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Ingrid Cardona Interview

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Oral Histories Bronx African American History Project

Fall 9-25-2024

Cardona, Ingrid

Mark Naison

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Ingrid Cardona Interview Transcription

Interviewers: Grace Schmidt, Victor Pichardo Jr., Allison Lecce

Interviewee: Ingrid Cardona

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4:28

Victor Pichardo Jr. (VP): So Ingrid, thank you so much for participating in this project, as you know... (Unintelligible)

Ingrid Cardona (IC): Thank you guys for considering me. I appreciate it.

VP: It's really our pleasure and our honor. Considering your background. So how it's going to work. Grace will explain. I'm going to fade away in the background and listen in, but, uh, but we'll talk on the back end. All right.

IC: Okay.

VP: Thanks.

Grace Schmidt (GS): Um, so my friend Allison, just got off the D train, so she is on her way, um, in as well. Um, so, uh. But we can get started without her as well. So.

IC: That's okay.

GS: It's not, she's important, but you're, you're the star of the show. Um, all right, give me one second. All right, we are recording and yeah. So basically, I'll just be asking you some questions. Um, feel free to, like, take them as you want, go where you want with them. There's no script. It's more of a conversation. That's the... those are the best types of interviews. But yeah, so we can go ahead and get started if you're ready to go.

IC: Oh, I'm ready.

GS: Okay, awesome. Okay, welcome everyone to the Bronx COVID-19 oral history project. My name is Grace Schmidt, and we are here today interviewing Ingrid Cardona. She's the operations manager in the Food and Nutrition Department at St Barnabas hospital in the Belmont community of Bronx. We want to talk with her about her experiences working at St Barnabas during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ingrid, thank you so much for taking

the time to speak with us today. Would you like to start off with some questions about your work at St Barnabas, and then move into some more personal questions about your experiences dealing with covid? So if you don't mind, would you tell us a little bit about yourself, where you're from, and how you came to work at St Barnabas?

IC: So my name is Ingrid Cardona. I'm Hispanic, Puerto Rican. Raised in the Bronx. I came- I'm-I've been at Saint Barnabas for about to be 22 years. I started at Saint Barnabas because my mom actually, really worked here, actually retired sometime last year. She's been here over 30 years, and I had just recently graduated out of college. She knew someone who worked at the same Barnabas facility and actually were recruiting for a manager in the retail area. And I actually had just finished college, fresh out of college, maybe not even a month. And my mom spoke to the person, and he was like, "Oh, I'm-"... ah, he was actually relocating to Ohio to take another position out there. And he said, Oh, you know, give me her resume. Let's see what happens. And I gave them my resume. About two days later, I get a phone call from the general manager at the facility, at the at the account, [he] asked me to come in for interview, and I came in, and I fit in the way they wanted me to fit in. I had all the credentials. I didn't have much of the experience, because I came from a hotel background, but I, you know, it kind of like coincide a little bit together with, you know, full service, so I fit in, and here I am, 22 years later. [laughs].

GS: Wow, that's awesome. That's that's a long time to be in the Bronx.

IC: Yeah, I was actually, I'm actually born and raised in the Bronx also. So I actually was born and raised in the South Bronx, so most of my life I've been in the Bronx.

GS: That's awesome. So talking a little bit about what food management looks like in Saint Barnabas, what does the Food and Nutrition Department do specifically?

IC: So we feed about 220 meals. We feed about 220 patients a day, about three times a day. So that's over about 1500 meals a day. We also have a full cafeteria area with which we feed customers that come from the outside, employees—it's open to the public. So, you know, we we're in the business of constantly doing food all day long. [laughs].

GS: So how many people are you feeding in the cafeteria can compared to how many patients you're feeding?

IC: So in the cafeteria, we do about a week, in about a week, about 3500 a week. In the patient area, we do about about 1500 meals. So our capacity of patients is 250. So three times a day it's about 50, about 15, over 1000 meals a day, between breakfast, lunch and dinner.

GS: And as Operations Manager, what do your responsibilities look like?

IC: So I manage, so I manage the whole kitchen operation. I just, I make sure that we are compliant with food standards, temperature, (unitelligible). We're always ready for any type of third party surveyors to come in joint commission. You know, we get our something called ecoshore and basically everything's all to make sure that we're following food safety standards. We're handling food properly. Temperatures are being taken, you know, food is being cooked properly. So that's basically my role here. I actually also manage a 75 worker union environment. So we deal with, you know, union issues. I also do employee schedules. I also do in services with staff. I also, I'm part of the safety committee, so I monthly do safety committee minutes, and, you know, just basically make sure that our environment is zero hazard for any employees to get hurt on the job. So that's basically my, my role.

GS: That's a lot of roles.

IC: Yeah, I do a lot.

GS: Now, when you first heard about the pandemic, what were your initial thoughts and reactions? What did you think for yourself and then also for your role as Operations Manager.

IC: So, when it first hit, I was like, wow. My first thought was, how is the Bronx going to deal with this pandemic if it hits?—number one. And then my second thought was, will, will, will be able to deal with patients coming in and food wise. So it was a little bit of a, you know, something to like, really, it was a little bit nerve wracking, but sort of something that was like, you know, it's something that we said, I, I said to myself, we've dealt with other stuff, so something else to challenge. And, you know, all for it, we was already ready for it, if they came, you know.

GS: So on your end, were there any preparatory steps that you had to implement? You know, when you first heard about the pandemic in the first cases came to New York.

IC: So, yes, so basically, you know, in our cafeteria area, it was self service. So employ—the staff would come in and they serve themselves. That immediately had to be changed. We needed to put partitions up. We had to change our whole dynamic, our whole assignments of staffing. So we had to convert. We had to put, like four new positions to manage the cafeteria so no one, no one could touch food, so we were serving our food. Everything had to be indisposable, Self Service. We had to shut down our self-service fountain beverage machine we went into like “grab-and-go”. So we had to make sandwiches, grab-and-go, salads, salads made to go. So a lot of stuff had to transition. And then once the pandemic hit and patients started to come in with covid, we had to change our plating. So we had to go because a lot of them was non contact, so they couldn't use the plates. So we had to purchase disposable wear, to prep. So that means anything that touched the food, anything that touched the patient, wouldn't have to come down, from trays to the cutlery to the plates to the covers, so everything was disposable,

meaning nothing came down that could contaminate anything here, and then we had to change a few of our chemicals. We had to purchase chemicals that were approved to kill covid 19 and sanitizing was a big thing for us here, sanitizing because even though a lot of the stuff was disposable, we still had trucks that were not disposable, and we needed to sanitize. So we had to buy a chemical that we needed to use to come down to sanitize our trucks because they were still sitting on the units. So a lot of different changes had to come about once the pandemic hit. That changed, like a whole lot of you know, things that we do as processes in the kitchen.

Allison Lecce: I just want to jump in here. I'm so sorry for being late, but my name is Allison. I'm Grace (unintelligible).

IC: Hi, Allison.

AL: Hi. It's very nice to meet you, and thank you for meeting with us today.

IC: Hi! No, don't worry!

AL: So I just want to ask you, at what point did you realize, like the gravity of the situation or the magnitude of the pandemic.

IC: So, personal experience from hearing the news we already knew, like by January, that, you know, the pandemic, that it already had hit New York in the middle of February, I kind of, like, kind of know. Something was like, not right. And personally, speaking, my husband, who was the first actual patient who caught covid 19 and [an] employee, he got so sick in a matter of like days. So I knew that it when I saw, when I saw how critical he got in a matter of days. I knew that, wow, it hit the Bronx and it was coming hard.

GS: So did both you and your husband work at St Barnabas?

IC: Yes, so he was so he worked telecommunications. He was a phone technician. He was here for about 10 years, and he he came in close contact more to patients than I did, because he was actually all around the building fixing phones and, you know, so he had more of accessibility in being around more of a patient population than I was. I was more in the kitchen area, um, dealing with more food wise. And, you know, from time to time, I would go upstairs and, you know, round on patients. But once the pandemic hit, that kind of stopped. So, you know, it was to keep us in precautions of not getting, you know, covid ourselves, so that kind of stopped.

GS: No, we talked yesterday with Dr Grantham, and he spoke with us about the increase in influx of patients and how it called for staff to be at the hospital for longer hours and be working more days than they normally would. So in the height of the pandemic, were you still going into work every day? Were your hours extended? And what did that look like?

IC: So yes, so my hours, my hours, actually stayed a little the same, coming in, I'm absolutely leaving, was a little bit longer I would have to stay maybe, you know, until, like, things were like, you know, not nothing ever stopped. You know, it's just when we thought that the, you know, when the boss was like, "Okay, it's time for you guys to go home. You guys need rest." A lot of us went home and we all took turns, you know, coming in later, staying extra hours. So, you know, the management team, kind of like, pulled together, and we all took turns. And, you know, standing, staying extra hours, coming in on on on weekends, off to, you know, to to have extra hands in case we needed it. So, you know, it just we, just everyone, just helped each other in the time of that need.

GS: And how did your ability to serve patients and staff and visitors differ? I know you spoke about the partitions being, you know, added and changed, but did you feel like it became harder and more, you know, meticulous as as the pandemic began?

IC: So it actually, for us, got extremely, really busy, because on top that, you know, everything changed, and process change, they decided—administration decided that we were going to get free food to the staffing because of the long working hours, the stress, you know, all this, this whole thing, changed everyone's lives. So we were like feeding our staff with free food so they were coming down, you know, as ours were going through. And then, you know, we got a lot of- we got a lot of donations from a lot of different vendors, companies, from Arthur Avenue, we, I mean, exceptional like different vendors. We had, as a matter of fact, an R&B artist who actually donated. We had a whole bunch of stuff. Food was donated from all over the place that we also donated to different areas of the hospital, like the emergency room, ICU, you know, to to help, you know, facilitate these employees, you know, working so long hours, and try to relieve their stress. You know, with food. You know, what best can we do? You know, they're working long hours, they're stressed. They're seeing so many people going through like, you know, you know, deaths, dying alone. And you know, that's the best thing we could do, was just try to support them with food. And you know, at least that helped a little bit. You know, with eating at the time, it was just very stressful time. So...

GS: Can I ask a little bit about your home life, if that's okay?

IC: Sure.

GS: Who do you live with?

IC: So I currently live alone with my two children. My daughters are. Um, 10 and 14, um, they're currently in school. One just started high school, and the other one is still in um, about to end public school and going into middle school.

AL: So when you're coming home from the hospital. What kind of precautions did you have to

take when entering your home?

IC: So when I came home, the minute I got into the front door, I immediately took off my clothes. I actually kept a plastic bag, and I just basically took all my clothing, from my shoes to my shirt, and just bagged it and just left it there, and then immediately walked into the shower and showered myself before I even came in contact with my children.

AL: And now I'm assuming that they obviously were at home for the stay at home orders.

IC: So yes, they were, once the pandemic hit, we got an email from the school saying, effective immediately, children are to stay home. They're going into zoom. So that was a little challenge for them, too.

GS: So what did you do about childcare?

IC: So, luckily, with the thank of my parents, my dad actually had a has been retired, so he was at home. So if I had to come into work, I had to drop them off at my parents house, and they were taking care of them. And so that was what was happening on a daily basis. I was leaving them at my mom's house so they can go on Zoom calls while I was at work. And then once my, once my, my mom was still working at the time, and she was immediately set to go into, you know, stay home and work from home, so it was a little bit easier for her, but she was also working. So, I mean, she couldn't really watch them as much, but my dad was so thankfully, my parents were, you know, like my savior, for me being for them, staying at home with them while they were at school.

AL: And how did you juggle this work life balance, and what kind of toll did it take on you?

IC: Wow, it was a challenge, just-just coming, just... between working the long hours and coming home and trying to wind down from working long hours and then trying to, you know, juggle mom life and, you know, get them situated and try to do homework. Because, you know, life, I mean, for them, it wasn't any easier. They weren't used to the computers and, you know, doing homework and trying to do stuff. So it was like I had to, you know, stay with them and finish their homework before I did anything else, and then try to juggle trying to cook for them at the same time. So it was a quite of a challenge, and kind of triggered my anxiety a little bit. I suffer from anxiety, and that kind of, like triggered my anxiety for a little bit.

GS: Now do you mind if we ask you a few questions about your husband?

IC: Sure.

GS: Okay, feel free to, like, skip any questions if you want, like, if you don't feel comfortable

answering anything, that's okay.

IC: No! No worries. Hey, listen, we're here to open this up. Don't worry about it. There's nothing that, nothing that nothing's gonna... I'm ready for this! It's, I'm used to this already.

GS: Okay, awesome. So you mentioned that he was the first covid patient at the hospital...?

IC: Right. He was the, actually, the first one to get hit with covid, yeah, at first, actually, first employee.

GS: Okay, and when was that?

IC: So he, um, I actually brought him in. It was March 13th. I brought him into the emergency room because he wasn't feeling well, um, for about two weeks. Um, he actually wasn't feeling well. He had a funny cough, which, to me, wasn't normal, and he had it, it was lingering for about two weeks, and he wouldn't stop, like, especially at night. It was like, it would come on stronger at at times at night, he was waking up and felt like he was choking. And, you know, men have a pride, and he, I kept on telling him, "That doesn't sound good! You know, this cough of yours does not sound normal." I really suggested that he checked himself out. And his response was like, "Oh, this is just allergies. We are allergy season. Don't worry about it. I should be okay." And it just kept on coming and coming. And then about two weeks after, I kind of got a little hard on him, and I was like, "Listen, that cough does not sound good to me. You really need to get it checked out." And he's like, "You know what? Now that you're nagging me so much, let me go." And I was like, "Listen, we work in a hospital facility. You know doctors, get an appointment! You know, there's an there's a there's a comprehensive care center, you know, go and see yourself." So actually, he kind of like, really heard me and took my advice and actually went, two weeks prior of him getting sick, and went to see a doctor and actually tell them about what he what was going on, and they had put him into a pump, an "Albuterol," an albuterol pump, which was like an asthma pump, so I thought he had asthma. I said, "Oh, did they diagnose you with asthma?" He says, "No, he just said that I'm a little congested on the chest, and that this should help, you know, open it up and I should be okay." So he used it about a week, and that cough progressed. It stuck to me, it sounded like pneumonia or like bronchitis. That cough was like, it sound like a, I don't know if you ever heard of a whooping cough. It sounded like that, at night, and it hit more at night than it did during the day, which didn't allow him to sleep. And then, after a week of using the pump, I said, this is not working, I think that you should go back to the doctor and say that this is not working. So he said okay, and went back to the same doctor who actually gave him the albuterol and then said, I think that you need to go on prednisone. So he was on prednisone pills, and he was on that for two weeks. So he was drinking that for two weeks, and about exactly on March 13, his last date on that medication. I was—he was actually waiting for me to come out of work, and he was waiting for me in the car, and I walk out, and he does not look

himself at all. And I'm like, "What is wrong?" And he's like, "I do not feel well." His eyes were like, really red. Um, he looked lethargic. He looked kind of weak. He says, I feel really tired. I'm not feeling well. And I said, "Well, you know, do you want to go back into the—I said, Do you want to go to the emergency room?" And he's like, "No, I just want to go home and actually lay down and sleep." He's like, "They already gave me medication. Let me—just maybe it's because the medication needs to, you know, hit my system, which is why I feel the way." So we said, "Okay," I—we went home. I picked up my kids at my parents house, and I said, he's like, "Don't even cook. Just just pick up something for the children." And we did. And about 6:30-7 o'clock, he was in bed, knocked, sleeping because he wasn't feeling well. So my daughters was like, "Oh, Daddy does not feel well, because Daddy never sleeps this early." It's like, well, "let's leave daddy alone and let him be." So, he fell asleep. I woke up around 1:30 in the morning, and something just startled me from my sleep. I felt like... it felt like fire, like something was so hot, intense next to me, and I feel him, and he was like, really hot. So I—I went to the bathroom, and I went to the medicine cabinet, I grabbed one of the infrared thermometers, and I kind of just swabbed it in front of his forehead, and it was like 102 fever. And I'm like, wow, he's burning. So I kind of tapped him. And I was like, "Hey, can-can you sit up for the from the bed a little bit? You actually have fever." He was like, "I do?" And I was like, "Yeah." So I was like, let me go. Let let me get you something. So I gave him, like, two Tylenols. Because he's a, he's a, he was a really tall man. He was 6'2", 220 pounds. One Tylenol was not going to be enough, so I gave him two tylenols. He laid right back down, and he fell asleep. And then I tried to fall asleep, but I couldn't, so I proceeded to get up for work, my normal day routine. I got up at 6:30, [I] get my kids ready for school. I got them up, I let him sleep about 7:15 I'm about to leave, and I wake him up, and I said, "I think you that you need to get up and actually, really call the job and say you're not coming in." And he's like, "No, no, no, I have to go!" He had a project to do he was working on. And he was like, so adamant about coming in. And I was like, "No, you need to really, like, call out and say, you, you just had a fever." And he's like, "No, I gotta go." So then he said, "Inga, just go ahead, take the girls to school. On your way back. Can you come get me?" And I said, "Okay, no problem." So I left, and on my way back, I have to pass my house. And I called him, and I got no response. And it kind of startled me, because I was like, he always answers. So I was in front of the house, and I kept on calling and calling no answer. Now, I started to get worried, and I even called the house phone no answer. So I had to get out of my car and come into the house. And when I come into the house, he's laying in bed, and I'm like, "Hey, you told me to come back and get you." And he's like, "I'm not for it. I can't do it. I try to get up the bed, and I'm so weak. I'm not I can't make it to work today. Just go ahead and go into work. I'll be fine." And I was like, okay, so I said, "I'll check up on you." So throughout the day, I kind of checked up on him. He was constantly sleeping. And then I kind of like, asked my boss, you know, "Hey, you know, my husband's not feeling too well today. Do you mind if I leave a little earlier?" And she's like, "Oh, go ahead, by all means." So I got out a little early from the job, and I kind of went home and checked up on him, and he was sleeping. And I said, "Listen, you can't sleep. We gotta get you up. Let's go. Let's get you to an emergency room or to an urgent care." We— at that point in time, I didn't know exactly what he had, because he was being treated with prednisone, so we thought it was

just something minor. So he's like, "I don't want to go to an emergency room. Can we go to an urgent care?" So we did. We went to an urgent care, and basically he was so weak, like I was trying to help him walk. And we go into the urgent care and, you know, the lady, nurse is triaging him, and she's like, "What's going on? What brings you here?" And we kind of, like, give her the general, you know, what's going on. He's been, you know, with a cough for the last two weeks. You know, they gave him this medication. Now he's on this. We've seen that he's not, is not doing any effect, and, you know, we want to make sure that it's nothing more than what we thought it was. So she said, "Okay," so she's checking his temperature, and she's shaking her head and like, I just continue seeing her shake her head, and I'm like, "Ma'am, is something. Is everything all right?" And she's like, "No, I gotta get the doctor." She's like, "His, his vitals and his oxygen level is not normal, and he has 104 of fever." And I'm like, "Wow." So she's like, "Just stay here for like, 5-10 minutes." So she goes and gets the doctor. The doctor comes in, we explained to her what's going on. So she's like, "I want to put you on a nebulizer treatment and see if that's going to help your oxygen level go up." And it kind of did for a little bit. It went up to, he was at the 70s, and it went up to about 90, but she still was not comfortable, because the minute that nebulizer treatment went away. His oxygen was going down. And then she goes, "Do you mind if we test you for... We test your white blood cells, and that we take a chest X-rays," and we're like, "by all means, we want to know what's going on." And she goes, "You're definitely battling an infection. We just don't know what it is." So they take them to the X ray room, and they take a test X ray, and then they take blood work for to check his white blood cells. We wait about 15-20 minutes, and she comes back and she goes, "Oh, Mr. Bates, this is not looking good." So now I'm like, "What's the problem?" And she says, "You have pneumonia, and it's on your right lung. Your right lung is shot right now, and you cannot go home. You have to go to an emergency room immediately." And I was... "And I'm gonna give you a copy of this chest X-ray so that you don't have to do it again." So we waited for a bit, so, I had to like call my parents and I was like "Listen, you have to go watch the kids, I have to take him into the nearest emergency room, he's not doing well. They found, like, he has pneumonia." So, my mom said, "Okay! Go, go do what you have to do!" So, at 6 o'clock in the afternoon, as we leave the urgent care, I come up and I was like, "So, where do you want to go? What emergency room?" And, he's like "Ingrid, let's go to Saint Barnabas 'cause they— you know, we already work here, so some of the doctors know us." So, I said "Okay, no problem. Let's go." And, we came in and I happened to walk in and some of the people I knew and some of them I don't know, and I actually asked "Oh, who's the attending in the emergency room today?" And, that's when somebody said "Doctor Patty is the attending today." And I'm like, "Oh my god." I was like, it was like a sigh of relief 'cause I knew Doctor Patty. So, I was like, "He's— is he around?" And they were like, "Yes, he's around, he's actually over there." So, while they triaged my husband, I'm walking to find Doctor Patty, and Doctor Patty at the same time is walking towards me and he sees me and he says "Ingrid, what are you doing here at this time?" And I was like, "I brought- I'm bringing Warren." and he was like, "What's wrong with him?" And, I said "Oh, he has pneumonia." and he was like, "Oh no!" And, I was like "Yeah." And he was like, "So where is he?" So, I was like "Oh, he's in ED 1, he's being triaged." And, he says, "Okay, Ingrid, I'm walking with you 'cause I'm actually

working on that—” He was actually working in ED 1, that particular night, which was also amazing. So, he’s like “Okay, Ingrid, let’s work on him.” So, they go over there and he goes and tells the nurse, “Can you check his vitals?” His vitals were not looking good at all, you can even tell he was gasping for air like he was like not himself. So, he was like, he was telling him, “Hey, buddy. You’re here with me tonight, so I’m gonna take care of you, so you’re not going home for today.” So he’s like, “Oh, doctor, don’t tell me that!” And he’s like, “You’re gonna be here so, just stay with the ride.” And, I was like “Okay.” And, then he’s like “Ingrid, I really need to speak to you.” So, I said “Okay.” So, he moves me away from Warren, and he says, “Ingrid, this doesn’t look good. I just need you to be ready fo what’s gonna happen.” And I’m like, “Oh my god, please don’t tell me...” So, now I’m getting anxiety, and I don’t even know what to think or to say. And he’s like, “Ingrid, don’t worry, we are gonna get him, we’re gonna get him treated! Don’t worry.” So, because his vitals were not good and his oxygen was not good, Doctor Patty decided that he wanted to call a code, so he called a trauma code and I kid you not, in less than like ten to fifteen... not even ten minutes! He was in the trauma bay and I’m talking about doctors already working on him. They were puting heart monitor machines, they were doing x-rays ‘cause they couldn’t read the CD from the other facility so they had to do another chest x-ray. His heart rate was actually not at the best because he was like... the lung was, you know the right lung was shot so his oxygen was, I mean, the doctors did such an amazing job with trying to get him stabalized and you know once they got him there then they moved him over to the... and then, it was like, you know “Ingrid, we are going to admit him because his pneumonia’s not good.” So, at that point in time I wasn’t thinking about COVID, I was just thinking that he was just battling pneumonia and that, you know, with proper antibiotics, through IV, he was gonna get himself up in that, maybe, two or three days in the hospital would be sufficient. And then, they admitted him that night, and I actually wanted him to get rest and he was admitted on the seventh floor, I actually waited for him to get to the room, I left him there, and I actually left for the night. And, I kid you not, maybe like twenty minutes after I get home, I jump in the shower, I’m getting out, I’m getting a phone call from the hospital, and it was like, “Ingrid...” And, I’m like “Yes.” And it’s like “You’re Warren Bates’ wife?” And I’m like, “I am.”—”You cannot come to the hospital to come and see him.” And, I’m like, “Wait, what happened?” They was like, “We’ve discused it with the infectious disease team, and we think that he has the symptoms of COVID and just to be precautious for you and everyone else, we are about to put him in isolation, so you cannot come in.” So, basically, I left him there and I never saw him again. So, a couple of days later he got diagnosed with COVID, he was actually transferred from the seventh floor to ICU in... I think I brought him in Friday, so Sunday afternoon, I’m getting a phone call from one of the attending doctors saying that Warren took a turn for the worse and his oxygen level was not good and they were afraid that he would code and that the best thing to do was to intubate him because that would help him lung. And, I had to make the toughest decision ever was because I was his healthcare proxy was to sign over for him to be intubated. So, I mean I left it all to God and said “You know, let me...” I’m sorry if I’m getting a little emotional... and it’s the toughest thing that I ever had to do and he got intubated and that’s the end of where I had to make that decision and then he wasn’t doing well but because he was young and didn’t have any type of underlying

conditions, he became a candidate for the anti-viral drug but because Saint Barnabas, at that point in time didn't have any patients so critical like he was, he was actually transferred to, Weiler hospital which is Albert Einstein and he was transferred over there on Sunday and then they did a procedure to give him the anti-viral drug and that didn't work. Out of all those days he was admitted, he only did good for one day and the rest of the other days it was just getting phone calls with "He's not doing well... He's in critical condition..." Actually, his kidney failed, so I had to sign for him to get dialysis, some of his organs were shutting down, his heart was starting to fail, so little by little, you know COVID was taking a toll on him and it was shutting him down. And, you know out of that last day, I got the worst phone call ever, on March 20th, March 22nd, I'm sorry. March 22nd, about 4 o'clock in the afternoon and I could tell I wasn't gonna get good news, that whole day I couldn't sleep, something was not letting me relax, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't this. So, one of the doctors from the ICU called and was like "Ingrid, are you home alone?" And I'm like, "I actually am." At that point in time, I was also diagnosed with COVID, so I caught COVID myself, so I was battling COVID at home alone. And, that's when I got the news that he had passed and said that he had died of actually complications from COVID. And, I made the toughest decision ever was to let him go.

GS: Thank you for sharing that with us. I can speak for Allison that really was quite an emotional... I can't imagine the emotional stress that that would have put you through.

IC: I had to make the toughest decision ever. I don't think I've... I don't think I ever got closure 'cause I never got to tell him how much I loved him, how much his kids loved him and I think he knew that he was gonna die 'cause he knew the minute that they were intubating him. He was like, "There's something that I gotta tell you and please don't talk." And, I was like you know, "Tell me what? Is there anything you want me to do? Anything you want me to say? Do you want me to talk to your family?" He was like, "All I want you to know is to hear what I'm gonna tell you." And he was like, "Don't ever, ever forget that I love you and my kids and I know that if I die, I'm gonna be at peace because I'm gonna be with my parents." 'Cause he lost his parents at a young age, so he was like, "I know I'm gonna be with my parents and I know that I'll be at peace. So, just always remember that I love you." And he hung up the phone, and I never, ever got to tell him anything 'cause I think he knew he was going to die.

GS: Wow.

IC: I'm sorry for being emotional.

GS: No, don't apologize at all. It's an emotional... I mean it's incredibly emotional, it's emotional to hear you talk about it. How did you, how did you address that topic with your girls?

IC: Oh my God. So, when I got that phone call, it's just like, I mean, I didn't even, I think I was in a shock mode, at that point in time, and it's just like, I would, I didn't even know what to think, say, I don't even think, all I can tell the doctors is just like, you know he was like, the doctors could not apologize, he was just so apologetic over the phone, and he was like, "Ingrid, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry." I said, "Hey doc, you know, you did the best you can, you know you were, this is something that nobody knew how to handle." So, you know, it was like, it was like, to me it's like an experiment. Nobody knew how to handle these situations, nobody knew how to— so, they did the best they can to keep him alive for eight days, you know, you know, I would have loved to see him and but, you know, I think that the Lord works in mysterious ways and maybe if I would've seen him, maybe I would've not taken it well. So, at that point in time, it's just like, I was like, I just looked up and I have, I have a real faith in God, and I have like, actually have decor in my room of Jesus Christ and you know and basically a saying and it says, "And you are confined..." Or something like that and I just look myself and I kneeled on my knees and I just say "God, you know please, you tell me like what am I gonna do? Something to point towards, like how am I going to move forward, like you give me the strength that I need to be able to, you know, tell my children that their dad is gone?" And, you know like, I don't even know what hit me and it's just like, I had to pick up the phone, I didn't even pick up the phone! I had to like Zoom my children, so I had FaceTime, so I had to take my tablet and I called them and I had my parents around and everybody was on, everybody was on the phone, on FaceTime and I actually told my mom, I said, "Mom, where are the girls?" And she was like, "They're right here." So I said, "Mom, please, I really need you guys to like, to like really sit together and sit somewhere because I gotta say something." And, I think that my mom already knew, so she was like, "Okay, Ingrid." And, they sat in, my mom has an island kitchen with barstools, so they all sat there and my daughter was there, both of the girls were there. She goes, "Hi, Mom!" And, she was like, "How are you feeling?" I said, you know, "Mom's feeling a little better, but mom's still not—" And, the first thing that she said was, "How is my dad?" And, it just tore my heart because I didn't even know what to say at that time, and I'm like, "Well, as far as Daddy, are you sitting next to Grandma and Grandpa?" And, she said, "Yeah, Ma, Grandma and Grandpa are sitting right here." And then my brother was sitting there with my oldest daughter and she was like—And, I said, "Hey guys, I really really need to tell you guys something and I really need you guys to pay attention." And he's like, "Okay." And I said, "Girls..." And, they were like, "Yeah, mom?" And, I was like, "I'm sorry to really... I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, that I really have to break this news to you. But, Daddy passed away." And, my eight year old, she was, she had just turned eight two weeks ago, was like, "No, mommy, no!" With a shock in her face, her hand in her mouth, and she just let out a scream, "Not my Daddy, not my Daddy, not my Daddy, why?" And she just, and I just broke down and cried, I could not, I could not stop crying and my mom is crying at the end, my oldest daughter is crying, everyone's crying, I wanted so bad to get dressed and go and be with my children and hug them so much but because I was battling COVID myself, I was scared that I would give them COVID. I was scared that I was going to lose my life, also, so I couldn't even, even hug them to support them in the death of their father. So, that was even more harder on me but, I did what I had to do and, and tell them you know that their father had died and it

was the most hardest, hardest thing I ever had to ever do. Was to ever tell my children that their father died.

GS: I kind of just [Unintelligible] incredibly, incredibly, incredibly moving, and heartbreaking to hear. How were you able to, you know take care of yourself, obviously right, you're a mom, so you wanna focus on your kids but given you had COVID, how did, how were you able to emotionally and physically take care of yourself during that time?

IC: Listen, to be honest, I just, I don't know if I had an angel over me or I had someone watching over me... I, I don't even know, I can't even say how I have the strength and the courage to be able to continue with my life, without being, without my husband and my kids. I just think, you know, my mother's instinct, you know as always had a mother's instinct ever since I became a mom. And, it's just like, I just kneeled myself and just said to God, you know, "God, give me the strength so that I can move forward and continue to be the best mom that I can. And, you know, be there for my kids and for myself because you know I gotta take care of myself and my children." And, I just like, it's just like something came on and I was like, I need to get better. And, I was able to like, you know, battle COVID, you know, it took me about two and a half weeks to get better. And, you still battling, you know, all the different symptoms. [Unintelligible] It was like symptoms after symptom so, unless I was not symptomatic at all, I couldn't have my children around. So, I basically could not have, I basically was without my children for a month and a half. You know how heartbreaking that was? Not having my children around when I mostly needed them, when I just wanted a hug, when I wanted a kiss, when I wanted them, when they, actually we needed to support each other, they were going through a loss, I was going through my loss, and they needed me as much as I needed them. So, it was just something, I was like, "I need to get better." So, until I go better, I didn't get to see my children. And then about a month and a half later, I was able to see my children for the first time and actually— And, not first time, but I was seeing them like on FaceTime, but actually to physically hug them and have them near me and it wasn't even still a hundred percent 'cause I still was wearing a mask. I needed to wear a mask because I had a bad cough. So, but just the fact that I was able to grab them and hold them and they cried so hard. They cried so hard because, you know, they needed their mom and you know they were going through their loss. So, it... I'll just say that this pandemic changed my life dramatically.

GS: When it came to you having the... you having to go back to work, how did Saint Barnabas react? How did your community react? How did your neighbors support you? Did you take time off, did you have to keep coming in everyday? What did that kind of look like?

IC: So, so, I took time off once I got better, I took, I took a leave of absence for about a month. I cannot, I cannot even say the gratitude that Saint Barnabas did for me and my family. From, from Doctor Patty taking care of my doctor, from taking care of my husband, from the nurses in the ICU, the seventh floor where he was there. They actually... one of the doctors, Doctor Lazar, who was actually a doctor, who was one of the ER doctors actually did a "Go Fund Me"

page for my husband which kind of like stunned me, like I was in total shock. I would never, ever imagine that the love that people had for my husband at work and how much he was loved, you know by his coworkers and you know people at the job, was amazing. They collected a lot of money for the Go Fund Me page and even at still that, it surpassed the maximum which was amazing. I... always say, I cannot thank enough what Saint Barnabas did for me and my family. Human Resources, 'cause they knew that I couldn't go out, the director of human resources with everyone up in the all the rest of the staff, they actually catered food and it came to my house from an Italian restaurant and I had food for days for myself because I couldn't cook because I was so weak. I mean, it was just there... an abundance of love that I got from Saint Barnabas, the community like, my neighborhood, my neighbors, 'cause I live in a house, so my neighbors downstairs in the house, they kind of like went to the supermarket for me and got me like you know the bare necessities. You know, milk, juice, you know, and they left it at my door and they would knock and it was like "Ingrid we left you something." I mean, I mean just everyone just like kind of like helped with you know helping you know me cope with my loss and you know trying to get myself better and my children you know some of some of my kids, two of my teachers from my daughter's school stopped by my parent's house and they kind of did a card with some of the kids and other schools. I guess they took a card and spread it around and they took it to my mom's house with all the kid's signatures and telling my children you know about the loss of their dad. They gave my daughter a doll... it was just the... the support that I got kind of like made it feel even much better and to me it made it feel like you know my husband and I were loved by people and that showed out during the pandemic.

GS: So, what were the first few months like adjusting to life without your husband? And specifically while battling that with your children and work and the pandemic?

IC: Wow. It's... I just think I'm- I think I was- I just think-wow, two years later and I still haven't stopped. I'm always on the go. You know, life has been different because you know he helped me with a lot of things. We split, between financially with the bills, he helped with the bills so now everything is on me. You know he helped with laundry, food shopping, he helped me cook, he helped me with the girls doing homework. So now, you know all that falls down on me, you know I work 9-10 hours a shift. You know, he had worked, you know, it's it's- I'm on the go. I'm always on the go! So, my morning starts like 6 o'clock in the morning, I'm getting the kids up for school, trying to get them lunch, you know take them to school. Get them ready, drop them off at school, come into work, work my nine-hour shift, come back home, cook something for them, do homework, get them showered, eat something, and get them in bed. That's my, that's my normal routine, and I won't go to bed 'till probably 11-12 o'clock at night [unintelligible]. So, you know, I'm always on the go, so life has really, actually changed for me, I had to like, you know, I mean my mother's instinct has always been there but now the kids depend on me more. You know what I mean? They need mom more because dad is not around.

GS: So you mentioned that a lot of your neighbors and community members like really showed up for you after your husband's death; in what other ways did the community show up for each

other in the larger scale of the pandemic?

IC: People, I mean, basically, everybody treated each other one as if they were family. That's all I could say. Everyone was concerned about everyone. Everyone was asking about everyone's wellbeing. I mean, for myself, I mean people were asking me, "Did you have food? Did you have everything you need at home? Do you need anything paid?" I mean people were asking me you know "Is there anything I can help you with?" And I know that in the community, 'cause... I mean not only I was going through stuff, people weren't working either. A lot of people got you know- were working from home, some people got laid off 'cause work wasn't- So it wasn't only for me, it was for everyone. I mean life has changed, so you know I could speak for myself but also for other people like I could tell for myself, a few of my family members lost their jobs during the pandemic 'cause of work. So, I mean everybody was, even if you were friends, everyone was treating each other like family, I mean I had friends and family members from other states. I had my cousins from Florida reaching out and finding out I needed anything. I mean I had people from all over the place, you know, I had family members who sent me money from- they did a collection and sent me money. Actually, some of my husband's high school friends, when they found out, that he actually died, they did a collection of money and actually sent it out to me in a gift card that actually had money. It said, "Ingrid it's not much but it's for something." And, it's just like the abundance of people helping each other was just tremendous, you know? So, I think everybody came together as one and just tried to, you know, just go with whatever was coming, this pandemic.

GS: Did you see people around you going through similar events that your family was dealing with as well? Or did you have neighbors who has also lost a family member due to COVID? Well I have a couple of friends who lost- I have a couple of friends of mine who lost family members due to COVID, also, so... You know, I had a cousin, I had a friend of mine who's grandson was only thirty years old... So, I had quite a few people that I knew that also lost their loved ones, also, so I think that we all got together and kind of expressed a lot of our emotions because I thought at that point that I was the only one going through my pain in being able to do this alone, but I kind of found out that I wasn't the only one. It was thousands and so many people out there losing loved ones that it was kind of like you know, it kind of like opened my eyes, you know what I'm not the only one going through this pain, there's thousands and millions of us going through what I'm going through right now. So, that's that. And, then you know I don't know how I came about some- I don't know- to tell you honestly, I don't know how this came about, I think I met someone who also lost a family member and she was a member of the church. And, she did this whole reunion of like a meeting of everyone who died of COVID and everyone was meeting on a weekly basis and everyone just was just spilling out their emotions and everyone was talking about their story. And, it just, everyone was just like talking about so it was like a grieving-counseling session where I wasn't the only one that was grieving. Everyone in this session was grieving the exact same thing that I was grieving- losing someone to COVID and how everyone was trying to cope and how life was for them. So, it was just like, I didn't even know how that came about to be honest. I think it was through a friend

and to this day I still do these sessions. I do my grieving sessions, not as often as I should but you know we all speak about how life has changed for us in the past two years, and you know how life has been, you know, how we have coped and some of us have children, you know? So, both of my girls are going through grieving also so they also have their own sessions. My oldest one kind of took it really hard so she sees a psycho-therapist. She's actually in her own, went into depression and anxiety and she's also battling herself currently and then my little one has anxiety which she's also seeing a therapist. So, this has effected them long term, but with the faith of God, and you know with me trying to be there as much as I can for them and you know helping them cope with their grieving. We are trying to move forward.

GS: What are some other lasting effects of the pandemic that you've noticed in your community?

IC: People are like... they are afraid! People are... not afraid, it's just that, people have noticed that life is too short, you know, they see that, how, a lot of people from my community, where I'm from how my husband died so fast and how life just like so easily ended. It's just like today you're here, tomorrow you're not. So, tomorrow's never promised, so you know we've learned to say "Don't take life for granted and live your life like it's your last and you know don't dwell on things that you can't dwell on. Move forward. Petty stuff, you just leave it aside. Stop being angry and just love each other." I mean, I seen that with, you know with my parents and you know with family members of mine, my neighbors, and you know... Life short, you know? They're afraid! People are afraid, you don't know if, you know, you don't know if tomorrow is your day to go, and if like you gotta try to like it like the best that you can. And, I think to me that's- those are my daughters' fears, my, actually my little one's fear. Because she asks me that every so often and her fear now is "Mom are you going to die now soon?" And, I'm like "Don't think about that." You know? So that's her fear, she lost her dad, and now her fear is that she's going to lose her mother. So, and that's something that we are trying to work with, with the grieving counselor because we have to try to get her to understand that. And she just turned ten, so... So, that's basically where we are at but you know, I feel that the community has in my area.

GS: I mean, yeah, it's so easy to get so consumed by all this grief and disaster. I can- I couldn't even imagine. But, despite all of that, could you tell us about- was there anything positive to come out of this pandemic for you? Like, any happy moments that you remember? Anything that made you think like, "Okay, my world isn't actually ending right now?"

IC: The fact that, you know, that fact that I was able to get through this pandemic and speaking from experience, a person who got COVID-19, and how I was able to surpass this and you know get past it and be able to be with my children and you know and see life as a different perspective. You know, like I could have taken a turn for the worst and you know gotten sick and died myself but you know what? I just take that God gave me a reason why he still wanted me to be here and it was because of my children. And you know I still have, you know my

children and you know my job. And I know that there's people out here who care about me. And that gave me positive things to say, you know, despite of everything, I still have people out here who care about me and you know I got to keep on moving. I got to keep on going for myself and my children, so you know there is a positive and you know, despite of everything that has gone, I thank God that I've gotten these opportunities where financially, I've got help with, so I was able to... With the help of someone who also works in a health care facility, who works out of North Central Bronx, kind of heard of this benefit fund that they were giving to family members who lost their loved ones that were health care workers. And, I applied for this benefit fund and I actually kind of got approved for it and financially they paid for- I got reimbursements for the funeral arrangements for my husband and it wasn't much but it was something to help, something to help me long term with financial debt for my children and for myself going forward because he helped me with bills. So, this benefit fund, so there's is some positive outcome, you know that there is stuff right there, that there is a benefit out here. There's funds out here that are helping people like me financially. It's amazing and thanks to the GoFundMe page and this benefit fund, I'm able to have something set aside, you know for my children in the long term and a little bit of the life insurance that my husband left aside for my girls is actually going to help financially when they go to college. So, I mean that's the positive you know that I see. There are things out there and you know people out here helping each other so there is some positive out of this COVID.

GS: So, we just have one last question for you. What is one thing you think that people outside of your community, so outside of the Bronx, should know about what happened at Saint Barnabas and with Bronx community members during the pandemic?

IC: The fact that this pandemic is real and that people didn't understand that it wasn't real. This hit the Bronx really bad and people were dying and it took a lot of lives. And, people didn't understand that the Bronx got hit the worst and you know... in the hopes that maybe later on in the future there's some benefit for the families that are probably still struggling financially from this whole pandemic. There's probably still people who have not been able to go to work themselves, you know people who have actually also fought the pandemic and they're not doing the best of their health. So, there's things, there's a lot of things that you know people need to understand that this is something that affected the Bronx really dramatically.

GS: Wow, thank you so much for your candor and your honesty. If there is anything you feel we didn't touch on... you know, if you want to add anything, now is the time to do so. But, if you know, if you think we covered everything, then we can wrap up. But...

IC: No, you guys did... You guys asked the questions actually really good. I just want to thank you guys at Fordham University and Victor Pichardo for actually picking me to speak about my personal experience of the pandemic and I really appreciate it. I think that this is something that I can later talk to about with my kids because this is history and later on in life when my kids get older and they want to talk about their dad and you know their dad is part of history you

know he died at the height of the pandemic and you know he lost his life but that does not mean that we can't move forward and speak about how good of a man he was. I thank you guys for doing this, you know? Amazing!

GS: No, thank you so much for speaking with us and for talking about your experience. Allison and I are both passionate about oral histories in the Bronx, and passionate about uplifting voices in the Bronx so we are just incredibly grateful to you for taking time out of your day, out of your busy day, to speak with us and to be open and honest about what you went through. We really really appreciate it.

IC: Thank you so much, I appreciate it, thanks. No worries, I'm here! It helps with my grieving!

GS: Yeah, I can understand that. But I think with that, Victor, we should be good to go in terms of concluding this interview.

VP: Okay, Ingrid, thank you. I kind of lost, a bit, a couple of times. So, we'll follow up, I know that Dr. Patty is unavailable, so we'll do a follow up, probably next week at some point. Grace, Allison, appreciate your time, and Ingrid, I'm sorry.

IC: No, thank you so much! Thank you guys, I really appreciate it! Take care.

GS: Thank you, have a great one.