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Interviewee: Pedro Trivella  
Interviewer: Kelly Dender  
Transcriber: Rev.com  
Editor: Gillian Demetriou  
Location: Zoom Meeting

**Kelly Dender:**

Okay, and we're recording. Okay.

**Pedro Trivella:**

You will be editing? You will edit some of this?

**Kelly Dender:**

There is a team that Professor Ziobro has to do that kind of stuff on the back end. She's paying for transcriptions and stuff like that.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Okay. Good.

**Kelly Dender:**

All right. Here we go. My name is Kelly Dender and I am a student oral historian at Monmouth University. Today is March 12th, 2021. We're here today with Professor Pedro Trivella. They have agreed to be interviewed for the Paradoxical Paradise Asbury Park Oral History project in a phase of the project that is focused on, but not limited to COVID-19's impact on the city. This interview is being recorded with the permission of all present parties.

Again, thank you very much for being with me today. This is exciting that you want to be a part of this project. Can you tell me a little bit about your early life? Were you born in Asbury Park?

**Pedro Trivella:**

No. I wasn't. First of all, I want to thank you, Kelly, for this amazing opportunity for me to share my love, my commitment to my rich community of Asbury Park. In case you haven't noticed, I have an accent, so I was not born here. I was born in Venezuela. I moved to the United States on a scholarship from the government of Venezuela and the purpose of that scholarship was for me to earn a college degree, but also learn about the American culture so that I could go back to Venezuela and come back with a dual vision of life.

So after living in many states, I ended up here in Asbury Park 12 years ago. And as you will find out, moving here changed my life for the better, for myself and the people that I have come in contact with.

**Kelly Dender:**

That's great. Okay. So then you grew up in Venezuela and you came here for college?

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes. I did. They gave me six months to learn English.

**Kelly Dender:**

Oh wow.

**Pedro Trivella:**

And I started the University of Wisconsin, that's where I went to school. .

**Kelly Dender:**

Cold!

**Pedro Trivella:**

In Superior, Wisconsin. My first winter was fifty degrees below. With the wind chill, it got to be 100 degrees below. Coming from a tropical climate, it was shocking.

**Kelly Dender:**

That must have been shocking, yes.

**Pedro Trivella:**

But I did earn a college degree in business marketing from the University of Wisconsin. Little did I know that was not where life was going to take me because I'm in education now. I teach at Monmouth; Spanish and oral languages and Hispanic cultures, but also, I teach elementary school here, at Thurgood Marshall Elementary School and I teach ESL bilingual students K through third.

**Kelly Dender:**

Okay. After you got your business marketing degree, then where did you go?

**Pedro Trivella:**

I went back to Venezuela because I was supposed to go back and service my country, meaning work for the government. They invested in me, so they wanted me to work for the government and bring the knowledge of the American culture because we always idolized the United States. And we wanted to acquire the positive aspects of the American culture, particularly the work ethics and their vision for businesses and economy and social justice.

But when I went back, they basically told me I was on my own, so they were not very organized in a way that they invested so much money on not just me, but many of us. They were not organized and committed to utilizing their investments. So I ended up moving back to the United States because I felt like even though I still feel very attached to my Venezuelan culture and Italian culture, because my dad was from Italy, I really felt at home in the United States.

**Kelly Dender:**

Oh, that's so nice.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yeah. It was very nice. I think it has everything to do with how well-organized you guys are, Americans and then how you know that if you do A, B, and C, you will get D as a result. So I'm very structured that way, so I connected to the American culture to the point that I felt like this was my home.

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. That's so nice. So then when you moved back to the United States, did you go back to Wisconsin?

**Pedro Trivella:**

No. I ended up going to Minnesota. I ended up moving to a state that, believe it or not, it was a little warmer than Wisconsin and I worked for 3M in the automotive department and I was in marketing, more like sales, which is not ultimately what I wanted to do. And I did that for two years, but they transferred me to Houston, Texas.

**Kelly Dender:**

Wow.

**Pedro Trivella:**

I know, so after being in Houston for approximately a year, I knew that I did not want to be a sales rep for 3M and I just quit.

**Kelly Dender:**

Oh. So then what?

**Pedro Trivella:**

So you want me to continue my journey?

**Kelly Dender:**

Yes. So did you have a backup plan when you decided to quit?

**Pedro Trivella:**

No. I'm an artist and I'm very creative, so I wanted to explore that side of me. So I became involved in the drama world, I guess. I did [inaudible 00:07:34] and I did some acting. So that was very fulfilling, but I did not feel that I was accomplishing my American dream. And then I decided since I don't know what I want to do when I grow up, I am going to become a flight attendant.

**Kelly Dender:**

Oh man.

**Pedro Trivella:**

So that I can travel the world and also, I can continue to see my family and I could continue to do my paintings. Then I ended up doing some artwork, which I still do to this day. I became a flight attendant. I was a flight attendant for 16 years.

**Kelly Dender:**

How long? I'm sorry.

**Pedro Trivella:**

16 years.

**Kelly Dender:**

Oh wow. Okay.

**Pedro Trivella:**

I'm older than what I look. [laughter]

**Kelly Dender:**

[Laughter] So becoming a flight attendant, for you, gave you the freedom to do your arts and your drama and your acting, stuff like that. So it gave you more of your creative life. It freed that up for you.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yeah. And also it fed my creativity because believe it or not, you could actually see when you look back at my artwork, you can see the influences that traveling all over the world had on my artwork.

**Kelly Dender:**

Right, because you're getting all that different culture and different areas.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yeah. And it happened in a fluid manner because if I was flying to London for a couple of months in a row, it would reflect on my artwork and it was a little bit less colorful. The mood was just completely different, but I wasn't aware of it. It was [inaudible 00:09:39] I had an opportunity to showcase my artwork that I needed to write, not just my biography, but also, to write the source behind my pieces.

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. That's so interesting that it affected you that way.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yeah. So I became aware of what was happening. I lost one of my pets. I'm very [inaudible 00:10:00]. I love animals and I love to rescue them and they are like family to me. So that would

even reflect ... Losing a pet reflected in one of my artwork pieces. So it's interesting how the art reflects our spirit, what we're going through and also, it allows us to communicate and connect.

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. It does on levels we're not even aware of sometimes.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes.

**Kelly Dender:**

So did your creativity ... Is that something that led you to Asbury?

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes, but once again, I ended up being based in New York City for the airlines and then I met my spouse here. I'm a member of the LGBTQ community. He is from New Jersey and he said, "I want to show you that New Jersey is not the armpit of the ..."

**Kelly Dender:**

[Laughter] I agree.

**Pedro Trivella:**

"... the country." [laughter] So his dad was a lifeguard in Spring Lake. His mom and dad met in Asbury Park. So he took me here and at the time, Asbury Park was completely run down, but I was hypnotized by this town. It was something that you really can't explain that I connected with and I explained to him, there's something magical about Asbury Park. So we would come every summer just to see it. But I think now looking back, I was connecting to the creative [inaudible 00:12:05] of Asbury Park.

**Kelly Dender:**

There's definitely a big outlet for creativity there and it was such a shame that it was so run down for so long.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Really, it's the town that is by the water, by the ocean, and it was such a ... I don't know, such a secret to people and to me, it was so obvious. I'm like, "You're by the water. The buildings are beautiful. There's so much history."

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. You have a gold mine here and you don't even know it.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes. So we ended up when I quit the airlines because once again, I felt like I had fulfilled my ... I had gotten it out of my system. I had fulfilled my traveling around the world quota. I don't know.

I think if you go with your gut instincts, you know when your journey has ended in that regard. And he said, "Well what are you going to do?" I said, "I want to move out of Manhattan," because Manhattan was never really my type of city. And then he said, "Where do you want to go?" I said, "I want to go to Asbury Park." And he thought I was crazy. It was in 2010 and he was still not ... No, I'm sorry, 2008. It was not developed yet, but this is where I wanted to come, so we came.

**Kelly Dender:**

Okay. You came. And did you notice once you were settled here that there was any urban development? That they were starting to fix up the area? Stuff like that?

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yeah. They were in the process of doing that, but that's not the reason why we wanted ... My partner ended up staying in New York Monday through Friday and then come-

**Kelly Dender:**

Oh wow. Okay.

**Pedro Trivella:**

... on the weekend. But we knew that we loved it here and we were very happy with the way that the town was at the time. Of course you want to have a variety of the restaurants, have the nightclubs. I love music and having all the different types of musicians. That was a plus and the more the better. I'm very happy with the way that the town, the conditions of the town was and the essence was intact still. So I didn't have a job and so I took that as an opportunity to explore, meet people and I truly fell- I think I knew that this is where I'm staying for good. Because meeting people from different nationalities, from different religious backgrounds, from different sexual orientations and blending together the way that we blend in this town symbolized what inclusion is all about.

**Kelly Dender:**

Definitely.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Because [inaudible 00:15:39] Manhattan, it was segregated. Chelsea, you have the LGBT living there. Then you have Chinatown. Then you have the Italian section. So even though Manhattan offers diversity, it doesn't blend together like it does here in Asbury Park.

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. So Asbury Park, you have more of a sense of belonging and I guess, friendship of all these different communities coming together.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes. And acceptance. No one raises a brow when they know that you're part of the LGBT community or that I have an accent and I'm from Venezuela. It's celebrated. It's not just

respected, but it's celebrated. So that led me to become an educator because I was not an educator then, but I think that served an instrumental role in really finding what I was meant to be when I grew up.

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. So you found Asbury Park as an LGBT-acceptant area from the moment you stepped there, from the second your feet hit the boardwalk?

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes.

**Kelly Dender:**

Okay. Would you say that the same thing goes for race, then? That it's still very inclusive?

**Pedro Trivella:**

I do. I think people, the stakeholders in the community and the people that have the authority to make decisions have learned from history and so I think the town attracts people that are naturally built that way, where their mindset is very inclusive. However, if you're not one of those people that were born wired that way, you are almost forced to learn to be that way.

And history has a great impact on how they do things here. For instance, I live on the East side of town. So that's a privileged area of Asbury Park, right? But the people that have developed this area, they built the kind of house where I live, right? So when they found out I was from Venezuela, they were like, "Oh, would you be interested in having a business on the boardwalk to showcase your multicultural background and wanting to open a restaurant?"

So they had a business plan and they accepted it right away because it was going to be a Venezuelan restaurant. So they said to me, "We want to maintain the essence of Asbury Park, a multicultural essence of it. So that drove them to promote the idea of having different nationalities and different restaurants and all that. My mom was going to come and be in charge of it, but she ended up passing away, so that didn't materialize.

But when they open a restaurant on the boardwalk, they make sure they hire people from the east side of town. They want to make the east side of town enjoy the success of our town. So my partner was running to be a member of the board of education in Asbury Park, so we got involved with the west side. I do a lot of things with a committee that I created five years ago. It's called Basta, which means enough.

So I provide the second language learners and families with a safe place for them to flourish and to embrace their essence and understand that they do have a space here in our community and that we not only welcome them, but we want their contributions. So I do a lot of work with the west side. I kept saying the east side. So I live on the east side of Asbury Park. The west side of Asbury Park is what we do a lot of social work and community engagement with. The west side is the one that has also been given a lot of opportunities to enjoy the success that Asbury Park accomplished.

So yes. I can say that overall the Asbury Park community is a global community that fosters and promotes a global mindset, where every member of our community regardless of where they're

from feels that they have a seat at the table. Is it perfect? Absolutely not. Do we need to continue to work on diversity and what it really means to provide everyone with authentic opportunities to have a voice? And that's the reason why I have got involved. I'm the Vice Chair of the Asbury Park Democrats.

**Kelly Dender:**

Oh okay. Very good.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yeah. It's funny because I'm very blunt because I feel like I don't have time to play games when they approach me because once again, I have been involved with a lot of community initiatives and one of them was mental health. We lost my mom and my sister to mental health. And I inherited her daughter. And we were able to channel her lack of communication and her shocking experiences of losing her mom the way that she did by getting involved with the Monmouth County Mental Health organization.

Through that, I was approached by the Democrats of Asbury Park, democrats, and they're like, "Oh, you're Hispanic. We need someone like you." I said, "Oh, so am I playing the Hispanic card? Is that why you want me, because if that is the reason you want me just tell me and then I'll make my decision whether I want to be involved or not." And they told me "Yes. We need someone that is of Hispanic background," and then I was able to turn that into an opportunity.

The amazing contributions that our students and families bring to the community- and I always say, "We have to be thankful and grateful to the United States for offering us the life opportunities that they have offered us and allow us to accomplish our American dreams, but the United States has to also be grateful to us for bringing a rich culture, a strong sense of family, friendship, our happy aspect of our community where we love to dance, we love music, we love humor and we truly enjoy life every day."

**Kelly Dender:**

That's great, though. That's so good. So for being Vice Chair of the democratic community in Asbury Park, you were able to turn what they were looking at as filling a quota into a positive of being able to represent the community.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes. And they had the best intentions, so I'm not downplaying their willingness and their desire to be inclusive.

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. They're trying to be better.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yeah. But I just wanted to know why me? Just because I'm Hispanic. I do offer that, don't get me wrong. I understand that's something that I offer. But there's many other dimensions to myself and the empathy that I bring to the table due to the life situations that I have had to deal with and



having to move to this country, not knowing the language and having to learn to develop a new identity, a new voice in a new nation.

So it's been a struggle, but I wouldn't change any of it because I've been able to pass on those experiences and what I have learned from them onto my students and families. And to be honest with you, I still struggle on a daily basis, not just being Hispanic, but also, being gay. People always are going to have an idea of what you're about just because you have a label on your forehead.

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. So we need to break those stereotypes, break those labels.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes.

**Kelly Dender:**

How long have you been Vice Chair of the Democratic Committee?

**Pedro Trivella:**

I was the treasurer for two years and then I became vice chair three months ago.

**Kelly Dender:**

Oh. Very nice. Congratulations.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Thank you. Matter of fact, we had a meeting this morning.

**Kelly Dender:**

Okay. Very good. So you guys are still active even though the pandemic is going on?

**Pedro Trivella:**

Oh, very much so. Yes. Because we have a meeting on our ... unfortunately, our Chair came down with COVID.

**Kelly Dender:**

Oh no.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yeah. So I had to lead the meeting. It was so funny because they wanted us to be ... Angela is an African American, extraordinary woman. I said, "No. No. No. She can be the ..." They wanted us to be Co-chairs. I said, "She needs to be the Chair, I'll be the Vice Chair." And then she's doing better, though, but she couldn't lead the meeting, so I had to lead the meeting and it was my first time leading the meeting. But it went great.

**Kelly Dender:**

That's good. That's how it always happens. You always get thrown into it.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes. When it happens holistically, right?

**Kelly Dender:**

So now you said you started, what is it? I don't know if it's a charity organization or a group where I ... I'm sorry. It's "enough," in Spanish- Basta?

**Pedro Trivella:**

Well you made it sound Russian.

**Kelly Dender:**

[Laughter] sorry.

**Pedro Trivella:**

{Laughter} No. No. Don't be. Basta, B-A-S-T-A.

**Kelly Dender:**

Okay.

**Pedro Trivella:**

And that came about ... It started on a district level and it came about when there was a movement that was taking place, A Day Without Immigrants and that happened in 2017. I wasn't really well-aware of it and when I came to school, most of my Hispanic students were not there. And the few that were there, were in tears, thinking that when they went back home, their parents would not be there, that they would be deported. Nobody really seemed to know what to do about it.

They were coming to me because I'm from Venezuela and I also always took pride in being such an advocate for them, but yet I did the best I could at the time, but I was very ashamed of not being more proactive by informing myself of this movement, right? So I came home. I reflected on the experience and it just came to me, Basta, enough. It needs to stop. Then I plugged in Basta. So I made it a bilingual association, school transitional association. And then it took off from there.

I was able to present Dr. Repollet, which was at the time my superintendent. And he became the Commissioner of Education here in New Jersey. He took me to the Marshall Conferences in Nashville in 2017 as a product of my project. I have written articles. I've been published and then it just went to the community level, Basta. Because at the district level, there was a lot of limitations. I wanted to bring a lawyer that's bilingual and to explain to all community members that they have rights. Not from me, but they need to hear from an expert, the kind of what's stepping on a territory that was not allowed, being that he was coming from the district.

So now it's at the community level, the Basta committee - and we continue to ... Right now we have a project where we're aligning all stakeholders of our community with students and parents for them to understand that the police is actually an ally, it's not there to get them arrested and get them deported. But they need to hear it from them, not from me. So building those relationships.

And we have a huge Haitian American community, as well. So one of the many things that our current superintendent has done is that she refers them of as the black community. And she's African American herself, but we don't own the blackness. Black people come from different parts of the world, as well, so they feel very included now and they are part of that idea that I have that we need to bring everyone to the table and to hear from the police force that they are here to protect us. They're not here to harm us or to deport us if we are undocumented.

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. So it's open to everyone in the community in order to ease that transition of becoming an American, really.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes and we tell the students, take risks. It's all right for you to take risks, and you feel safe that you will not reach your full potential academically and personally. So possible adults, as well. If I know that I have people in my community that are rooting for me, that are telling me, go ahead and explore other options and we will not punish you for it or reprimand you. That's the only way that I will be able to continue with my mission of social justice, inequality readjustment, right? Environmental justice. I'm a Fulbright scholar.

**Kelly Dender:**

Oh wow.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes. And I was supposed to go to Peru, but then the pandemic took place, so now we're not even going this summer, either because of the pandemic, but we're going to plan for 2022 .

**Kelly Dender:**

Okay...

**Pedro Trivella:**

I chose the environmental protection as my focus and I had to develop a unit about it. So I'm very committed to saving our planet and that is something that Asbury Park is on board with, too. So I connect with the Asbury Park on so many levels. I feel like I finally have arrived.

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. You finally have that, what you were looking for all of your life.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes. Yes. And it happened much later on in life, but I'm lucky that it happened.

**Kelly Dender:**

Yes, very.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Has it happened for you yet?

**Kelly Dender:**

Not yet. I think once I'm out of Monmouth I'll be very close.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Good. That's good to hear.

**Kelly Dender:**

I hope so. So now I was going to ask you about the 1970 summer race riots, but since you weren't here, I don't know if you'll know much about it. So were you in town when the Black Lives Matter riots were happening last year?

**Pedro Trivella:**

Oh yes.

**Kelly Dender:**

And how did ... How was that?

**Pedro Trivella:**

Well it's interesting that you talk about the riots in the '70s because coming to town back in the early '90s just to visit made me realize something happened...

**Kelly Dender:**

Oh right.

**Pedro Trivella:**

...here. So of course that led to many conversations of what took place. And a lot of people that have been impacted by it, being business owners and so on and so forth, that is a topic of almost daily conversations. We've been in the West Side of my community canvassing for my spouse when he was running for a seat in the Asbury Park Board of Education- gave me an opportunity to hear them, to talk about it and the mistrust is still there.

It has gotten much better, but when they're being honest about it, that is something that they don't forget. History is something that I think makes us aware. The important thing is to be forgiven, but also, to be proactive and to be aware. So they would talk to us about it because my spouse is Anglo and I'm Hispanic. They were so appreciative that we would be on the other side of town to hear them out, right? And they would talk about their rights.

As far as Black Lives Matter, that was a huge movement here and it's embraced by everybody. So when I tell you that it happens organically and authentically here in Asbury Park, I'm not exaggerating. So it is not only something that happened when people were marching, it is something that happens on every decision that people make on every decision that we have, on what kind of terminology we should use. And it has branched out. This morning at my meeting, they were asking me should we call you Latino or Hispanic?

So Black Lives Matter has impacted our global community at so many levels. When was the last time I was asked that question? This was the first time. Do you want to be referred as Latino or a Hispanic? So we're living the movement and here in Asbury Park, whether it's at the district level or in our community, we are actually breathing the movement, thinking the movement, [inaudible 00:39:44] the movement. So I think that's how we celebrate woman, right? So it's women history month, right?

**Kelly Dender:**

Right.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Do we only celebrate women during the month of March? No. So that's the kind of mindset that we have here in Asbury Park. That's why I said I'm not going anywhere. This is my town.

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. So even though people are still a little hurt and distrustful after the riots 50 years ago, there is a movement now going on that is impacting everything, the entire community, not just one section of the community. So Asbury Park is sticking together it seems like.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes. What I notice is when people from out of town, they come here and that's when you hear things that shouldn't be said. And they come here because they love the variety of the arts and the music and the restaurants, but they don't like the fact that we're multicultural and ...

**Kelly Dender:**

And acceptance of it.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yeah. So I rescue Chihuahuas, and I was walking my Chihuahuas. Someone insulted me because they think that those are not real dogs. When they heard my accent, they said, "Go back to your country."

**Kelly Dender:**

This is my country.

**Pedro Trivella:**

I know.

**Kelly Dender:**

This is where I live. This is my home. So now you only think that race relations are bad when it comes to outsiders, when people are coming into town, not the town itself?

**Pedro Trivella:**

I think just like in every aspect of our lives, we have to continue to work on these different issues that we're talking about in order to continue to improve visions of all members of our community. So I'm not saying our work is finished, but what I know and what I feel and what I have experienced is that people are generally involved in making our community a global community and a community that not only accepts, but also celebrates the people that are not ... The physically challenged, disabled.

We want... they have special gifts they are bringing to our community. So this is what ... We're not saying that mindset. That's what I'm talking about. It's not just race-related that we're inclusive, but it's all across the board. Our special education students are given endless opportunities to also provide and bring to our learning space their unique gifts.

So is it perfect? No, it's not. We will continue to strive for? Oh yes, but it's in how we learn that we must continue to get up and learn from that. I'm not the first one that, maybe I have said something that is not appropriate. But it's not because I meant to insult somebody, but it's because I was misinformed. I hadn't taken the time to become more educated regarding the issues.

I was beyond myself. Why is it that people don't want to get the vaccine? Once I explore more, I kind of have an idea of what happened in the past. But once I heard it from different people and I did some research, I was like, "Oh my God. I probably wouldn't want to get the vaccine if I was in their heads."

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. If you were in that situation.

**Pedro Trivella:**

So to just sum it all up, I think that we are an example to follow....

**Kelly Dender:**

Absolutely.

**Pedro Trivella:**

...in Asbury Park. But is it perfect? No. Are there many areas of improvement? Yes.

**Kelly Dender:**

I think it's a really good start, though. I do think it is an example, especially for local communities to follow that may not be so inclusive. I think it's a good example for sure.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes.

**Kelly Dender:**

So the pandemic. How has that affected you personally? Has it affected your day-to-day working and being involved in everything that you're involved with, the committees, the outreach?

**Pedro Trivella:**

It has impacted us in a way that we don't have the human connection, right? And of course, we can't have the events to fundraise for the different initiatives that we have. However, we are resilient, and we have continued with our efforts and advocacy and we have been very creative. And one of the things that I wrote an article about, redefining equity in our new virtual space. I became involved with TikTok and I wanted to reach my students where they felt really comfortable, right, in their space.

And one beautiful thing that happened as a result of it is that for my second language learners and for the monolingual students, it was a huge life-learning experience that we encountered because ... Let me give you an example. For the second language learners, being that they are bilingual, prior to the pandemic and prior to learning virtually, they appreciate the fact that they had their home language, being Spanish or Haitian Creole or Arabic, because now we have some families from Egypt.

They wanted to assimilate. They didn't want to acculturate, so they felt like they needed to just learn English and forget about their home language. So because, the educators, we have to talk to the parents, also, we're invited into their homes. So I would say, "Ariel, can you get your mom because I need to relay a message to her." And then they see the value of being bilingual because their moms may not speak English, right?

**Kelly Dender:**

Right.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Then, they're like, "Wait a minute. Mr. T ..." They call me Mr. T. "He was able to communicate with my mom in her language and I was able to understand both languages and maybe help with the translation. So it has provided an invaluable opportunity for them to cement their gift of being bilingual and also, for the parents. As far as the monolingual students, it gives them that understanding and awareness of being a global citizen and having to experience first hand now because now they're also watching.

Okay, so did I understand any of the ... because they take Spanish at school and did I understand any of it? And they actually see the application of being bilingual and being multicultural. So it prompts them to become more familiarized with people from other cultures and speak other languages. So I think that has been a positive experience and also, to value what we had prior to COVID.

Now we're back to school, hybrid, and they are so appreciative of school and the meals that they get at school. So I think it really brought an important perspective that as far as the community is concerned, it reaccentuates the fact that we need to be empathetic and we need to continue to develop our relationships and the humanity aspect of what makes us who we are.

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. It makes the human connection a lot stronger.

**Pedro Trivella:**

So I do see a lot of positive things, but of course, there are drawbacks. And mental health. So many people have been affected by what's happened and will continue. We will see the consequences in the future. So mental health. Our ability to connect with each other like you and I are connecting, right?

**Kelly Dender:**

Right.

**Pedro Trivella:**

It's doable. It can be done, but we have to be empathetic, we have to be genuine, to be fully committed to our role in our community and in our school community, in my case. So that's something that transcends. No borders. Virtual learning is borderless.

**Kelly Dender:**

Yeah. That's very true.

**Pedro Trivella:**

That's another thing that I loved about it, is that we have connected with the world more because of it.

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. Disconnect in one way and reconnect in another.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes. We just have to learn how to reconnect again, when-

**Kelly Dender:**

In person.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes.

**Kelly Dender:**

Yes. It's going to be hard.

**Pedro Trivella:**

And it's needed so badly.

**Kelly Dender:**



Definitely.

**Pedro Trivella:**

We need oxygen. I do. I'm a social person. I need to be around my kids, to replenish and to have faith in humanity.

**Kelly Dender:**

Yeah. And I feel like Asbury Park is such a social area, especially in the summertime. I can imagine it's absolutely killer not to be able to do that right now.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes. Enjoy nature. Everything that is beautiful that happens here is the families. We are a family-oriented community and that is embedded into a community that celebrates different cultural backgrounds, different religious backgrounds, different ethnic backgrounds, different sexual orientation backgrounds. So you would think that you wouldn't find a family-oriented community with a diverse way of thinking or diverse lifestyles. It happens naturally here.

**Kelly Dender:**

Yeah. Everyone feels like they belong.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Have you visited Asbury Park?

**Kelly Dender:**

I am actually a frequent flier to Asbury Park. It's one of my favorite places to go.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Okay. So that tells me something good about you.

**Kelly Dender:**

Yes. When I can't think of what to eat, Asbury Park is a go to. You can find anything there.

**Pedro Trivella:**

I know.

**Kelly Dender:**

Anything. Especially places, you know, they used to have parades all the time. I've gone to Paradise a couple times with my friends and it was such a great experience of everyone being so welcoming. And now that because of the pandemic is just not as it was. I cannot wait to see what Asbury ... I think they're going to come back with a bang. I really do.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes. And think how much more appreciative of what we had that maybe we took for granted.

**Kelly Dender:**

Right. Definitely. I sure did. There's just things, regular things, going to the store or out to eat or whatever. You can't.

**Pedro Trivella:**

You know what? You're bringing a very interesting point because I think that Americans have experienced for the first time what it's like to live in a country where we don't have freedom, where we have to be afraid to go outside because of the militia or the government or your life is so structured by the dictator that is leading the country. So it gives us a different perspective, appreciation.

**Kelly Dender:**

Definitely.

**Pedro Trivella:**

And empathy for, now you know what it feels like and that is invaluable because when you feel it, you get it.

**Kelly Dender:**

Oh yeah because being told no and just having to accept you can't go to A, B, and C. You have to stay home. You can't do what you want to do. There's no wants in other countries and I think it's important that we do come out on the other side with empathy and understanding.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yeah. So there's a reason.

**Kelly Dender:**

There is. We might not realize it, but there is.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Also, globally speaking, when you try to tell someone we are global citizens and they kind of understand it, but they're not in touch with it. What happened in China didn't stay in China. So we do have to be concerned about what happens all over the world because we are interconnected and it's going to affect us in one way or another.

**Kelly Dender:**

It does. It might not affect us tomorrow, but it will eventually.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes.

**Kelly Dender:**

Okay. Let's see. Is there anything else you want to touch on about yourself, the town? Anything we haven't talked about?

**Pedro Trivella:**

No. I talk a lot, don't I?

**Kelly Dender:**

That's okay. The more the better.

**Pedro Trivella:**

The one thing that I would always say when I'm involved in discussions with regard to social justice and acceptance and equity, I always say you don't have to be someone of a different nationality to be an advocate and an ambassador for all people. At this point, I have a close friend of mine who is an educator in Asbury Park and she's an Anglo woman and I have not seen anyone deal with students from all different social or economic backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds like her because there is discussions that "oh you think that Hispanic teacher should be teaching Hispanic students because who would know better than a Hispanic teacher what it's like to be a Hispanic American?" But I think it's a matter of a mindset. If you step out of your comfort zone, which she has, my friend has, you could do magic with it. If we understand that, I step out of my Hispanic being and I have learned so much from my Egyptian student, which I was simply not knowledgeable- and from my African students. So I take my hat off to people that were not born Hispanic or African American that can really empathize and help people that look different than they do or sound different than they are because they were not forced to be a minority.

Therefore, they were doing what they were doing by choice. They decided to be an agent of change because they were driven by that. It took for themselves to be in an uncomfortable situation for them to learn and grow. So that's the one thing that I always tell people. Don't let your nationality or your cultural background dictate who you are. Use that to guide your decisions in life and embrace that inner Hispanic that you are.

In order for me to be the best American that I can be, I have to be the best Hispanic that I can be, right? But that means to me because the essence of being an American is being multicultural. So it is my responsibility to step out of my Hispanic being and learn about others so that I can be of help to anyone.

**Kelly Dender:**

Yeah. Definitely. It's something you want to do. It's something that you're not told to do, and I think that makes the difference.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes.

**Kelly Dender:**

That you want to do it.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Yes and they can sense it. The students can sense it. Children can sense it. Adults can sense it when you are genuine.

**Kelly Dender:**

Yeah. When you're trying to make an actual connection and not something that is falsified or under different circumstances, because you have the passion to want to do what you're doing and I think that's so great.

**Pedro Trivella:**

So I look forward to running into you, Kelly, here in Asbury Park.

**Kelly Dender:**

I will be there. I can assure you. I don't know if you'll recognize me with half my face covered.

**Pedro Trivella:**

Oh yes.

**Kelly Dender:**

But I really hope that it's ...