provides opportunities for building friendships and strengthening Latino communities here in the States. Mr. Velasquez cites Latino soccer leagues in Somerville as great opportunities for new immigrants to “make friends and meet new people.” As an example, he offers how once after playing soccer in Roxbury, he went along with his teammates to an apartment in Jamaica Plain where they bonded, talking about sports, politics, and family-life, for hours.

Not only does soccer function to build relationships among players, but Latino soccer games also provide a place and time for family gathering. Women come to games to support and watch their husbands, brothers, children, and friends play. Mr. Velasquez described how “most of the women stand on the sideline and sew, as well as talk with friends” and cheer for their loved ones on the field.

Another narrator from El Salvador, Lucas A. Santos,³³ who arrived in Somerville in 1995, described how at some games there have been as many as six to eight hundred people watching and cheering from the sidelines. In concluding his interview, Mr. Santos shared how he feels that participation in soccer games is a “very special experience for Latinos in Somerville, unlike any other.” He explained how everybody gathers at the field, chats and watches the games, eats traditional Latino food, and ends up spending the whole afternoon at the fields. From these two narrators it is clear that not only does soccer link Latinos to their senses of home and identity, but soccer games also function as

³³ Lucas A. Santos, (Interview Report), 10/12/03.

a site where new relationships are built, families come together, and Latino communities are further developed and strengthened.

This holds true for St Benedict's soccer leagues as well, where people from the church, along with players' family and friends attend games. As described by my AHORA students, church sponsored soccer games are a community-building opportunity because they "bring diversity and promote unity." The soccer field is then another example of a space that different people share which encourages a common sense of unity.

Organized Sites of Community-Building: PROESA

In addition to the three previously discussed sites of organized community-building, just this year, Centro Presente,³⁴ located at 54 Essex Street in Cambridge, has launched a new membership program entitled, PROESA (Proyecto de Educación Solidaridad y Acción). This education, solidarity, and action project was initiated at a community forum held by Centro Presente on April 12th of 2003, at which almost three hundred Salvadorans and Hondurans under the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program were present. At this forum, in addition to a postcard writing campaign to demand the extension of the TPS program, PROESA was born to provide "further opportunities for our constituents to shape our collective future."³⁵ Thus, members of Centro Presente can participate in PROESA, "planning and working on campaigns, cultural events and public education."³⁶ Although neither Centro Presente nor PROESA are located in Somerville, according to Elena Letona, Executive of Centro Presente, Latinos from all over Boston

³⁴ Contact Information: Phone: (617)497-9080, Fax: (617)497-7247, Email: centro@cpresente.org, website: www.cpresente.org

³⁵ "Centro Presente," Semi-Annual Newsletter, Summer 2003.

³⁶ Ibid.

participate (however neither of my AHORA students had heard of PROESA prior to this project). However, this program is still in its infancy and Letona expects PROESA to gain in membership in coming years. For the Latinos of Somerville then, PROESA is a burgeoning community-building opportunity, offering the chance to work with diverse Latinos on affecting policy and improving community education, and could be further investigated in the future.

Transnationalism

Although there are many obstacles to participation in organized community-building activities, such as restricted English skills, and limited time off work or away from childcare responsibilities, I will not focus on these impediments. Regardless of barriers, Latino's in Somerville are continuously working to improve their communities both through organized programs and in less visible ways. For example, one of my narrators sews clothes for people, which I would not have discovered had I not been prompted to ask about it specifically by others in the community.

Just as Maria Tejada did not tell me in our formal interview that she volunteers her time to teach CCD classes at The Little Flower school, many Latinos do not think of the generous acts they perform on a daily basis as “community-building” efforts. Only in casual conversation, walking with Maria Tejada after attending Mass at St Benedict's one Sunday, did she tell me how she and her husband bring used clothes back to El Salvador for those who are in need. Her husband, Orlando Tejada, will soon be flying home to El Salvador for seven days, and she was pleased because this trip they had a lot of clothing to donate. This is an example of community-building even though we may not think of El Salvador as within the “community” of a woman who has lived in the States for more

than a decade. However, she and her husband have both been back to El Salvador several times since they left, and both have family members still living in Central America. As stated by Peggy Levitt in Transnational Villagers, many people assume

“that migrants will eventually transfer their loyalty and community membership from the countries they leave behind to the ones that receive them. But increasing numbers of migrants continue to participate in the political and economic lives of their homelands, even as they are incorporated into their host societies. Instead of loosening their connections and trading one membership for another, some individuals are keeping their feet in both worlds.”³⁷

The Tejadas’ continual donations to El Salvador are only one example among many of the connections immigrants keep to their homelands while they build community in the States. As Levitt summarizes, “assimilation and transnational practices are not incompatible.”³⁸ This means that Latinos can adapt to new “American” lives in Somerville while maintaining connections across nations to the worlds they arrive from. The soccer players who keep up with their Central American hometown teams while playing with their “minds in El Salvador” are further examples of Latinos maintaining a sense of transnational community. In researching how Latino immigrants define and build community it is important to recognize that their senses of “community” likely include peoples and communities abroad. Thus, the Latino immigrants of Somerville are working both to improve their communities here in the States and also those in Central America.

Conclusions

In conclusion, while definitions of community vary, family, friends, coworkers and/or people that narrators interact with tend to comprise people’s visions of their communities.

³⁷ Levitt, Transnational Villagers, 3.

³⁸ Levitt, Transnational Villagers, 5.

Additionally, shared spaces, whether a common homeland, the Church, the soccer field, or a local neighborhood space or organization, build community among those who share them and can be powerful forces in the shaping of community concepts and borders.

Because people do tend to limit their concepts of community to those people with whom they share kinship or immediate space, it is vitally important that we have opportunities to gather and interact with members of different ethnic and social groups, especially with those sharing our cities. Immigrants who may be new and may be struggling with language barriers can gain much from connection to greater community networks, however the construction and maintenance of communities inclusive of diverse peoples is beneficial to all members of the nation, not only new arrivals. I hope this paper encourages, not only Latinos, but greater-Somerville residents to recognize and appreciate Latino communities, inspiring efforts to bring the diverse peoples of Somerville together, on common ground.

Narrators' Biographies (Formal Interviews)

Maria Tejada (Interview # 1, 10/05/03): Maria Tejada is the mother of AHORA student Jessica Tejada. She was born in 1964 in El Salvador, and immigrated here over a decade ago. She lives with her husband and four children in the Mystic Ave housing developments and attends St Benedict's Church. Through the Church, she also volunteers her time to teach CCD classes at The Little Flower Catholic elementary school.

Emma Ramos (Interview # 2, 10/10/03): Emma Ramos arrived from El Salvador in 1993, has 7 sisters and 4 brothers, and has children both there and here in Somerville (3 there and 6 here). Her children here range in age from 6 months to 17 years of age (6 months, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 17 years). Senora Ramos lives in the Mystic Ave housing developments and attends *Iglesia Dios Pentecostal*.

Alma Mejia (Interview # 3, 10/10/03): Alma Mejia is the single mother of two children, one of whom is Daniel Lemus, an AHORA student. Senora Mejia is from El Salvador, and one of 14 kids. She arrived to the States on November 10th, 1985 and currently works in American homes and lives in Somerville by the Welcome Project.

Nelson Salazar (Interview # 4, 10/10/03): Nelson Salazar arrived from Sonsonate, El Salvador in 1980. He lived in Cambridge and worked for Concilio Hispano for some time, and is currently the coordinator of the Welcome Project at the Mystic Ave housing developments. He lives with his wife and children in Somerville.

Anonymous Female, ((Interview # 5, 10/24/03): This narrator is middle-aged female from Nicaragua who came to the State in 1988 with her sister. She has a lot of family up here, a 9-year-old daughter, and two older teenage daughters. She attends Saint Benedict's church and lives in Somerville, a short walk from the Mystic Ave housing developments.

Rosemarie Federico (Interview # 6, 10/24/03): The narrator is Puerto Rican and was born in Florida. Spanish was her first language although she is fluent in English and has no Latina accent. She has about 80 family members across 3 generations in the States. She lives with her two sons and her Italian American husband (present and vocal in the interview). He was born in Somerville, and lived in Florida for 28 years. They married in Florida, had a restaurant that was destroyed by a hurricane, and so moved up to Somerville and are now in their 50s. Mrs. Federico teaches during the summer with the Tufts SPELL program, and Mr. Federico works with Delta Airlines and in the restaurant business.

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