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Oral History Interview on Sheff vs. O'Neill (with video)

Wildaliz Bermudez

Eva Bermudez

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Location: Eva Bermudez's home in Hartford, CT

Recording format: Digital video

File name: BermudezWildaliz&Eva_medium20110630.m4v

Length: 42:14

Transcribed by: Anique Thompson, Jack Dougherty

Additional files: none

Abstract:

Wildaliz and Eva Bermudez (born 1982 and 1987, respectively) recall their earliest memories of activism for school integration in Greater Hartford through their involvement as young plaintiffs (with their brother, Pedro) in the 1989 Sheff v O'Neill lawsuit, and how the case shaped their lives as politically active adults today. The sisters describe why their parents (Pedro and Carmen Wilda Bermudez) supported the integration movement, and reflect on their personal experiences as Puerto Rican youth growing up in Hartford's South End neighborhoods, attending Hartford Public Schools and bilingual education programs, and eventually (for Eva) an interdistrict magnet school.

Submitted as part of the [OnTheLine](http://ontheline.trincoll.edu) web-book by Jack Dougherty and colleagues (<http://ontheline.trincoll.edu>).

Speaker key:

WB: Wildaliz Bermudez

EB: Eva Bermudez

AT: Anique Thompson

JD: Jack Dougherty

[All comments by transcriber in brackets]

AT: Okay, so what is your earliest memory of your role or involvement in the case?

WB: My earliest memory of the Sheff case was when we used to gather different plaintiff's homes and we would share potluck dinners and everyone would come together and while the grownups were talking us kids would be playing around. But that was my earliest memory.

EB: It's actually the same. I'm not sure what age I was probably like five. But it definitely was a picnic or some sort of potluck dinner.

AT: What is the importance of being a plaintiff to you, or having this responsibility?

WB: Being a plaintiff is very important and it's something that stays with us wherever we go. From work to personal life those who ask more questions and once they find out that we're Sheff plaintiffs they're always very curious. But being a Hartford resident, having grown up in the city of Hartford, Having gone to school herein the public school system and continuing to college and undergraduate studies here and in the city of Hartford as a Sheff plaintiff is very interesting and it's always something that comes up. I was – at one point of my undergraduate studies in [the] University as their, through their undergraduate program and at one of the classes I was taking I think it was a sociology class the Sheff v O'Neill case and my professor wanted to study – for us to study the case for a good month. [00:01:44]

EB: Did you tell him that...

WB: Yeah, I was like "Oh professor, you know...."

EB: Maybe you should've gotten an excuse for the class.

WB: Yeah it's interesting. So it's something that is always there and a part of who we are.

EB: For me I guess the most important part of being a plaintiff was being able to give in input in the whole transition of a normal typical school to classical or Montessori schools that are now all over the city. So while we were growing up most Montessori or magnet schools didn't exist at all and by the time I hit high school they were slowly emerging so when the Sheff v O'Neill case was dying down – well people thought it was dying down and the schools were being created they got a lot of input from the plaintiffs like myself or like the Connolly kids. We're like; "Well we're in this right now this is still going on it's not dead and it's not going to be ignored." So that was very interesting for me and it was a very big part of my middle school and high school life. [00:02:53]

AT: What was the journey like for you?

WB: For me as a Sheff plaintiff I remember we would be going – again attending different potluck dinners and meeting families and getting to share some time with the other Sheff, with the other plaintiffs that were shouldering the case but at the same time also vivid memories of going to court and while you're a young child you're not understanding the full ramifications of the case but as you transition into teenage years and then adulthood you have a change to reflect more of the impact that the case has had not only in your life and the lives of the other plaintiffs- the children that participated but really all of Hartford students. For me specifically I went to high school at Hartford High and while I was attending High school I kind of, I was a little nervous about everything that was happening because my school was losing its accreditation so that's one example of this lingering feeling of uncertainty of what's happening with our education. What's happening with my education as a student and not understanding at the time the complexity of everything that's going on behind the scenes. It being a difficult time as a student because here I am I wanted to apply for college and yet I was faced with this uncertainty as well as the other students who were with me of not even knowing if we would graduate from

school. But also my experience as a younger student I was fortunate enough to participate in the bilingual program and that was something that was extremely helpful my parents came here when I was very young they only spoke Spanish to me at home and when they put me in school I was in the bilingual program so I was able to keep the culture from home and transition into school without it being too much of a worry of this identity or not being too much of a worry of losing that ability to speak to my parents particularly my mom who at the time primarily spoke Spanish because she just came from Puerto Rico so that was something that was helpful. Being in the school system and having that ability to learn both languages... [00:05:48]

EB: ... and transition. Nice transition.

WB: ...and transition

EB: My journey?

AT: Yes.

EB: My journey with the case it was different because I never actually - if I did go to court I don't remember. I don't think I did.

WB: You were that young yeah.

EB: I was that young so for me it was learning the people who were involved, getting to know the kids. I did a lot of interviews outside of court with the lawyers, "What's going on at school, how do you feel, how's the segregation or desegregation in your school?" But like I said before for me it was more middle school high school because that's when my input being in a - I went to Classical Magnet and I also went to the Greater Hartford Arts Academy and it was a brand new school, they just opened the facility. The Arts Academy had been around for a very long time but the facility that was the second year the facility - so when Sheff was still continuing with the case, they're like, "How did you get in?" Well I'm like, "I got in through the lottery, that's how you get in, you get in through the lottery." They're like, "Well you're minority, how many minorities do you go to school with?" and I'm like, "They're all white kids." and I'm like, "What do I tell you?" Even though I'm in Hartford and the school is in Hartford and they accept applications from Hartford students, which are primarily, Hartford is all minorities. I go to school constantly with Caucasian students who come from Simsbury or up to an hour and a half away and they commute every day to go to school with me and luckily I don't have to pay, they have to pay a certain amount. I didn't have to pay. But at the end of the day if you get in, it's luck and talent, a mixture of both. That was the reality. So my journey was one of, I guess, wonder and exploration and understanding how the system actually works and the injustice that can happen in the system. [00:07:44]

JD: Just one family history question, cause I don't really have a good understanding yet, your parent's names and why was the Bermudez family in this case? Why your family? Out of all the other families, why yours?

WB: Well our mother's name is Carmen Bermudez and my father - our father is Pedro Bermudez BermudezWildalizEva_transcript20110630

and my father was a school teacher in the Hartford School System in Sand when he was approached by different people in the community and he was asked, "Hey you know..."

EB: Represent, represent for the Hispanic community

WB: "...would you be interested in representing the Hispanic community?" and at the time he having us, young children he wanted to make sure for him as a teacher in the Hartford School System and seeing all the injustices that were occurring and also the fact that there was a lot of segregation. He wanted for us to have the opportunity when we go to school for the classrooms to have an open environment where the kids, the students felt comfortable and it was divers and their culture was represented and so at the time just as I was getting ready to go into school myself you know I was enrolled in the bilingual program and as a parent for him he said this is important and I want for this to continue I want a program similar to the bilingual program to be in place so that different cultures are represented and overall students can have opportunities further opportunities, further education, [00:09:30]

EB: He understood that it was [an] important case and his involvement was not only gonna be for the good of the community but for something that his family should see through and try to make a change in history I guess. That's why you're doing the video I believe. One thing that I noticed was a lot of his coworkers, Hispanic or non-Hispanic, their children went to private school. A lot of the kids that we hung out with that were his coworkers' children when we were growing up they went to Ethel Walker or just private schools in the area and they basically it would be very strange to try to participate in such an important case when your children are in a private school setting. So we were one of the few that were approached that were not only minorities but actually lived in Harford, went to Hartford Public Schooling and had no plans to change that. So we stayed, grew up here, went to school here and it was always through public schooling. [00:10:36]

AT: Describe the neighborhood that you lived in and the schools you attended while the case was going on.

WB: Well for most of our life, although I guess before then,

EB: All of my life.

WB: All of Eva's life.

EB: Most of her life, all of my life.

WB: We moved, I remember early memories of moving from different neighborhoods in the South End of Hartford. So we lived on Zion Street, very close to Park Street where the center of the Puerto Rican community lives and lived then and still lives now and now it's expanded to more diverse regions for other Hispanics. So I remember spending some of my childhood there near Zion Street attending McDonough school then we moved -

EB: I came along.

WB: Yes, you came along and then we moved in this very neighborhood that we are today. This neighborhood being the Charter Oak -

EB: We're counted as Charter Oak? Really?

WB: Yes.

EB: That was kind of . . .

WB: Yea, the Charter Oak neighborhood and I attended the school right next to us here which is Kinsella School and from there my parents were able to buy a house. By that time I must have been around . . .

EB: Six?

WB: Around seven . . .

EB: Seven.

WB: Or eight and we bought a small house on - also in the south end of Hartford on Hillside. Hillside Avenue and the school that we attended was Kinsella - I mean Kennelly.

EB: Kennelly, Kennelly, yeah.

WB: How was the school? How were the different schools during elementary. The experience[s] were a little bit mixed in the sense that the first two schools that I attended being Kinsella and McDonough.

EB: Hispanic...

WB: Yeah, everyone was Hispanic, it was primarily Hispanic.

EB: Then drastic, I would say it would be a pretty drastic change for you because when we went to Kennelly the majority of the students that were there are Caucasian.

WB: Well...

EB: Or Portuguese, Polish....

WB: ...Kennelly was an interesting one because at that time even though a lot of what they always refer to as the white flight occurred in Hartford that was - that did exist, but Kennelly was one of those last places in the south end of Hartford where at that time there were still some families who had not left - some white families who had not left and Kennelly was a little bit more diverse. But interestingly enough, while it was diverse, I don't think that the teachers or administration was that open to change and receiving a higher influx of students who were

Hispanic or minority in general. And that we felt a lot and my parents saw a lot in their struggle through the PTO. [Parent Teacher Organization] [00:13:45]

EB: The bilingual program did survive until I was in fourth grade. It was really small, almost non-existent but there was like one class a day. I don't....

WB: It was this transitional program.

EB: Oh transitional, that's what they called it? Okay.

AT: So you were in the bilingual program when you went to Kennelly.

EB: Transitional program if you want to call it - I remember taking a class, maybe an hour and a half a day. In the bilingual program in Kennelly or the transitional program and what that would entail would be ABC's in Spanish, basic Spanish words, a little bit of history - Hispanic history, like Puerto Rican culture or he would even review what happens in Mexican culture, Spanish culture and differences between that with American traditional programs.

WB: So for me in doing the transition from primarily elementary schools that were typically all Hispanic -

EB: Your bilingual programs were actual bilingual programs. When she went to bilingual programs at a young age they were Spanish-speaking classes.

WB: And then English, as - also English but primarily speaking in Spanish. So then the transition to Kennelly school was a transition for me to speaking English and I really like that I had the two experiences because I wouldn't be - we wouldn't, yeah you as well but I wouldn't be where I am today in being

EB: Yeah, I think you can count me

WB: ...as fluent as possible, as you can.

EB: The hesitation is the fact that I was only, since being the smallest and youngest of the three at home and not having as many hours in Spanish tutoring or Spanish bilingual because by the time I hit 5th, 6th, 7th grade bilingual programs were basically annihilated in the city. They were gone.

WB: Not yet, not quite. They were still around.

EB: They were getting there and

WB: They were getting there but officially...

EB: Less and less hours.

WB: They stopped in 2008.

EB: Officially, really?

WB: [nods]

EB: Okay. So in Kennelly school I remember at the rest of my Kennelly education I didn't take any bilingual... That wasn't optional right? They took out the teacher? I think they took out the teacher.

WB: I think so yeah.

EB: I think that...

WB: ... It depended on the school. Because Kennelly was a school that was not compared to Kinsella or McDonough school where the majority were primarily Hispanic population was a little different.

EB: And so by the time I got to an older age where I wanted to continue practicing Spanish, the only opportunity where I had to do so was at home and because of that I wouldn't have been so strong of a Spanish speaker as I am now if it wasn't for going to University abroad. Or going to University in Puerto Rico. If it wasn't for that I'd probably not speak Spanish. I'd probably be that person who's Puerto Rican who lives in Hartford, who didn't know Spanish. Which is the reality for some here in Hartford so...

WB: And that's sad.

EB: Yeah it's sad.

WB: It's unfortunate.

EB: It's losing culture, and having to - more than one language is always an advantage
[00:17:06]

AT: Okay, when the Sheff case was moving through the legal process, what was your role?

WB: Well as young plaintiffs of the case we weren't as involved as the parents were and they knew the legal ramifications of everything that was going on so as the young participants of the Sheff case we understood and our parents would sit down with us and explain that, "Hey, this is something that's very important for you and for the entire state of Connecticut and this will create changes, a ripple effect." But it wasn't until we started getting older that we understood it better, say in high school and also in college obviously as we moved along but we did understand that it was something important not only because it was told to us by our parents, but we could feel it when we went to school. Eva had the opportunity to go to a magnet school so we saw some changes there.

EB: My sister would always joke, because I was also in Hartford High school, so she would joke, "Every time that one of my siblings go to the same school I go, it's better than I went." But that, you see the progression and it's like, "Shucks, I wish I was in that school." But yeah, Hartford High, when I went to Hartford High it was already accredited, the fear wasn't there. They had a lot of magnet programs in place, they were already starting the construction on rebuilding a court, a new gym, and extending the school that by the time I finished high school in Hartford High school and now it's like this amazing facility which is like, "Shucks I didn't have that when I grew up."

WB: No, no.

EB: We saw those changes and that progression while we were in the case and while we were growing up within the city and within our schools.

WB: Yeah and we see a great deal now, we see a great deal of changes when I go and visit some of the schools here in Hartford, they have tremendous facilities like Kinsella's. We can name so many of them and so many of them that have been reconstructed or renovated or some of them that have been built from scratch in some cases and I think that's great because there are statistics out there that say that the student is more focused and more alert when he feels more comfortable in the school setting that he's being placed to study. But even though there are all of those great facilities there's still more work to be done.

EB: It's not over.

WB: Yes and so even though there are these great magnet schools, in some cases - in many cases: a lot of the students in Hartford don't have the opportunities to get into the magnet schools and so that's still - we're not living up to the full potential of what the Sheff case was all about.

EB: Was trying to accomplish.

WB: And was trying to accomplish. Even though we won in many ways right now there is no bilingual program and that is a problem because...

EB: We still have an influx of these families moving into the city.

WB: And if one of the major points, one of the major focuses of the case was to make sure that when the students went into the classroom they felt welcome and there was various cultures and neighborhoods and the neighborhood that they lived in various cultures were represented then why is it still that we have the majority of the teachers in the school system that are white and don't represent the students that live in Hartford and the teachers themselves don't live in Hartford and why is it that the bilingual program...

EB: I wonder where they go? All the minority teachers, is there a place where they all go?

WB: The bilingual program was just slashed and it was a poor decision that was made by politicians and state - the state Legislature level and it's really unfortunate because if you go into

the suburbs because they have two or three foreign languages that students can take and yet here in the inner city the students who primarily speak Spanish or whose parents may speak Spanish or grandmothers may speak Spanish at home they can't even communicate with them and for those that do go off to college that are from Hartford those students who are from Hartford they can very much see themselves in a scenario where they're taking a Spanish 101 class and the Caucasian student next to him is advanced and almost speaking as if they were a native speaker. [00:22:12]

EB: Well I can vouch to that. Our father was a teacher. His - the last class that he taught in the Hartford schools was a Spanish class and his number one student who - no, two of his number one students was a girl from Bosnia who moved here at that time was in her third year moving to Hartford from Bosnia and was one of his best students and mind you his class probably had six or seven Hispanic children in the class and the second student that always excelled in all the exams was a girl from - an African American girl from New Orleans and they were the best students and I would always after I was done with school I would go to his classes and sit there and see what he would do and when he was correcting papers I'm like, "Oh, so is Savannah gonna get an A again?" He's like, "Yep, she's a really good student." and I'm like, "That's so cool." But now looking back I'm like, "Wait, didn't he have like six Hispanic students?" Maybe like three kids who were of Puerto Rican descent and they're second generation and they don't know Spanish? So that makes you think. [00:23:26.14]

AT: So your role was similar to Wildaliz's?

EB: Yeah, I would say. I would say I was the eyes and the ears for what was going on in the actual case.

AT: What do you remember most about the court case?

WB: Wow, that's a hard one.

EB: I remember interviews.

WB: I do remember a lot of interviews.

EB: A lot of interviews.

WB: I remember going to the offices of - lawyers offices a lot and having meetings.

EB: I remember going to the courthouse and I would watch them talk. I remember sitting behind the bench. I think I did that twice. A lot of meetings.

WB: Mmm hmm, a lot of meetings.

EB: A lot of weekends...

WB: Again we were very young so we don't remember the actual discussions or the heated

debates but we remember what we went through in the actual school system and the changes that happened for us and then [00:24:27]

EB: Newspaper clippings our parents always something that came up on the case they would clip out the newspaper and save it. A photo of the family or my sister, there's a photo in the legislative building of my sister with the rest of the Sheff v. O'Neill plaintiffs and she's just standing there. So its moments like that. .

WB: It wasn't we can't recall any of what was actually said

EB: Yea... in the actual case.

WB: Some of us younger, the plaintiffs ourselves, we hung out together I do remember that and then the adults would kind of go off and talk...

EB: About the case.

WB: Amongst themselves in a room but it was really nice to see that so many organizers and parents that were involved and the lawyers that participated, the advocates...

EB: That actually cared.

WB: That cared about the case, it was really interesting to see them come together and we're talking about people of all different backgrounds so that was something that was nice.

AT: Okay how did your friends and family feel about your involvement in the case?

WB: Very supportive.

EB: My friends from school didn't know. Unlike my sister, that people would, they would know that she was a plaintiff, for me I guess since I was one of the youngest plaintiffs my name would probably show up in the list of plaintiffs in the paper, the newspaper but in the beginning of the case I was two. So my friends definitely didn't know my teachers would know. They'd be like, "Oh Bermudez." They'd start questioning me: "How do you feel about this and what's going on about that?" and I'm like, "Whoaaa." I'm like, "Okay," bombarded by questions. So let me pick up a book and see what's going on... I would - One time I asked a lawyer, "So what is this really about? Like what is it about?" And they would have to explain it to me and that's what I would tell teachers. I'm like, "This is where we are now." Very assertively tell them that, "This is not fair." [00:26:38.11]

WB: And sometimes also for a child, as a young student, it's a very complex case and so to go through every single reason of why there was segregation in the school systems and inner city schools is a little more complex because for us and for many students that grew up in an inner city and one like Hartford when we're just used to a certain environment and you're just used to having classes with people who look like you who pretty much talk like you, who share your same culture who understand who you are and where you come from - there's that likeness and

so you don't, as a student you don't necessarily have this thought in the back of your head of the whole different world that exists out there. The world where there are a variety of other cultures and people that may not even necessarily live the same way that you do or have the same experiences and so as a young student, the case itself was very complex to wrap your head around when the experiences that you're having as an inner city student are, it kind of felt comfortable because of the fact that you had students who were similar to you but that didn't - but that comfort did not make it right because then you enter into different environments and for my sister, going into the Learning Corridor where she was the minority and it - tables turned. [00:28:26]

EB: I was the minority.

WB: Or for myself, entering into the environment of going off to college. Graduating from Hartford High, a school where everyone was - every student was pretty much minority and going off to college and going to University of Hartford and then going to Trinity, schools that are still in Hartford, Universities that are still in Hartford but being a completely different world. A night and day of other cultures and other people who are out there who have come from different economic levels and so it's a complete opposite. [00:29:00]

AT: Do you encounter opposition to your role in this case? And if so what type?

WB: I don't think... there's really much

EB & WB: Opposition.

WB: For those who are in Hartford for those people who live in Hartford, they understand what's going on so there's not really that much opposition.

EB: Our biggest battle was in court with the lawyers against us.

WB: Judge Hammer.

EB: Judge Hammer, anyone who was from the city would say that what we're fighting for is correct. What we're trying to do is something positive for the kids. I don't remember, recall when I was a child, teachers telling me, "Why are parents doing this?" or pointing me out because we were in the case. I never felt that. Everyone was very supportive. [00:30:05]

AT: Do you still attend hearings or follow changes made to the ruling?

WB: I was pretty involved with the Sheff Movement coalition and there's I would go to, at the time. I know Jessica is not there anymore, but at the time I would go with Jessica to different schools throughout Hartford and different magnet schools to try to get more parents involved and give them more updates of what was happening with the case. My schedule is very busy. Extremely so I haven't been as involved as I would like to be. But the Sheff Movement coalition is definitely a good place to go to.

EB: We're part of their newsletter.

WB: Oh, there's also....

EB: There's meetings on a monthly basis and I think there's a meeting next month and if we have a chance go to those.

WB: And when we have the opportunity to go to the LOB [Legislative Office Building] and speak our mind and say: "Hey, don't cut this program or you have to make sure that what is going on with the Hartford school system and what that main principles...

EB: There are new fights that are in addition to the original case.

WB: Yes. So we stay - we try to stay a little bit more involved in that.

AT: Okay, so in a previous interview that I had with another Sheff plaintiff they mentioned that pretty much all of the families have moved out of Hartford, either the plaintiff parents or the plaintiffs themselves but is that the case? Do you agree with that statement?

EB: Yeah, yeah. Right now families that we stayed in touch with were the Connollys. They still live in the same house that we would go to, to have picnics and potlucks since we were children. Their children are now abroad for college and like Erica right now is in Israel and Tasha I believe is in like Ecuador and she's doing a teaching program there. But they always come back and we always keep in touch. I think we see the girls probably twice a year?

WB: Maybe about twice a year.

EB: About twice a year and the parents are still in the area. Our brother lives in California. Yeah most of them did move away.

WB: Yeah, most of the families moved away and I think their moving away should not be interpreted as a message of... they ended their fight, it's not even that. I think the sad reality is that because this is something that takes such a long time for it to work out.

EB: Hence our parents signing up their kids, or me at two years old to see it through.

WB: I think that, and I don't want to generalize but I think that that yeah, for many of them, they wanted for their children to have a better education and at the time that I was going to school and their children were going to school that education was not possible. I attended a school that was on the verge of losing its accreditation so I could only imagine that as, for a parent that's very frustrating and so the best education possible, the reality of it was that it was in the suburbs.
[00:33:34]

JD: We're just being mindful of your time...

AT: Did being involved in the Sheff case change your life in any way?

EB: Definitely. I hope and I'm hoping that a lot of the changes in schools here were influenced by the Sheff case and since I was able to go to the Learning Corridor I met people I would've never met. I had the experience of going to Hartford High and a magnet school at the same time. I was in Hartford High, Classical Magnet, and the Greater Hartford Arts Academy all at one time. Which is very odd to say three schools in one, but I had experiences with people who lived in the suburbs which I never had interaction with. They got - one of the phone calls that I did to one of my friends I'm like, "Oh, can so and so and I hang out next Wednesday?" and the mother told me, "No she'll call you back, she's on the tractor right now." I'm like, "We're in Connecticut! What tractor? What is she talking about?" I'm like: "Look at the roads, there's people here." So I was, ignorance is bliss, right? One thinks you live in an area and you forget there's a whole world outside there. So I would've never met people who lived on farms in Connecticut or been able to do a lot of the programs that I did after high school. I went to study abroad in Brazil after high school, the reason I was involved with a study abroad program or an exchange program after high school was because of Mr. Connolly, Tom Connolly. His daughter did the program and recommended me and that's why that changed my life. So little things from the family members and from the court case not only changed my schooling but we're influenced with my future. [00:35:38]

WB: For me as well it changed my life. It introduced us at a very young age to fighters. People who fought...

EB: Activists.

WB: Who were advocates, activists, and wanted the best for their communities and so at a young age being exposed to that makes you, plants a seed in you and so its sparks your curiosity and puts you in that line of thinking of helping out your community.

EB: Don't be quiet, do something. Say something.

WB: And doing something about it. And even though it can take a very long time and it's a very long road ahead of you...

EB: Arduous process.

WB: ...that's the only way that change comes: with that first step and to see how from something that was an idea and having these different families come together and...

EB: Make it a reality.

WB ... making it into an extended family in some cases; it plants a seed in your mind and it shapes you - it shaped me in my adult life and how I view reaching out to the community and advocacy and me wanting to do more with the community. [00:36:46]

AT: Okay. Looking back, what lessons have you learned from the Sheff case?

EB: What lessons... I guess we'd tie it into what my sister just said with how it shapes you and how it plants a seed in you. The lesson that you shouldn't be quiet the lesson that if there is change to be made - change that needs to be made that you should find the way to actually start it up and get community help from your neighbors from people that you know and make it happen. [00:37:27]

WB: The lesson is one definitely of perseverance and not giving up and fighting the injustices that are out there because if it had never been for the Sheff case, then we wouldn't have the opportunities for some of the magnet schools or we wouldn't have this magnifying glass, if you will on the inner-city school system and everyone would just have kind of said: "Oh well, that's just the way it is. That's just the way that the constitution was written and even though we're so..."

EB: You should be more aware. I guess one of the other lessons that - awareness is a big key to getting anything done. If you live in ignorance then you're not gonna really make change in your life of in the life of someone you care about. [00:38:20]

JD: And Eva, just a follow-up of this if we stand on your back porch on Van Block Avenue here we look, we see three magnet schools...

EB: Right next to me, yeah. So right now in the location we're at we have Kinsella on our left hand side, then we have an extension to Greater Hartford's Academy on our right hand side and then right behind us we have the new complex - well not new anymore... getting old. Sports Sciences Academy and their gym and the school's right behind us.

JD: So do you look at those three schools and say to yourself: "Maybe those wouldn't be there if it hadn't been for your family."? Does that thought cross your mind?

EB: We didn't do anything.....

WB: No, no, yeah. That's an important thought because sometimes you take things for granted because we've been living here such a long time but you're absolutely right: where my sister lives right now there are three schools..

EB: There are three schools.

WB: That are behind her and if the Sheff case wasn't here then these wouldn't have been renovated or have been here. [00:39:31]

AT: Okay, so those are all the questions that I have. I just have some quick background questions and then we can wrap up the interview. So: where were you born, what year, and how long have you lived in the Hartford area?

WB: I was born in 1982. I was born here - I mean... sorry.

EB: No you were not, she was not born here.

WB: I was born in Puerto Rico but I was raised here most of my - all of my life actually. My parents came here when I was very young. They came to the United States when I was very young and so I was raised and brought up here but I was born in Puerto Rico.

EB: I was born in 1987 and I was born here. St. Francis Hospital and I was brought up here. [00:40:16]

AT: What type of work do you do? What is your occupation?

WB: I am a community liaison for the Mayor's office of Constituent Services.

EB: I am political organizer, union organizer now and I work SEIU [Service Employees International Union] 1199. [00:40:35]

AT: How do you identify your race or ethnicity?

WB: I am Puerto Rican. That is my ethnic background and Hispanic. Race is an interesting one because it's based more on your features so if you're - wanna like the Census is trying to fit us into a certain box - which I hate. But Puerto Ricans are everything as you know, we're pretty mixed.

EB: Caribbean.

WB: Our island was colonized so we have African and we have Spanish and we have the native Taino and there were also some Chinese.

AT: And you agree with that?

EB: I'm her sister so I'm the same thing. We are of the same parents, I am also Puerto Rican. [00:41:25]

AT: In what neighborhoods have you lived in the Hartford area before, during, and after the Sheff trial.

JD: It seems like you covered - went through a lot of south end neighborhoods.

WB: Now, after growing up - having grown up in the south end neighborhood, the southwest to be more specific. I've moved from the southwest into the Asylum Hill neighborhood which is located in the north end of Hartford and I purchased a condo there. So I guess you can say I'm a home owner in Hartford and that's where I live now.

EB: I stayed in the South End of Hartford, the south west of Hartford. [00:42:07]

AT: Okay, alright, that's it. Thank-you very much.

EB: Okay.

WB: You're welcome.

AT: For agreeing to be interviewed.

WB: No Problem. [00:42:14]