

**Interview with**  
**CARMEN SANTOS**

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**June 28, 2023**

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## CARMEN SANTOS

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Carmen Santos was interviewed by Caitlinn Grimm and Kathleen Broeder on June 28, 2023 in St. George, Washington County, Utah. She related her story of coming to St. George and experiences as a local business owner. Her daughter Sophia was also present.

CG: Hello, this is Caitlinn Grimm. Today is June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023. We're at Utah Tech Library. Kathleen Broeder is acting as the recorder today and we are interviewing Carmen Santos.

KB: Mention the baby.

CG: Oh. And I'm sorry, what's her name?

CS: Sophia.

CG: Sophia Santos is also present.

CS: It's actually Vargas.

CG: Oh, Vargas, okay.

CS: [Chuckles].

CG: Sophia Vargas is also present. Carmen, can you please state and spell your full name for us?

CS: Yeah. It's Carmen Santos and it's C - A - R - M - E - N. Santos, S - A - N - T - O - S.

CG: Thank you and what languages do you speak?

CS: English and Spanish.

CG: And where were you born?

CS: I was born in Tijuana, Mexico.

CG: We'll just move on to the more open questions now. So can you tell me about your childhood and family?

CS: Well, I come from a family of twelve.

CG: Oh.

CS: It's eight sisters total, well seven sisters and four brothers, and my mom and dad.

CG: Did you have fun with your family growing up?

CS: Oh, I did, yeah. My house was always full, like all the time, nieces, cousins, brothers and sisters, so I had fun. It was a good childhood.

CG: Yeah. What types of things did you do with your family?

CS: We used to play, go camping, go to the beach in Tijuana. Well, Ensenada, more. And we would always be playing together, cards, anything, just have family time.

CG: How about school?

CS: I did my elementary in Mexico.

CG: Okay.

CS: Kindergarten through fifth grade, then I came to California in 1993.

CG: Was school very different when you came to California?

CS: Very different.

CG: Yeah?

CS: In Mexico, I did the night shift. Not the night shift, but there was a shift from seven to three, and then three to five, six? I don't remember, but I had the night shift, or the afternoon shift. So coming here, waking up at seven in the morning was really hard for me. It's still hard.

CG: Yeah.

CS: [Chuckles].

CG: [Chuckles].

CS: That was a big difference and change.

CG: How was high school?

CS: High school was fine. Elementary – no, middle school was a little hard 'cause I didn't know any English. So, I had to learn English as a second language and it was fun, but it was hard.

CG: Yeah?

CS: Yeah.

CG: Did you do any extracurriculars? Or did any teachers stand out to you?

CS: We actually had an ESL [English as a Second Language] teacher. Her name was Mrs. McGraw [???correct???] and she was really nice. She always helped me out.

CG: Yeah. Did you do sports or theater?

CS: Not really.

CG: No. Just went to school?

CS: Yeah. I did help a lot with the ESL new students when I knew a little bit more English. I would help 'em out with their letters and try to get along with English. That was fun [chuckles].

CG: Yeah. Can you describe some of your favorite religious or cultural traditions you grew up with?

CS: I would definitely say religiously, my first communion, my baptism to my kids and myself and family, and I would say the like the Easter day. That's one of the most popular days that we celebrate. So on Good Friday we make a big dinner with seven different [phone ringing] dishes, which stands for the seven days of the week, and I don't know. My mom used to tell us all that.

CG: [Laughter]

CS: So it's a Good Friday we usually do that and it has to be with the family, and that would be the one that I like the most, religiously.

CG: Yeah?

CS: Mm-hmm.

CG: Did you have any festivals or things that your town would do or you would do when you moved to California?

CS: Well, in Mexico we have like the Fourth of July here, but it's in September.

CG: Okay.

CS: And it's way different than here [laughter].

CG: Yeah? Can you describe how?

CS: Yeah, we just have a lot of fireworks, there's food everywhere, there's parades. I mean it's similar, but it's, I don't know, it's just –

CG: It's everywhere, not just in people's backyards?

CS: Mm-hmm. Yeah, it's everywhere. I used to live five minutes from a park, in high school, and it would make it there, and it was fun. So we would just go walking and it's everywhere.

CG: What brought you to the St. George area?

CS: Work.

CG: Work?

CS: Yeah.

CG: Can you tell us about that?

CS: Yeah, my husband and I had a business in California and one of our delivery guys told us “Hey, here's a place in St. George that's looking for someone to buy the business.” And we came in September of '09 and we moved here in Thanksgiving of the same year.

CG: Oh.

CS: So, I loved it when I came here.

CG: Yeah. What kind of businesses?

CS: It's a Mexican Restaurant.

CG: Okay. Is there anything else about work you wanna tell us or –? About running a restaurant?

CS: Running a restaurant, it's really hard, but I loved it. I've been doing it for twenty-two years, so it's — I just love it. You get to know people, I talk to a lot of people. And running a business can be hard sometimes, but it's – you just need to enjoy it and get your heart into it so you can be successful.

CG: Going back a little bit.

CS: Mm-hmm.

CG: How have your religious and cultural traditions changed since you came to St. George?

CS: Hmm. They haven't changed much. 'Cause I go to church on Sundays and I keep my kids in their Catechism, is that what it's called?

CG: Catechism, yeah.

CS: Yeah. And no, nothing has changed much.

CG: Do you still celebrate Mexican Independence Day or do you celebrate Fourth of July, now?

CS: Now, it's Fourth of July mostly, yeah. Yeah, 'cause Mexican Independence is in September and we watch it on TV, but it's different. So now we celebrate Fourth of July.

CG: Do you kinda celebrate it the same way you would have, like, Mexican Independence, just here?

CS: Yeah, 'cause you go to the park here in [inaudible]. So yeah. I guess it's just the memories of when we were kids that made it more exciting. But, yeah, it's pretty much the same. [Laughter].

CG: Have you stopped doing anything since coming to St. George festivities-wise or —?

CS: No.

CG: Have you changed anything to fit into the local culture?

CS: No.

CG: [Chuckles] You just keep doing what you've been doing and what you like?

CS: Mm-hmm. And I've met a lot, like see Latinos, it's different countries. So I've met a lot of people from El Salvador, Colombia, Cuba, Honduras; we have a couple of people from Honduras working for us right now.

CG: Oh, yeah?

CS: And we're all the same. [Laughter] So I've met a lot of more cultured people here, like from other places. In San Diego it's mostly Mexicans, and here it's Colombia, El Salvador.

CG: Have you adopted any food or cultural traditions from them?

CS: Oh, yeah.

CG: Yeah?

CS: Definitely yeah. I have a friend, she's from El Salvador, and she makes really good pupusas. And I know how to make pupusas now. [Laughter]. And then Colombia it's – I wanna go one day.

CG: Yeah?

CS: I'll be going one day. I don't know, it's more of their culture, their music, and yeah.

CG: Is there anything specific other than the music about Colombia that you like?

CS: Mm-hmm. Their accent.

CG: Their accent.

CS: I love their accent [laughter].

CG: That's interesting [chuckles]. Yeah.

KB: I'm curious, in California you said that you were interested in buying a restaurant here or buying out the owner. Were you running a restaurant in California?

CS: Yeah, and then our contract expired, so he just came at the right time.

KB: 'Kay, so you had like a franchise kind of thing, or that's why the contract ran out or –?

CS: No, it was a family –. It was my husband's brother-in-law and he was ready to pass it to his oldest son.

KB: Ah.

CS: So we only had five years with him and it expired and he wanted to get his son into the business; we were kinda like stuck on the side.

KB: That makes sense, so that's why you knew, already, how to run a business and all that when you got here.

CS: Correct.

KB: What business did you buy?

CS: Jalapeños.

KB: That was the one next to the gas station at 700.

CS: The first one it's on Bluff Street.

KB: Bluff Street.

CS: And then that was our second location.

KB: Okay.

CS: Yeah, but we opened El Patron on the [St. George] Boulevard and at that time I was struggling a lot with employees and I was like, I can't run three businesses. So we closed 700 location, and we kept El Patron and Jalapeños on Bluff.

KB: That makes sense.

CS: It's hard work [laughter].

CG: I can imagine.

KB: What's the hardest thing about running a business?

CS: What's the hardest thing? I would say not spending enough time with my kids.

KB: I can see that.

CS: Yeah. That would be the only hard thing to do running a business, not having enough time to spend with the kids.

CG: Those were good questions. That specific one, with your business and life in general, what's been your experience with the broader St. George community?

CS: With the —?

CG: With the St. George community.

CS: I've met a lot of good people and I don't have anything negative [laughter] besides getting three tickets.

CG: Oh, no!

KB: [Laughter]

CS: Which I never did in California. Yeah, now I know that I need to go on the limit.

[Laughter]

KB: That is a cultural difference between California and here.

CS: It is. Yeah, it's very different and those three times I got the tickets, it was just – I was running late.

CG: What are your thoughts on the Latino/Hispanic community in the area?

CS: They are very hard working people and they're always – we are always, like, happy and we love music. Like, me, myself, I wake up with music and I go to sleep with music. And the community here is very hardworking and friendly and I've had a good experience with all of them.

KB: I'm curious as a owner of a Mexican restaurant, do you feel like maybe you've become kind of a center where people of just Latino/Hispanic community just kinda congregate?

CS: Sometimes yeah. You feel like it – like when we opened El Patron, we didn't want anyone to know that it was our business 'cause we just wanted to be completely separate. But not even, before even opening, a lot of people knew that it was ours. And yeah, there's times where I feel like you're the center of attention and you just have to deal with it.

KB: [Laughter].

CG: Do you ever get involved with the community, like the Latino/Hispanic community leadership roles? Or do you have festivities here that you do? No?

CS: Not really. I'm pretty easy.

CG: Yeah. Okay, how would you describe your relationship with white Americans?

CS: I would say it's a good relationship.

CG: Yeah?

CS: And like I said, I'm here and I live here, and you learn to love the American community 'cause they're part of you now 'cause you're here.

CG: Mm-hmm.

CS: And you need to integrate everything here and I like that. I like it.

CG: Yeah. Have you experienced any racist or prejudiced behavior here?

CS: I'm not a prejudiced person, so I really don't and if there's ever been prejudice or racism towards me, I really don't take, like I don't take it. Like, I don't feel like I'm a prejudiced person.

SV: [REDACTED]

CS: Okay, Sophia.

CG: Not really sure how to segue from that one [laughter]. Important information. So you were saying you don't take any, like, prejudiced behavior towards you to heart.

CS: Mm-hmm. Not really, I don't think it's a part of me. My husband's more like that, but I'm just like, "Let it go."

CG: [Laughter].

CS: Let it go [laughter].

CG: Can you think of an instance where that behavior might have happened towards you? Like somebody acting poorly towards you for those reasons or nothing comes to mind?

CS: Yeah.

CG: No? Okay. How has the area changed since you've been here?

CS: Oh, a lot.

CG: Yeah.

CS: Yeah, back in '09, it was way different. I see more people now. I think that's one of things that I liked about St. George when I came here. California, it's like chaos, like there's always traffic and that I didn't like. Like I just go to the store. And, I mean, you see it now, but because there was a lot of construction going on, so I'm hoping it's gonna go down. But, yeah it has changed a lot. It has grown a lot [compared to] when I moved here.

CG: Have you noticed a change in, like, how well your businesses are doing or who's coming to your restaurants?

CS: No, COVID [Coronavirus-19] changed a lot.

CG: Yeah?

CS: With that and, but no. Since we opened, it's been pretty much the same.

CG: Can you talk about how COVID changed it?

CS: COVID was a crazy year.

CG: Yeah?

CS: Like, first we were all scared of what was going on. And after that, all the restrictions we got from the health department, and closing and not opening, and the masks and everything –

SV: [REDACTED]

CS: – and so with the customers, we gained a lot. I guess because a lot of restaurants had shut down, unfortunately, we got a lot more business. So we got really, really, really busy.

CG: Mm-hmm.

CS: And I'm sure I'm not the only one. Customers got impatient.

CG: Hmm.

CS: And that was hard. And then, with employees having to go and some stayed. And it just changed a lot. Like, I was working – not that I'm not working a lot right now, but that year, I think I worked more than my whole life [laughter].

CG: Thank you.

KB: How did your business stay open when so many other restaurants failed?

CS: 'Cause we had a drive through.

KB: Oh.

CS: That's what I'm saying that unfortunately other restaurants had to shut down 'cause they didn't have a drive through or — And we had a drive through, to-go orders – What's the other one?

CG: Delivery?

CS: Delivery, we had delivery. And then – I can't remember the other one. Where you order and we bring it out to your car.

KB: Oh.

CG: Oh, okay.

CS: Yeah, so that was how we kept our business open.

KB: Did you have the mobile or online orders set up beforehand or did you adapt to do that?

CS: We had DoorDash.

KB: Okay.

CS: Yes. First, it was a little hard 'cause people didn't know, but now it's what they do. You order and pick it up.

KB: Right.

CG: What changes have you noticed within the Latino/Hispanic community since you've been here?

CS: I see more people [laughter].

CG: More?

CS: But, that's pretty much. They have stayed the same on Sundays on that Bluff park.

KB: The Sandtown one?

CS: I don't know what it's called; it's right across from the 24 Hour Fitness. They're always playin' soccer. And then I just see new people at the restaurant, like new community or new people moving here. I don't from where, but I've seen new faces. 'Cause we have a lot of regulars, and then we get new people and they become regulars. But, yeah, I've seen a lot of new people, but nothing has changed. I think it's pretty much the same.

CG: Do you have any other questions? Well, we have one more question for you, but is there anything that you wanted to talk more about that we've asked you about today? Okay. Then our last question is what would you like people to know about yourself or your community.

CS: About myself, it's – We come here, we don't leave our country for no reason. We come here to be responsible and make a life, be happy, that's the most important thing now, be happy. And we are very hardworking. I'm a hard working person and I love to talk to people like —

SV: [REDACTED]

CS: Yeah you do. And the community, there is exceptions, maybe, but not because of those exceptions we all get credited for it. And we just, we love to get with other people, like to know other people, and we love other cultures, too. We like to integrate into whatever comes to us [chuckles].

CG: I think that's all we have so I'll stop the recording.

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]