**Eloisa Hernandez Caneiro**

Fecha de entrevista (no dice)

Entrevistadora: Catherine Murphy

Camera: ¿?

Lugar: La Habana

01:15 Empieza la entrevista

**CM: ¿Ok, can you please say your full name?**

EHC: Ok my full name is Eloisa Hernández Caneiro

**CM: ¿What do you remember the most about the literacy campaign, your time in the literacy campaign?**

EHC: The sense of freedom. The sense of liberty. The sense of feeling very great. I felt like Ecoliah. Because you, let’s go back to my age, I was a child. And this was the possibility I had to go away and to be with other people and do what I wanted to do.

2:02 **CM: How, How was it that you got involved? What inspired you to get involved, to go teach on the literacy campaign?**

EHC: Analyzing things at that point in time, my parents, my dad and my mom, were my inspiration because at that time you didn’t know what the revolution was, you didn’t realize because you were a child. So you just went away and did what you had to do, that was it.

**CM: How old were you at the time?**

2:49 EHC: Well I’m very bad at, at, at dates, I was born on May the 9th 1948, and the campaign began in 1961, but the revolution trumps in 1959, so I was ah 11 when the revolution triumphed, I was bout eh 12, 12 when the campaign started.

**CM: And when you say that your parents were your inspiration, how did they inspire you? What did they, what did they say to you?**

3:30 EHC: My parents didn’t have to say anything, because both of my parents, please remember that I was born in Caimanera. Many people call it Guantanamo, you know I don’t have to explain to you what Guantanamo means to us, and to the world where the navel base is. The US navel base is based in Guantanamo, but in a small territory know as Caimanera. It’s a beautiful territory where the war had been really waged there, a battle. A battle with weapons, with fire, with everything. And my parents, they both were engaged in that battle. In the organization of the liberation of that little town known as Caimanera. Being so near to the naval base, where the Americans were based in that period. And they would come from the naval base to the place where I used to live, where I learned my English with them, right? Because not all the Americans are bad Americans. There are lots, and millions, I don’t know hundreds of millions of good Americans. Ok. And seems to be that according to my life, it had to be that way. I had to be always connected to English language, and to the American people, which I really love.

4:54 So going back to the literacy campaign, uh, my parents didn’t have to force me to go, or ask me to go. I went because I was also with my parents when they were in the war against the tyranny, you understand. I was a child, but I would carry weapons, I would help my parents, we were very small and we would, my, my sister and myself, we would carry weapons to a given place, so that the weapons would be taken to the rebels, in the second front, in Santiago de Cuba, you understand. So that was the reason that I was part of the literacy campaign, as something natural, as life is, because life is very natural. You have to let go life and be part and parcel of what you really enjoy.

5:42 What do I remember the most. The sense of liberty, the sense of freedom. And I don’t know, Marti said something like “schools or teaching is like enhancing or promoting the spiritual level of the human beings.” So this is what I remember the most of the literacy campaign.

**CM: Do you have memories of your students, people who you gave the classes to?**

EHC: I have a very weird, a very…I’ve had a busy life. So I, you don’t remember things because you think that some day you’re going to be interviewed or whatever, right? So you do things.

6:29 But I do remember the school, it was in the open, and I remember standing in front of the pupils. I do remember that feeling of feeling important, of being a big girl, not an adolescent, not a child. Not having my parents tell me do this, do that. I think the greatest thing that the Literacy Campaign had was the sense of freedom, and spiritual enjoyment that all, meaning the teachers, the methodologies, and the pupils and the so called ignorant, or illiterate had, because nobody is illiterate. Everybody has things inside and what you do is you teach them to read and write, and then you provide that person with a sense of freedom that allows the person to read. John Paul’s encyclicals, to read the bible, to read Fidel, to read Martin Luther King, to learn about Abraham Lincoln, to learn about Michael Moore, or whatever, you understand. To know a little bit about Savannah Georgia, to know a little bit about Gandhi, Mother Teresa, whatever and I think that every person, every person, every individual is a teacher because, do you have children? Not yet, but when you bring a child, when you have a son, you’re not a teacher, and you teach your son or your daughter to be an honorable man, right? You don’t need to read and write to do that. The people in the Amazonas don’t need to read and write to teach their kids, the Indians or the black people in the United States. They are black, they are Indian, whatever they are, and you teach your children to be honorable people.

8:29 **CM: So how was that process for you, becoming a teacher? How did you….?**

EHC: Well, I felt a bit ah nervous. I thought I couldn’t cope with that. It was a, I felt, it was a very big thing. I will, I’ve, I’ve always been shy, a shy persons, you under…, but I had to do and I had to teach them. I still preserve the list of the names of my pupils, their attendance to class. I have it my, my, my book. It was a great experience.

**CM: And you talked, you said something very beautiful just a moment ago about the wisdom of the people, of the sort of so called illiterates? What do you feel like you learned from them?**

9:21 EHC: What do you learn from the people? Their humbleness, because there were people who were old in my group, grandparents, uh, women, because you know that Caimanera, in the Guantanamo, it has been known only because of the prostitutes, before the revolution. But there were not only prostitutes, the women who were prostitutes, had to be prostitutes then, you understand. And there, they went to class and they, they did, they, they, they were, they were free enough to go and learn. They were humble enough to sit and learn from a person who was a kid. And that is what you learn. I think that that is the grandeur of a process that has nothing to do with politics, that has nothing to do with a given establishment, or a given process, meaning socialist or capitalist. But rather that rapport that you establish between persons, that teaches a person to be he for himself or she for herself. That’s the greatest thing, that is, I think that that is the greatest value without weapons, a peaceful war, if you want to call it war, a peaceful endeavor, right. And it comes from the old ages, it has been practices even by the church, because you see today North Americans and people all over the world in Venezuela, and people that you have never even interviewed that are unknown to the world and has done much than what I did. You understand.

**CM: ¿Um, how, what memories do you have? Were you there during, you know, during the time of the literacy campaign there was an invasion, all this conflict between the US and Cuba sort of came to a head. What memories do you have of that?**

11:25 EHC: Well I do remember that I was in shock, in panic, when the invasion took place. I heard it, I remember the television, my dad had a television at home, and I remember the news that we had been invaded. But, what, what shocked me the most, well that the news…in…I remember I was coming from my…I now remember coming from my aunt’s house in El Nunque in Caimanera, because the center was the park where the harbor was, the people would take the boats and go to the Navy and go to the Naval Base to work. But you had to turn left and go to my aunt’s house. And I remember coming from my aunt’s house and there was a church and I heard the news, everybody had the radios, that the invasion had been crushed, the Bay of Pigs invasion, and I went inside the church, I have never been inside that church, I just jumped in the church, I sat down and I said, “(sigh), finally the invasion is over.” I was very much afraid of the invasion but I was very very much at ease when I realized the invasion had been gone, it was over. For me, the bombs and the killings were over. That’s what I, I remember the most.

12:43 **CM: Talk a little bit more about Caimanera please. Explain what is Caimanera what was Caimanera like.**

EHC: Bueno, Caimanera is um, is a small, very small town. I think that it’s about 14 minutes away from Guantanamo by, by car. I lived in Caimanera, a very much under-developed place then. In 1958 the only thing that existed there was the production of salt, but not as, as mechanized as they are doing it now. The territory was divided into two, the little town. There was the place we could not, the good girls, we could not visit because it was prostitutes. And then the center and the other half of the town was dedicated to the rest of the people in Caimanera. But I told you a while ago not to remember Caimanera only for the prostitutes, we must remember Caimanera for all the good people living there. For all that they did for the revolution, for their dedication to work there, to stay there. And after 1959 and after have, years have gone by, all the efforts, because they are in the, how do you say, in the first line against that naval base, that piece of territory that has been illegally occupied in our country, as many others in other parts of the world. Because of the, how do you say, the feeling of power of a big empire. I do this because I want to do this, I want to have a base there. And I don’t mind what the people think about that. So Caimenera was a nice, is a nice, was and still is a nice place where people live and people keep on, and they sometimes they pretend that it’s not there. But if something happens that awakens their feelings, they do wake up and they do act and react against any action that can be taken against our territory because of the naval base.

15:17 **CM: And, how did you come to speak such beautiful English?**

EHC: Well, maybe its ten generations behind, I don’t know. But to be honest my mom…[loud noise] [video cut]

15:39 Video starts over

**CM: How do you speak such beautiful English?**

EHC: I told you before that maybe it’s because 10 generations behind me, my mother she studied in a Catholic school in Camaguey and uh in a nun school, she knew English. But it was meant to be that way, things don’t happen by chance in life. I, I am a person who thinks that when you are born you carry a book under your arm, and the book has number of pages, and your life is all written in that book, this is my belief. Of course there are things that you have to change in the course of your life, you have to be dialectic, you cannot be dogmatic, right. But this is my feeling.

16:32 Since I was born in Caimanera, there were North Americans who were in the navy, who were working in the naval base who would come from the base to Caimanera and stay with their wives and live for the weekends with their wives. Or maybe in the course of the day they would come in the day and then they would go the next day to work in the naval base. And this is how I learned my English when I was 3 or 4 years old because I would live with them. I remember eating peanut butter, I remember the bouquet or the flavor of marshmallows, I remember the peanut butter with strawberry jelly, or jam however you call it. I remember uh, how do you say, when you, you, you used to, to, uh, how do you say, dye the eggs and put them in colors and put them in the basket. I don’t know what, when did they do this but I used to be with, with a friend with an American woman who lived there with her husband, her name was Patt. She had blue eyes like you, and she had the col…like you, just like you, just, you’re a second Patt to me today. I remember all that. So I learned the English from the cradle. Then I worked to Guantanamo and I studied English in a Protestant school in Sara after school. My fourth and my, my fourth my fifth and my sixth grade. And in the fifth grade, the Revolution nationalized education. So I had Spanish in the morning, and English in the afternoon. And I enjoy speaking in English because I believe I don’t think in Spanish, I think always in English. This is how, then I went to scholarship then I graduated and I became an interpreter because I wanted to be an interpreter. And that’s what I do.

**CM: So you’ve been a communicator for your whole life, really?**

EHC: Yes I have communicated the ideas of others. It’s easier, because when you have to communicate your ideas you feel a bit shy.

18:44 **CM: What do you feel like your, what importance does your experiences in the Literacy Campaign have for you throughout your life? What did you carry with you from that time?**

EHC: There is a term now used as solidarity, right. I didn’t know that term when I was 11, 12. And that term didn’t exist in Cuba. Solidarity came after, the term, right. The, the term that we know is help right, not solidarity, then. So it’s to help others. It’s nice to help other people. And that is what I carry, to help other persons and myself too. This I’ve realized after, right, when you stand here and you look at the literacy campaign like you call in films a flashback, right, in the film industry this is a flashback. If we have a flashback, what I remember is my, I told you before is a sense of freedom, a sense of liberty, it’s a sense, you call it today independence. It’s a sense of what they call today solidarity. I don’t know how you call it in the church, right.

20:18 **CM: Did you stay in touch with any of your students?**

EHC: No because my life has been as fast and moving as the revolution. So I lived in Guan, Caimanera, then I went to Guantanamo, then from Guantanamo I moved to, to a place here in the old Hershey sugar mill, now the Camilo Cienfuegos where I did my secondary school. And from then I went to Havana to Miramar to be a scholarship student and live in those big nice houses as a scholarship student from 1964 to 1968, where I studied English. So then I did graduate and then I went abroad and then I, I translated and then I met uh Stoolie Carmichael, and I met this and that, so my life has been like that. I haven’t been able to preserve my contact with many people.

21:07 **CM: Where did you actually teach the classes? Where did you go to?**

EHC: I went to Caimanera, in the same town, eh part of the time there and then in another town in Guantanamo where my parents had to move because my father was working in the Agrarian Reform. So he had to, we had to leave our house and go to like a hut, with two bedrooms when it rained the house was completely flooded. And we lived there, and there we finished the campaign. I remember I taught a man, I had to ask my father because I had forgotten, his name is or was Emilio, a black 50 year old man. This is where I finished the campaign, together with all the persons who went there.

**CM: Did you come back?**

EHC: Older then me, maybe taller, maybe not so old.

22:04 **CM: Do you have stories or memories, anecdotes, specific memories from your time teaching?**

EHC: I remember once when we were trying to have a person read one of the lessons, uh, in this booklet that they, we were given. Because I didn’t go to Varadero, you know that the persons who went to the campaign went to Varadero and had a stash there and uh, I didn’t have the training I just got the booklet and went to teach. It was like that. So I remember…[loud noise]

22:50 Start again

I remember that I had troubles in teaching the person with the vocal “O.” It was very difficult for that person to really grasp the meaning of that word. And then one of the pupils themselves, one of the youngest in the group stood up, and all of the sudden she stood up and she fell on the floor and she started “o, o, o, o” because as, as, pretending that she had a pain. So the sound really made the person realize that we were talking about that, that letter. Other memories, I just remember the whole thing, the whole, the whole town the whole people the whole a global vision. I was very very young, I’m 58 today but I was very very young. I told you, don’t, you don’t keep memories for the future you just keep on living, you understand.

**CM: Did you come to Havana to the big march at the end?**

23:52 EHC: No. No, and it was in the anniversary, I have to go back to the metal, when I received the metal here in Havana. When I was a worker as an interpreter in my workplace I received the metal. But you don’t work for metals, those of us who went to the campaign, that’s the best thing that you don’t work to get, be recognized, you understand. Just like the priest just like the religious people, just like many people in the world…look, like…I remember very much Mother Teresa, I read some of her works. And Mother Teresa, or many people in the world [bus sound].

24:44 They do things because you have to do them, you want, you feel, you feel pleasure when you help another person. And that is like, when you get gasoline it’s your insulin it’s your gasoline. And that is why I believe, I’m not, I’m, I, I, I want to ask you to let me go out a little bit of this illiteracy thing and the literacy campaign.

25:08 People don’t understand the Cubans and why we Cubans have resisted so many years of what they call, the establishment calls the embargo and we in using the proper language call it blockade. Why have we resisted so many years, because, because we have, like to help other people. And other peoples like to help us too. That has existed before the money existed. Now they call it barter trade, its no barter, there’s no trade, it’s just a linkage of people, you understand.

**CM: Thank you. Is there anything else you’d like to add that maybe I didn’t ask you?**

EHC: No.

**CM: Thank you so much Eloisa it was very beautiful.**

EHC: Ya.

**CM: Just stay there.**

26:08 Demostrando fotos.

Y estos son my padres, mi papa y mi mama. Mi papa aun vive. Tiene 86 años. Es combatible, ellos son los combatidos. Yo tengo allí otras fotos de mi papa con sus medallas.

**CM: Donde esta el ahora, donde viva el?**

EHC: En Altamisa con mi hermana.

26:39 Y este es el libro, ve. Que lo debe ver como esta porque… Este es la lista de mis alumnos. No le he quitado la presilla porque tiendo miedo de que se me vaya a romper. Pero más que la medalla, lo que más amor yo tengo es a esto. Ve. Cando faltaba cuando estaban enfermo. Aquí está, ves, en el mes de septiembre en el mes de octubre, y la asistencia como se hacia antes. El otro libro no lo tengo. El otro libro no lo tengo, pero bueno conservo este texto.

**CM: Como se llamaban los alumnos? Puede decir los nombres que tiene en el papelito?**

27;47 EHC: Ay los nombres. Bueno pues mira, Mireada, Julia, Edelfina, entonces abajo dice analfabeto asistencia para yo acordarme, no. Analfabeto falta, la, la cruz roja, the red cross would mean that the student didn’t come to class and the black would mean that he attended school that day. This is July, August, September, October, November and December. Todo los meses. Y aquí el cartón que se encargo de ella.

**CM: Was this the system that they taught you or you made it up yourself?**

EHC: No, no, no, no, no. Remember I didn’t go, I didn’t receive the training, no no.

28:39 Mira open the book by chance, right, just where my thumb stayed. Every, every class, every subject, every topic would have a thinking of Fidel and then the class. The subject matter is 23 and it’s entitled, the Revolution Wins All Battles. Now what is it that heads this, this, this uh class today and uh and it’s a quotation, it says “we shall be winning the battles one by one, our main slogan is venceremos.” This is what Fidel said once. [reading/translating] The Cuban revolution has had to wage many battles along the course of its final and definitive consolidation. In all of them it has been able to win because of the courage, stanchness and firmness of our people. And to the help offered and rendered by many peoples and friendly governments to ours. You see I opened the book by chance and its only, right away what I just told you during the course of the interview.

**CM: So?**

30:30 EHC: These are my parents in that period, my mom and my dad. And you know where they are, they are sitting at Patt Char’s house, the North American woman that taught me to dye the eggs, for Easter.

And this is la medalla. It’s nice to have a metal, but honestly the metal is nice because I no longer preserve the emblem in the metal that light, el farol, I don’t have it. It was the emblem of, of, the literacy campaign was the, the emblem of, of the metal, el farol, the light. It’s the emblem, it gives light. This is what I’ve preserved. My memories like Barbara Streisand would say, memories.

31:46 Cuts to another interview reading a letter written during the campaign.