

Jennifer Kamara

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SPEAKERS

Jennifer Kamara, Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz



Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 00:02

Okay, today is August 5, 2022. My name is Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz, and I am an oral history fellow with the Institute for Diversity and Civic Life working on the Gone to Texas oral history project. I am in Oakcliff, Dallas, Texas interviewing Jennifer Kamara. Jennifer, can you introduce yourself, share your pronouns, and share where you are located today?



Jennifer Kamara 00:24

Yeah, I am Jennifer Kamara, I am in Houston, Texas, and I'm a she.



Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 00:33

Thank you. Jennifer, where were your parents born, and what did your parents do for a living?



Jennifer Kamara 00:38

My mom was born in Colombia. Cali, Colombia, and my dad was born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. My dad, he is a pilot, or he used to be in the Air Force, and then he studied industrial engineering. And then my mom, she's a industrial designer.



Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 01:03

Where were you born?



Jennifer Kamara 01:05

I was born in Dallas, Texas.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 01:10

Nice. And when did you - since you were born to Texas, did you always live in Texas, or did you come back at some point?

J Jennifer Kamara 01:18

No, I actually moved back to Honduras and lived in Honduras, had some time in Colombia. Most of the time was in Honduras. Finished my high school there. Took two years of college and then came to school here in Texas, in Dallas, actually.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 01:38

What caused your parents to choose Dallas, Texas as a place to have your birth, and did they have community or family here?

J Jennifer Kamara 01:49

Yeah, they have family here. So when my mom immigrated to the US, they actually have family in New York. And then my mom realized New York wasn't a good place for her younger brother, who is my youngest uncle. And then they decide to move to San Antonio. That's where my mom and my dad actually met. And then my uncle moved to Dallas, because there was more work opportunity.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 02:31

Could you repeat that last part, you broke up briefly? [Pauses]. I'm gonna go ahead and pause the recording.

J Jennifer Kamara 03:09

Yes, so my mom moved to San Antonio, just for a better opportunity. And then my uncle, one of my uncles moved to Dallas for a better job opportunity. And then everyone then migrated to Dallas, the Dallas area, because they actually went to Arlington, and then everyone was living here. So that's why when my mom met my dad, they got married, they went to Central and South America. And then when it was baby time, my mom was like, "Oh, I'm just gonna - I think it'll be best for me to have my kids there just because I have my family and support there." And her mom, of course, that's a very big thing.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 03:56

That makes sense. Jennifer, how has immigration affected your upbringing?

J Jennifer Kamara 04:03
Can you repeat that again?

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 04:06
How has immigration or migration impacted your upbringing or your childhood?

J Jennifer Kamara 04:15
I don't think it has affected me in a bad way. I think it has affected me in a very positive way. I'm a person who was always open minded, coming from a diverse family, even though they were both Latinos. They come from different cultures, so even living in a country where your mom or your dad wasn't from the same place, it was something that I always embrace. And I feel like it had helped me to be open minded, and as a result, I mean, you can see where I am now. My husband being from Sierra Leone, being open minded about religion and learning about new cultures. The fact that I love traveling to different countries and learning about their cultures. I think that has been the positive impact that I've had.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 05:04
That's wonderful. Could you speak about any brothers or sisters that you have and share something special that you remember about them?

J Jennifer Kamara 05:11
One brother, he's older than me. He's very, very smart. And I'll say the most special part about him is that he's very loving and caring.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 05:30
Aw, that's sweet. Can you describe your community when you were a child and who did you spend time with typically?

J Jennifer Kamara 05:40
My friends, family. For us back in Latin America, and I seen this even in the West African culture, your neighbors become your family, and you call them aunts and uncles. Those were the people that I spent most of the time with. And of course, your real relatives, they always come, and it was an experience that I would definitely never change. And I am hoping I can

give that to my kids here in the US, knowing that it's more than an individualistic culture. But I think there's always those kinds of people, you can always find great people that you can work with and be close to them.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 06:34

Where did you go to school? What type of school did you go to in elementary, middle, and high school?

J Jennifer Kamara 06:41

So I went to a private Baptist School. However, my family practice the Catholic religion, which was very interesting, because in Latin America, even though we're all Christians, they all fight with each other, which I always find that very odd. But it was a great experience for me. And I think that's one of the mind breakers because it made me be someone who was open to understanding other religious perspective, not just in my own religion as a Christian, but with other religions, like, Muslim, or Jewish, or someone who's considered more spiritual, or Hindi, or you name it.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 07:32

Did you have a favorite subject while you were going to school?

J Jennifer Kamara 07:36

I think my most favorite subject was math. I struggled but I never gave up. So I guess that would make me be an engineer now.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 07:51

Where did you go to college, and what did you study?

J Jennifer Kamara 07:53

I went to University of Texas of Dallas, and I did mechanical engineer. And after that, I did my Master's in Texas A&M Corpus Christi, and I did my MBA there.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 08:15

Could you repeat the university that you attended Jennifer?

J Jennifer Kamara 08:18
University of Texas at Dallas, I did mechanical engineering. And then I did my MBA at Texas A&M Corpus Christi.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 08:33
Thank you. Since your parents are from Honduras, and then Colombia, you speak Spanish

J Jennifer Kamara 08:40
Absolutely.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 08:43
How would you describe your relationship to the language since you live in Texas now, and it's a little different than living in one of those countries.

J Jennifer Kamara 08:53
Spanish is my first language. I still have an accent, and I love my accent, and I embrace it. I honestly - in Texas, there's a lot of people that speak Spanish. We don't speak the same Spanish, I will say that. There is a Texan Spanish, which is very different from Mexican Spanish after being in Mexico several times, to realize that it's Tex-Mex. Very different and unique, which I think Texas should embrace it more. But no, I mean, Spanish is just my first language. And sometimes when I dream, I don't even know if I'm dreaming in English or Spanish. It's an odd thing.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 09:38
That's great. It's a wonderful thing to be able to be multilingual. Let me see. So do you notice any changes in how you speak Spanish since you've been here in Texas?

J Jennifer Kamara 09:49
Absolutely. I have a mix of Spanish. I already have a mix of Spanish just because my mom has a Colombian accent and my dad has Honduran accent, which are completely, completely different. Coming to work where I had to use my Spanish, and I have to change my lingo to make sure they understood what I was trying to talk to them. So I had to learn a little bit more of the Tex-Mex Spanish. So when I go to other places, they are very off where like, "Where are you from?" I'm like, "I'm a mix, and my Spanish is a very, very mix." And sometimes I get my Mexican words, which I like them, and people are like, "What did you mean?" Or when I go to Honduras, they're like, "You didn't speak like a Honduran." Or I go Colombia, it's like, "You don't speak like a Colombian." When I'm here, they're like, "You're not Mexican, right? Or Texan." So it's a very interesting mix for me.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 10:50

That is interesting. So do you speak to your family often, and when you speak to them, do you typically speak to them in Spanish?

J Jennifer Kamara 10:59

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I do that. In fact, my brother doesn't like me to speak to him in English. And I speak with my husband most of the time, English. But as of like, I'll say four months ago, he has been trying to embrace more his Spanish and learn more. So he's been trying to speak his Spanish, but it's still kind of a confusion because I'm like, "That doesn't mean that." So we have to - I turn back to English just so I can get my point and move on. But with my family and everyone who speaks Spanish, absolutely. That's our method of communication.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 11:40

Did you in the past, or do you now participate in any community organizations? How did you get involved in your community?

J Jennifer Kamara 11:52

Well, I like to volunteer as much as I can. I used to do it a lot more. Before when I was in college, I was part of Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers. I had the opportunity to work with FOCUS [Fellowship of Christians in Universities & Schools], which is a Bible and non-denominational Christian community. I also work with Engineers Without Borders, Society of Women Engineers. Volunteered at any opportunity the community allowed me. That's something I need to work on more. However, I'm very, very involved in my company's ERG [Employee Resource Groups], and diversifying my workplace and talking more about different cultures and learning more about the cultures where I work.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 12:42

So I know that you grew up going to a private Baptist School, and then you said your parents were Catholic. So can you talk about that experience growing up as a Catholic with your family?

J Jennifer Kamara 12:58

It was great. I feel like the majority of people in Latin America, by default, are Catholic just because it's the base religion. But I personally didn't have no problem. I think I had different perspectives. And for me, both perspective, both point of view, I wouldn't say they're a whole lot different. They're both really very close. It's just the way of practice is different. And I

honestly - I'm comfortable going into either or church even now. I have absolutely no problem. For me, it's like, you have the word of God and you want to share it with me? I'd be willing to hear it. I would not step back.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 13:53

What importance was your religion, faith, or church to you, and would you assess, to your family?

J

Jennifer Kamara 14:03

So for me is very important. However, for my family, I will say it's also as important as it is for me, but I think religion is something that's very personal. I don't think religion should be something that limit us as human beings to be around with other people who doesn't share the same religions belief, and I feel like even in the future with my kids, I will do my job of introducing them to my religion. But ultimately, they're gonna become adults and take their own decisions on their own, and I have to respect that even it's not something that I don't favor for. But sharing the right values to them, I think it's as important as sharing religion.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 14:52

Absolutely. What kinds of traditions or practices did you keep from your parents and do you hope to pass down to your children?

J

Jennifer Kamara 15:02

Celebrate every single birthday every year. I think that was one of the most beautiful things that I - I think even people here do it. Having a piñata on your birthday, I love that. Celebrating Christmas with family, no matter what, I think that's something that I really enjoy. And then being valuable and purposeful whenever you're with your family, even if you're just going to share with them for an hour or two. I think those are some traditions that I don't want them to go. I want my kids to - for home, and we're with family, we're gonna go talk to family, we're gonna go talk to auntie and uncle, or tio, tia in Spanish, not just everyone their own and being separate. I am a person who grew up in a very close family, who we're very - Hispanics are known to be very touchy, and we like to give hugs and, and ask people how they feel, and this is something that I really want my kids to learn and move on with their life with that. I think that does make a big difference. And it can be really hard when you're married with a person who has a whole different culture. But I think my husband has learned that very well. He has adapted to that and he loves it now. Now that he's more like me, and I'm just like, "Give me my personal space."

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 16:39

That's funny. Could you talk about how you met your husband, share his name, ethnic background, nationality, any other information you'd like to share about him?

J Jennifer Kamara 16:51

Yes, his name is [Name] Kamara. He is from Sierra Leone. He has lived in Senegal, and he speaks more like, I think, eight languages because of the dialects that they speak over there. He does speak French, English, and he's learning to speak Spanish now. He and me, we do practice different religions. He's Muslim and I'm Christian. I met him in community college. We were taking a physics class. We were at a lab, and he was actually laughing about - he was laughing at me. And I was just like, "Why are you laughing at me?" I was trying to get that lab down, and just - it was a summer. I wanted to just get it done and just go enjoy my summer.

J Jennifer Kamara 17:36

Well, he had the courage to be laughing about me across the room. And I am a person who I am very bold and straightforward. And I went to asking what was he laughing about, because I wasn't gonna take it. And then he's like, "Oh, you are so serious. Bla bla bla bla." And I was like, "Oh, yeah, whatever." I did find out I was taking also a chemistry class. And he worked at the lab, and I also find out that he was very smart. And he could help me with some of my chemistry classes that I needed. So I actually did ask for his number. I was like, "Hey, can you give me your number? Anyway, you were laughing about me." Like, whatever. And then I always said that the only chemistry I liked was the one I was going to have with him, but that's not true. My life is around chemistry now. But we met in community college, and then we went to different schools. He went to SMU [Southern Methodist University], and I went to UT Dallas.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 18:44

So he is from Sierra Leone, and what religion does he practice?

J Jennifer Kamara 18:50

Islam.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 18:54

How has that impacted your marriage? You growing up in a private Baptist school, and then your parents practicing Catholicism, and then you coming to Denton, and going to a non-denominational fellowship of college students there, and then marrying someone who's Muslim, can you talk about how that has impacted you?

J Jennifer Kamara 19:17

It really has not impacted me in that way. So for many people here in this side of the world, we don't see as many multi-religious marriages. But for your surprise, many people's surprise, Sierra Leone, it's a place that is very free on religion. So there's a lot of inter-religious marriage.

So in fact, his mom is Christian and his dad is Muslim too. So learning that for him was very impactful for me. And I was just like, "Well, what is wrong with this? Why would I ever think that this will be something bad for me?" I think there's good and bad people in either/or religion. And I think he was a person who valued my religion and helped me growth with my own religion, even him being a completely different - he knew so much about Christianity that I was even impressed to be honest. I was like, "How do you know so much about this?" And he was like, "Well, I also study the Bible, and I also study the Qur'an, because that helped me grow as a person."

J

Jennifer Kamara 20:28

But it hasn't had no side effects or anything. I will say, yes, sometimes people be like, "Well, your husband is Muslim," like, "Oh, no." And I have to educate to their ignorance. That might sound really bad. But a lot of people have stereotypes, and they're wrong stereotypes. Not all Muslim people are terrorists, and not all Christian people are saints. We're all great people. We all have great people that worship and do the right thing, and we all have bad people. I just think there has been a lot of stereotypes out there that have made people look bad. Just like when you see a cholo. You think a cholo is someone who's gonna come kill you right now. And that's not true. Or if you see a Black guy coming running from the hall, you will think, "Oh my gosh, he's gonna do something," but no, it's just stereotypes. And I think breaking those stereotypes - And I even myself was, like I said, guilty of those stereotypes. And being with him and learning about him, I

J

Jennifer Kamara 21:45

think it made me realize, how the better person I can be, and how things can change, and how much more change we need to have for the future. Yeah, I think it has been great. I have learned so much. One of the things that I'll tell you that even one of the places that I have enjoyed the most that I've traveled is Istanbul, which is an Islam state, but they're very tolerable for Christians still, as well. Going to places like Hagia Sophia, where it used to be a Catholic Church and then became a mosque, and being there with him. It's not a mosque, but you can still see what was Constantinople back in the days. I mean, it was just a dream come true for both. We share so many good things. We still pray together, everyone prays their own way. And we put God as our center for life. We ask God to keep us together and help other people see like, "Hey look, you can be married to someone from your same religion, and things can not work." That will make a difference. So it's been great.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 23:18

Wonderful, that was a really great answer. So I know that you all are planning for children. How do you foresee your vision, you all cultivating your child's religious life?

J

Jennifer Kamara 23:37

That's a question sometimes I made myself with him. Like, "How are you going to do this?" There's no really right or wrong way. I feel like we've never been parents, we'll be parents soon. So it'll be a trial and learn. We will both expose to our kids to both religions, and we will show

them that God is the path, whether you practice is one way or the other. I don't think I am the right person to judge one person based on their religious belief. At the end, religions were made by humans. So it's just doctrines. We follow different doctrines. However I feel like between [Name] and me, we have done our own mix, I feel. I don't know how to call it. We celebrate certain stuff together, and other stuff we don't. It's a different kind of [inaudible], but I like it because we have a lot of celebrations through the year. So that's good purpose of eating if you'd like to eat good food, okay? Just putting that out there.

J Jennifer Kamara 24:52

But we will expose them to both religions. We'll take them to church, he'll take them to mosque. We talk about being supportive of each other, and supportive of their decisions too. Definitely I hope they take the right path for them, and whatever is their calling will be the right thing. Because if you think about religion, religion also has to do a lot with who do you grow up with, where in the world you were at. It's more like a cultural thing. If Islam was a big religion in the West, then most likely we all gonna be Muslims, right? If in, let's say, the Middle East and Africa, some places in Africa, it was more Christianity, then there will be more Christians in that area. Well whatever, and Africa, that's a continent. It has more than fifty-seven countries, and people think sometimes it's one country, which it is not. There's a lot of mix of religion there. And they live their life, their kids grew up with no problem.

J Jennifer Kamara 26:03

I think that's something that we make it such a big deal here in the West. Just like, "If it's not this, it's not that." I mean, I have a lot of friends who call themselves Catholics, and they just go to church twice a year, or they don't ever go to church, and they don't even have a personal connection with God. They don't do things right. So I don't know what's worse, to be honest. So I think we'll be just fine. There will be places or points in our life where we're going to probably have some sort of conflict, but I think we're preparing each other, and having good communication is gonna make things a lot better. And like I said before, you can introduce your kid to a certain religion, and when they grow up, they go to college, exposed to other stuff, it's your values what's going to hold them to what's right. Not necessarily a religious perspective.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 27:07

Yeah, great communication. Sounds like you guys got it figured out.

J Jennifer Kamara 27:12

I think so [laughs].

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 27:16

Jennifer, who would you say are your biggest personal mentors in your life that you look up to?

J Jennifer Kamara 27:23

My parents. I'm very close to both of them. I'm very close to my dad, and I'm very close to my mom. I think they are very hardworking people, very honest, very willing to give to others, very open-minded, too open-minded for me sometimes. But I think they are my greatest mentor. And when it comes to decisions for work, life, marriage, I also think I have a lot of good influence from my brother and my sister-in-law. And I think my husband and me, we just help each other grow. One of the things that I love the most about my husband is that he's always wanted me to be a successful person. So he is that kind of person that he will put anything behind for me to be successful. So I think it's more like not one or two, it's more like my circle. I think they are the people that are my support circle and will continue to be. Whenever I have doubts or questions, whether it's religious or not religious, I seek for my parents. And stuff like that. I touch different topics at different levels with each of them.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 29:06

That's wonderful. You have such a wonderful support system in them. Do you have a favorite memory of your parents or your grandparents that you'd like to share?

J Jennifer Kamara 29:19

Favorite memory. Oh, it's because I have too many. I need to choose one right now. I will say probably when I was twelve years old, my mom threw me a big birthday party, and I was just so happy. I just couldn't believe it. But now that I - it's one of my favorite memories. But at the same time, my mom asked me if I wanted to go for a trip or throw a big party. I think I wasn't smart enough to say go for a trip. So she throw me a big party. And my brother said that he wanted to go for a trip, and he had a great trip. And then I was like, "Why didn't I choose that?" But in my brain, I thought I was gonna get both, but no. But I guess that was one of my favorite memories with my family. Now, I'll say my favorite memory - and you probably didn't ask me this, but I want to share with you - with my husband was the day of my wedding. I think that that was the most beautiful day in my life with him. Maybe when I have my kids, that will change.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 30:32

Aww, that's that's beautiful, Jennifer. So do you ever see yourself and [Name] leaving Texas or moving?

J Jennifer Kamara 30:43

Yeah, we're open. We're both open to relocating for work, not just in the US. We have thought about going to Europe to work, going to other places, Asia. I don't think that's something that's - what I mean is that's something that we're going to do in the future if that right

opportunity comes in front of us. Yeah, we would love to. I mean, what a better way to get to know a culture, and it's living within the culture. And I don't know, I just think it'll be great experience for us and our kids, if they're here to experience that and learn about that.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 31:38

What do you do to rest and have fun in your life?

J Jennifer Kamara 31:44

Rest? I sleep. I love sleeping. Well I love sleeping between eight and eight. Let's say it like that. It's really hard for me to sleep during the day. When I have fun, I love cooking. That's something that I really enjoy. Being pregnant, it's not been something very enjoyable lately, but I do enjoy when I'm not pregnant, okay? So I like to spend time with my family and friends and have them over my house and host them. That's something I learned from my mom and my grandma is host people. You cook for them, and when they eat your food, and you just want to keep feeding them. It's just a personal joy for me, and it brings me together to people. I feel food just brings people together. Some people say that I cook good. I don't know about that, but they say that. I mean, there's many claims. I'll let you interview them for that one day [laughs].

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 32:47

That's funny. I think you're a good cook. I'll say that. Let's see, can you share about your professional work life and things that are your passion, like engineering? And I know you said that you don't like chemistry much, but that you ended up doing some of that in your work life now. Can you talk about that?

J Jennifer Kamara 33:06

Yeah, so I used to not like chemistry. Now I like it, because I understand it better. I work in a material science company. I am an application engineer, but I also work with new product development. So I'm under R&D [Research and Development] in the company that I work for. I enjoy my work. I have a great support system, too, at work. I have a great manager, can't complain about her. I have great mentors within the company. They're looking for my success, and I'm very blessed to have that. Corporate America is really hard, but the company that I work with is a very socially responsible company that definitely looks and seeks to further employees, which I really appreciate. And that's one of the reasons that I make a move from my former company to this one, just because they do believe in diverse talent.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 34:09

Do you think there are any obstacles that you've faced around people making assumptions over what you're capable of in this workplace or engineering field?

J Jennifer Kamara 34:21

So right now, currently where I am, I think there's a very open-minded perspective. However, in the broader perspective, I do feel like there's so much more to be done with women in any STEM field. There might be many stereotypes, and there's many people that are struggling. I am just blessed and lucky to be in the right place at the right moment with the right people around me. I cannot talk about every single coworker at my company. I cannot talk about every single woman. I think that will be very biased on my end. But I've seen and I experienced previously a lot of woman discrimination on the field. That exists and will continue to exist, and I think, has there been improvement from twenty years ago? Yes, there have. That's thankfully to the women who step their foot down and make the path for us. And I'm thankful for that, and have to continue to also do that, and that's why I'm a person who works a lot with the ERGs in my company and find ways to diversify and put my input out there as I can, to open the path for the future a women in STEM.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 35:44

That's so important. What historic events have impacted your life? And how, if any?

J Jennifer Kamara 35:49

What historic events have impacted my life? I think 2020 was a very hard year, there was a lot going on politically, religiously. COVID happened. I feel like we went three steps back when it comes to racial issues. I personally never felt it and understood it the way I do now. I do feel sometimes with Hispanics, we have some bias, but being married to someone who's Black and has a different religion than yours, you get a better understanding of what are the struggles for some people. Thankfully, my husband and I haven't had any really big issues, but it really created a distress on me, just because my kids are going to be considered Black, even though in my perspective, they're going to be Black Hispanics, but society will never see them like that.

J Jennifer Kamara 37:02

So I was very confused and had a lot of mixed emotions. Is this the environment I want my kids to grow in? I will say even recent shootings from school have made me think, "Do I want to do stay home school or send them to a private school? Would that even make a difference?" But I don't want to ruin their social life. Either him or me will have to figure out work schedules. It would be very hard. But I think there's a lot of social issues happening that it's just very physically and mentally tiring for me. I just don't understand why we can't just accept people the way they are and respect their decisions. It's just the constantly feeling superior from other people. I just can't. And I'm a very big advocate, and someone comes and tells me something that is wrong, I learn, with time, to be bold, and tell them that's wrong.

J Jennifer Kamara 38:18

I will say that was not me probably five or six years ago. But I'm like, "If I stay quiet, I'm just

being receptive of what they're saying." I think I need to step up and make a difference, because I just cannot - I will never accept someone being racist to my kids. I might get in trouble, because I'm like, "No, this is not - you're not gonna do that to my kids." And I don't want my kids to experience that. I mean, how far along we have gone, and we're still talking about this topic. I mean, it's really, really disappointing. Talking about a country who preached freedom, goes fight for freedom for other countries, and there's no real freedom for a woman, for a person of color, or someone who just doesn't go with what society thinks is normal. It's very difficult for me. We just need to learn how to accept and understand people the way they are.

J

Jennifer Kamara 39:26

In a religious perspective, I'll tell you, the time will come and God will make the right judgment. I am not the right to judge, so I just hope weâ€™it's achieved in the next years. But I don't know, sometimes whoever is younger than me actually, Gen Z some of them, the way they think, I'm just like, "Oh my gosh, will this even get better, or will this get worse?" Sometimes I'm thinking they're [indoctrinated] what their parents do, and they don't realize it until they go to college, and they see a whole different situation. And I've seen some of my friends where they don't even have a relationship with their parents because they think completely different about especially racist stuff, which is really sad. But I just hope there will be a difference, and that it's not just only drive by corporations, because I feel like right now, corporations are being more social responsible with this kind of issues than what at a government level is being taken care of. That's just my bias opinion.

J

Jennifer Kamara 40:45

I feel like there's much more that can be done. It's not being done, because it's all about an agenda. So I hope I can give a better future for my kids if I were to be here in Texas, or in the US in general. Otherwise, I think even what people say. It's like, "Well, you live in a first-world country where you have everything." But I always tell them, "We don't have mass shootings in my country. That was something I never had a problem with." We didn't have this kind of discrimination because you look different in my country. That was not in the environment that I grew up. I never saw that. That wasn't a problem for me. So, yeah. That's all I can share there, I guess.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 41:36

Thank you. Jennifer, what do you see as your identity?

J

Jennifer Kamara 41:41

What do I see as my identity? I see as a bold person who wants to do the right thing, who is faithful to God, who loves to help others, who worries about others. And even for those that have done wrong to me, I'm always praying and thinking that everything will go good for them, and I feel like part of my identity is just be that person to other people that they have never been there for. Am I being clear with that? I have to probably expand on that. Playing that role

on someone that they have never had, I think that's something that I tend to do a lot. Sometimes it gets me in trouble, but sometimes when it's the right person, you'd appreciate. So that means I can be a bad or a good person towards that person, if needed for the right purpose, right? It's not in a bad way.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 43:07

Okay, I understand. Did you ever feel pressured to Americanize yourself whenever you came back to Dallas?

J

Jennifer Kamara 43:16

So I did at the beginning, but then after I was like, "Why am I having pressure for something that I will never be able to be?" I was getting out of my comfort zone to pretend to be someone that I was not. So I was like, "You know what? I'm just gonna embrace myself, my culture, my religion, and move on." I'm glad that I find out about that very early in going in my life. So no, I just felt it at the beginning. But it also has to do a lot with your upbringing. My parents are very strong on their personality when it comes to culture and embrace your culture. So I think that definitely helped me be that kind of person. I know that that's not the same story for everyone, because I know people that in order to be in an environment, they had to act and be different just to be felt accepted. I am just not that kind of person. If I'm not accepted, then I just move on to the next place. I mean, not everyone has the kind of bold personality or that kind of strong personality, I'll say. But I mean, for me, I guess there's no problem. I'm just like, "Okay, you don't like me the way I am? Then you don't like me. Too bad, move on."

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 44:49

Do you ever use the term Texan to identify yourself, and if so, why?

J

Jennifer Kamara 44:55

Have I identified? When I go to other states, yes, that's like, "I'm Texan," and then I like to say I drive like a Texan, because we drive so bad here. I will say I'm guilty of that, because I go to places like Philadelphia and they drive like fifty miles an hour. I'm just like, "Really?" And everyone is driving fifty miles an hour. It's like, "In Texas, it's like seventy, and we're like eighty-five." So yeah, I have used it. I have embraced it in a good way. I try to be positive. I know there's a lot of things going on right now with Texas and a lot of things that might change people's personality. I actually even tried to convince some people from California to move to Texas, and they're like, "Hell no." And I'm like, "It's not that bad, okay? You just gotta deal with some people, but then other than that, it's a great community."

J

Jennifer Kamara 45:57

I mean, I live in Houston, which I think that's what makes a big, big difference. Houston - and people don't know this - but Houston is the most diverse city in the entire US, overpassing in New York and LA. People don't know that. So I live in an area which is so cosmopolitan, that I

feel very well accepted. I don't know if I live in Nacogdoches I will have the same perspective. However, I met people, I had a mentor once that she was from Nigeria. She lived in Nacogdoches, and she said she had the best time of her life there. And I'm like, "Great. I'm not going to live there anyways." But Houston just makes such a different environment. And I think that was one of the reasons why we actually even moved from Dallas to Houston.

J Jennifer Kamara 46:46

I remember the first time I moved to my apartment in Houston, and I went to a restaurant. And we went inside the restaurant, and no one stared at me and my husband. We just looked at each other just like, "What?" I was like, "What is this?" It was just like everyone's on their own business. I was like, "Wow." Its environment is so different. You go to the store, Victoria, and someone can be speaking Arabic, someone can be speaking French and Spanish or Hindi or something different. It's just a cultural mix, Vietnamese. We're around a lot of multiracial couples, too, which I think it makes it great, too. So yeah, I mean, Houston does make a big difference. It makes me proud of being Texan when I live in Houston. There's things that I don't agree with, but I think we have a long way to go. And Texas will continue to be a very diverse state as more companies move here. And suburban areas continue to grow, more diversify.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 48:01

I'm glad Houston sounds like a good match for you guys. This will be the last question that I ask you, Jennifer. So this recording is going to be a resource for people in the future. So knowing that, how would you like people to remember you, or maybe could you share any last words of wisdom?

J Jennifer Kamara 48:32

Be yourself, no matter what other people tell you. I think embrace your culture. And pass it on to your children, to your family, share it with your co-workers. Don't be ashamed of where you come from, because where you come from defines where you're going to. Be honest. Stand for the right things, even though sometimes it's very scary to step up and say "no" to someone that everyone's saying "yes," I think that does make a big difference. If you're the first one, many will follow, so be a leader. Be a leader for change, and challenge status quo, for sure. Do it, because if you don't do it, then a lot can happen, and that's the only way we can make a change and continue to move on forward with diverse environments. And I think diversity makes places better. Some will argue the opposite, but they can come and talk to me, and then we'll have the conversation then.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 49:48

Well, thank you so much for a wonderful interview. Jennifer, I will go ahead and conclude it now.