



John C. Pinheiro

John C. Pinheiro:

My name, original name, I was born in the Azores on the island of Faial and my really name, my mother gave it to me, like it or not, Juan Carlos [inaudible 00:00:14] Pinheiro. But now everybody knows me by John C. Pinheiro. Different [inaudible 00:00:22]. I live until 17 years old on the island of Faial. And the reason that I come to US was because a volcano erupted on the island in 1957. And being very close to the port that boats used to go whaling, was offshore whaling, we lost my father and we lost everything we had. We didn't have much but we were very happy there. No ideas in leaving the island.

When the volcano erupted September 1957, our house was covered with ashes, disappear completely and we had to move to other areas, and was big disaster. Volcano was active for 13 months and of course the island was a big disaster there.

Interviewer:

Did you have siblings? Was it just [inaudible 00:01:45]?

John C. Pinheiro:

Yes. Everybody was moving to the other islands. Everybody move a little more from the area. The volcano was really a disaster. The other areas of the island, people move in and people open their houses and things like that. So at the time John F. Kennedy and Senator Pastore from Rhode Island went to Washington. They knew about this big disaster, that people need some help, so they went to Washington and they passed a special visa for the people on the island that they want to come to US so their special visa could come.

So my father, I sold my father decision so decided to give it a shot, you know? But if it wasn't the volcano, I had my life more or less planned. I was in school. I was going to go to the army and rank and I had a little bit of school. I was lucky on that, on the island, and he decided to come. So, no volcano, I wouldn't be here. I would never [inaudible 00:03:05] on the US. It changed the life completely. Completely, we had no plans, no ... And at the island, we didn't have much because at the time on the '60s and on the '50s, an island that was 1,000 miles away from a big land like mainland Portugal was 1,000 miles away, US 2,000 miles away.

So we're in the middle of the Atlantic. So, our culture is a little different and people, they farm on the island, they live on the island and they die on the island. It's not like today, things happen now, in a minute everybody knows what's going on. To go to the mainland, there will be people with money, a lot of money and it used to take about a week to get to the mainland. Today we get there in an hour and three quarters, so things change.

The city, people live on the city, and a few things smaller than people who live on a village. I was lucky for a part that I run there give me a lot of credit and influence to get through my life when I come here, was I was ... my father, we live on the city [inaudible 00:04:33] which we have a few things but we didn't have TV, we didn't have radio, no radio, very few things. And on the summer, my father moved to the port of the whale. Over there was zero. No running water in the house, no stove, we have a wooden stove, no electricity, no refrigeration, no telephone. Nothing, nothing, and we lived very happy there and was exchange. People from the village and people from the city is a big difference in philosophies and thinking, and I had the chance as a kid to learn about the impact.

When I come from the city, the city I was in school, high school, I had to dress up. To go there, you have to have a tie. If you don't have a tie, don't even try to go because you're not going to get in. You're going to be kicked out. Shoes, everything else. On the village, no shoes, first of all. And the roads at the time wasn't paved roads. It was



dirt roads. So, when I first come into the village, there was guys who said, "Hey, look at this guy with shoes," and all that. And I said, "Well, I've got to do something here." So I took my shoes off and I started walking like that, but my feet, my toes all banged up. Oh, my mothers always put them [inaudible 00:06:03] enough to when I go down to the city, oh, put the shoes on wasn't easy because all banged up.

So, it was an experience that I learned how to deal with different people, good people. They didn't have money but they have everything else. They grow their own corn, their own potatoes, everything. They had the cows, they had the milk and they have all that. But they have no money. No, some people come from the city to sell sugar or even fish. They didn't have the money. How are you going to get the fish? So they gave him potatoes and they get the fish. So it worked. It worked. But that's the way it was, but to me for my life when I come here it was even in my business, when I get in business her, people tell me, "John, whoa, you're dealing with the guys that sweep the floor, but it comes to guys here like PhD degree and things you deal with them, you changed," because I learned over there. Talk with the village people, same way. I go to the city, it's like shifting and [inaudible 00:07:33] another level. But there was interest now.

Interviewer:

So when you came in 1958 with your family, did you all move to New Bedford?

John C. Pinheiro:

Yes. The way this worked was before you come here, you've got to get a sponsor. A sponsor is somebody that when you come here will guide you, will get you an apartment, get you some furniture, try to get you a job and [inaudible 00:08:08] our sponsor was in New Bedford was another thing that we had no control. You've got to keep adjust, but the biggest impact was when you come from the middle of [inaudible 00:08:25] a small island and I was in high school. Very few people went to high school in Faial. You've got to pay, you've got to dress up, you know, all that stuff. But I had lucky I graduated from my school before I come here and my idea is going [inaudible 00:08:47] to school when I come here. But after time, they added to the people they immigrate to US, it's not to go to school at that time. Come to work.

All the guys that I know from the island Portuguese what are you working already? No, I'm trying to get to go to school. Where do you come from? You come to America to go where? Mentality. No, I come to America to work. It was a big impact for me because I wasn't going to achieve where I want to go. For maybe 99% it was a blessing. They're working there, they work here, level of life way better. That was a very easy transaction, but that's the way it was, so it's very hard on the beginning. I tried to make deals with my father. I'm going to go back to go to school, continue school there. He sent me the money but [inaudible 00:09:42].

And at the time there wasn't too many organizations and people to help people go to school. Today, completely different. There's all kinds of different scholarship [inaudible 00:09:58] for scholarship, people who try to guide you, try to ... It's completely different ballgame, and myself, I found two or three different scholarship organizations and people sometimes say, "Oh, John must be doing very well. He's trying to raise money to give to these kids." Well, I'm better off now than I was when I come. There's no question about that, but my idea was I want to help somebody that I know and they're going to need help because I needed help when I come here and I didn't have the guidance and the money to get through.

So, that was the reason. I'm still a scholarship [inaudible 00:10:48] that's one of the things that ... And it was a big impact. When they come to here, they come empty hands, nothing. Matter of fact, my father had to work here three or four months to pay the trip from here because they gave us the money to pay the money but we had to pay a little bit here and there. So, my first year if I could swim back, if I could have walked back, if I could get back any way, I would have gone back, but my father decided we're together, we come together, we're going to stick together. See, in the island, families are a little closer because you can go and today even though our culture changed, today we've got sons here and if you go to college, you've got to go to New York, you've got to go to California, you've got to go here, there, oh my God, over there.



Here, living in the same mile, everybody together. It's a different culture because that's the way we get brought up. So, time went by and I had great days in the island because I was in school, was one of the first people, fishermen, whalemens to go to high school and all my friends, I was good in sports and all my friends with fathers who are doctors, you know? Very, very small. When I say high school, our class was 20-some kids on the [inaudible 00:12:35]. After the game we're going to go over there. We're going to have a few drinks and this, and I just laughed. He said, "My friends, my situation is like this. You turn me upside down, sideways, nothing. I very gladly would like to go, but you've got to know my situation. No money. Nothing." "Oh, don't worry about it," he said. "Okay [inaudible 00:13:03]." Yeah, but things that is okay if [inaudible 00:13:10].

Interviewer:

So what made the difference for you here? How did you find your community here? When do you feel like you kind of came into New Bedford?

John C. Pinheiro:

It's up to the person himself. So I have a little bit of studies there and I knew a little bit of English, a little bit. I could speak French, Portuguese [inaudible 00:13:37] and Spanish. Of course, Portuguese, Spanish, we get part. So to integrate on American culture, American way takes a while, but people never do that. They always keep their own traditions and they live here the same way they live over there. It's just better off because [inaudible 00:13:59]. No big deal.

And we found a place to stay with some used furniture and I wasn't sure in the beginning if I was going to go on here. I had to find a way to go to school or find a way to go back to the island, which I was there [inaudible 00:14:24]. But I started playing sports here and well, they found me a job to get by. It's not really what I want, but enough to play in sports, start getting friends, our team start doing good, we travel all over the country. We're starting going down and there was school here, there, but to me it was lost years from [inaudible 00:14:48].

I don't want to come here and just ... I'm going to bring my traditions and I keep my traditions and I'm very happy for my Portuguese Azorian culture. And I'm happy that [inaudible 00:15:17] and I get into the American culture. So, I feel very happy to have in me two cultures, that I love them both. Although I can mix them and I try not. When I'm talking with you different ways, American, we talk, I'm proud. And in America, I'm proud to be here, but you go to another thing, if people say, "Oh, he's stuck in a ..." Sure, when you go to the [inaudible 00:15:46] I change ships.

And I'm proud of both the same. Very proud of being of my upbringing culture and I tell people, "When I lose that, I'm done." [inaudible 00:16:01] I've got to keep that inside of me. I don't want to telegraph it too much, but it's there.

Interviewer:

What things have you done to keep that culture and transfer it to your family? What kinds of ... are there things that you have really worked hard to make sure that that kind of carries forward in the family? That culture?

John C. Pinheiro:

On the beginning I get a job, I work in a factory for seven years [inaudible 00:16:36] and after that, my father-in-law was a [inaudible 00:16:44] he was one of the best in the Azores when he come here, all different cars. Everything is different, and he was a man that he didn't have much education but he had the will to be in business and ideas on [inaudible 00:17:02] put him through. It was the other way around. I didn't know how to work on cars but I have ideas [inaudible 00:17:09] I want to go ahead. I don't want to just live the rest of my life working out on a factory.

So he come to me, he said, "Well, speaking English a little bit and you know a lot of people here in the area even for being here not long." Through sports, everybody know me. "Let's start a business. Are you willing to quit the



[inaudible 00:17:36]" "Oh yeah [inaudible 00:17:37] oh, right a way. I'll give it a shot. Even if it don't work, not a big deal. We've got to try something." And we went for it, and [inaudible 00:17:48] went to the business. And one time he even told me this story, I like to say that. I've been working with people with very little ability. They're not too good, they're not into this. But before he told me, "Hey, don't get mad. I'm telling you, don't get ..." He said, "No, no. You can tell everything you want. No problem. But I've never seen a person that don't know anything about cars like you." You say? Thank you. I know other things. [inaudible 00:18:27] and work out. Hey, I put that business from two men to 20-some men working [inaudible 00:18:33] went to seminars, doing things always.

And I like sailing. I learned how to sail through school in Portugal. We had boats to sail there and I learned and my father being a whaler he sailed too a little bit so one of my wishes when I come here [inaudible 00:18:56] right now was get a sailboat. Took a while, but I did, and the other thing is we live there. The time I live there was under dictatorship, so it was a ... Mainland Portugal was a little tougher. On the islands, we had to be careful. We had to follow rules, and they'd say as long as you follow the rules, do the things, no problems at all. But nobody that come from the islands ever votes there's no vote. We don't know this. Right on the beginning, Portuguese here [inaudible 00:19:36] was the majority and when it comes to political positions, they don't know. They don't know the power of the vote. We have to learn that when [inaudible 00:19:49].

Today is a little different. People from there, they vote there. Already they come here, they integrate, they know [inaudible 00:20:00] nobody know [inaudible 00:20:03] so they go sit over there, go over there. Can talk about anything else but you can't talk about religion and government, politics. You know? And yet in a dictatorship is one thing they lose. You give up a little bit, you're done. So they had people everywhere, even certain [inaudible 00:20:31] your friends here and there, they were the ears of when you say something [inaudible 00:20:39] or next day, they take you somewhere away. That's the way it goes. That's the way it went. But if you don't talk about the government and religion, one religion, that's it, you're okay. [inaudible 00:20:59] that's it.

But that's the way it was. So you come here, it changed a little bit. So I get in in different ways, organizations I'm proud to found a scholarship organization that we raise money to give to kids on the island and some families here, poor people. I've been involved with cancer, all different things there [inaudible 00:21:33] we've been the business of the year quite a few years and man of the year, the Portuguese community. Well, I guess I was doing things a little above the average I guess. I'm not sure but everything always [inaudible 00:21:50] they needed to do and enjoy doing. It's the way the idea, helping someone because I come to a point that it's best reward you could have on this life [inaudible 00:22:06] to help somebody in need. If you help somebody in need, you feel good. You feel good. The rest is just ... [inaudible 00:22:18] you know? [inaudible 00:22:19] whatever it is.

And I get involved with the museum too, a little later. I get involved in New Bedford Yacht Club which I was very proud to be one of the first immigrants to be on the board there. I was the chairman of the [inaudible 00:22:39] regatta that was a hundred or some volunteers. To me it was a challenge but when you have good people around you, makes it easy. I love that, you know? Everyone wants to be the superstar, wants to be the [inaudible 00:23:00]. You've just got to know how to talk with people [inaudible 00:23:03] and say, "Okay. Let's go for it. [inaudible 00:23:07]." Just let them go. We've got to trust some of them and they've got to trust some of you.

That's the thing. Sometimes people [inaudible 00:23:16] well, trust people and they're going to try to get people they know better than I do, so, you know? And it works. But I used to say, "I won a lot of regattas. Why? I have a good crew. I have good people around me." People they know as good as me and some of them better than me. So that makes it easy. Sometimes I get the credit. "Oh, John, wonder if he [inaudible 00:23:46] ..." It's my boat. I spent the money, but all these guys work. Without them, I won't be winning this. And they know [inaudible 00:23:56] because I told them, "Hey, [inaudible 00:23:57]." But that's the way it is.

And other things. It is a challenge to break the barrier being an immigrant from certain countries, Azores. People never get out of it, and some do because I had my personal ideas and I hang onto it. I don't care what people say about me, this or that or that. My idea is still there. Keep banging, keep pushing. They say no, okay, but if it's something I really want, next day I'll be knocking on the door again. "What's going on?" [inaudible 00:24:47] Right, but you better try to get on a wagon because I don't want to leave you alone. Persistence.



Interviewer:

Yes, yeah.

John C. Pinheiro:

Persistence, and it's been my trick. It's persistence. If you want something, you've got to persist. Don't give up. You know? When I first bought my first sailboat, I thought that I want to go here and win and do everything else. Oh boy, what a surprise that was. It was a few years. I always finished last, last. Even I come home, my wife, "Oh, you finished last." "Yeah, but last year I would finish half an hour behind. This year is only 20 minutes so I'm improving." Quite a few years like that, and you start getting people, you're prepared. If I would have gave up, nothing happened. Hang in there getting beat and beat, but I was pushing. [inaudible 00:25:49] I'm going to get there. I'm going to be [inaudible 00:25:51] my idea was not being better than anybody else but being at the same level, local. But that wasn't easy, but hang on.

So that's part of my coming to the country here. One time it was John Garcia we see a lot of people come from the island and then they get involved with the yacht club, they get involved with these things. We're involved in politics. My son was the city council here in New Bedford, but you ... Well, country that I'm going to live, I want to get in and do what I have to be to be accepted on this society, you know. That's it. It's not like I give up and forget about where I come from. No, no, no. [inaudible 00:26:44]

So, pretty much it. That's another story I have to tell. When I left the island, I cried. I was 17 years old. I cried. I didn't know where I was going to go with my friends here, a few, and it was very ... Now, my life is set pretty much. I still get ideas, but if they told me, if somebody told me as much as I like where I come from, I go there every year, maybe twice sometimes, people tell me, "John, you're going to go and you're going to live the rest of your life on the island." I'll cry again. They're going to call me a crybaby. You know why? Things change. This is my home here now. Before it was there. Now, my home is here. I get friends, I get bases, I get family. That's it. I'd like to go there and I hope they don't say, "Hey, [inaudible 00:28:00] come here." No, no, no. I like to come here for a month and see everything's beautiful.

And on the beginning when I used to go there, it was three or four places before I do anything [inaudible 00:28:14] I used to go to grammar school, the church and the house that my father used to live. [inaudible 00:28:21] that's it. Now [inaudible 00:28:29] that's the way it was. So even before I get [inaudible 00:28:45] nice place and everything. "Oh, you're going to retire here." Well, my retirement is what you see. A month here, this way I go back home [inaudible 00:28:56] and I'll probably get enough strength to come back here every year and enjoy it. So, no question about that.

But you've got to have inside of you a little bit of willpower, respect. See, the island, when we left, was a disaster. About 19,000 people left the island at about 20,000. That's a disaster, everything was a mess. [inaudible 00:29:26] 99.9% of the people. They call Saint Volcano. They volcano, they call Saint Volcano. Those people from the villages, they came here, oh, they get a car, they get a TV. Oh my God, these people ... They're workers. They're working, they've got to work here [inaudible 00:29:45] other people still call it Saint Volcano. It was bad for the island but in the long run for the people itself is a gift from God.

Interviewer:

And through it you found a different home, made a different home.

John C. Pinheiro:

Of course. Oh, no question about that, you know? I've been on this area for a while and I still [inaudible 00:30:22] my position here [inaudible 00:30:24] special something [inaudible 00:30:27] restaurants for the business [inaudible 00:30:30] they know I get along with everybody and I can help them in different ways. So it's a good feeling and [inaudible 00:30:44] that I live here and it was not by choice. [inaudible 00:30:51] that was where I



live. They get together once in a while [inaudible 00:30:58] and it was a few people here and [inaudible 00:31:04] and she said [inaudible 00:31:07] "John, why don't you live there all the time?" She didn't know the story. I said, "I come here not by choice." And I said, "I come here because a volcano." "Oh [inaudible 00:31:19]." Right there to explain half an hour about the volcano, why I couldn't be [inaudible 00:31:23]. "Oh, I didn't know that."

And Tony [inaudible 00:31:30] lives in the same area [inaudible 00:31:32]. So, from this story you're going to eliminate some of these things.