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**Oral History Interview with Ericka Basile
Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations, 2011.019.095**

**Interview conducted by Jennifer Scott at the Brooklyn Historical Society on June 4th, 2014
in Brooklyn Heights, Brooklyn.**

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK. Today is June 4th, 2014. My name is Jennifer Scott. We are currently -- currently at the Brooklyn Historical Society here in Brooklyn Heights. And this interview is a part of the "Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations" oral history project. Now, could you please introduce yourself?

ERICKA BASILE: My name is Ericka Basile. I was born on [date redacted] in Johnson City, Tennessee. And I have been living in Brooklyn for the past four and a half years.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Thank you. That was perfect. OK. So. You were born in Tennessee.

ERICKA BASILE: Yes.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So how long did you live in Tennessee?

ERICKA BASILE: I lived in Tennessee from, you know, the time I was born in '82 until 2000 -- 2008?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, wow.

ERICKA BASILE: So I came directly here from living in Tennessee. I, you know, went through all of my, you know, primary schooling there, all through high school. And I went -- attended college there as well. So once I finished college I stayed there and worked for a couple of years and then moved here to attend graduate school.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh. So --

ERICKA BASILE: In New York.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- what was the name of the town in Tennessee that you were born in, or from?

ERICKA BASILE: It's called Johnson City.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What was that like?

ERICKA BASILE: It's a really beautiful place to -- a beautiful place to have been brought up, I think. It's a mixture of being rural and being a city at the same time. I think it's around the -- I think it's the seventh largest city in Tennessee. So it's not -- you know, it's not totally -- totally tiny -- but, you know, it's not a huge metropolis either. So...the name comes from Johnson's Depot, and it was a -- so it was a hub for trains to go through. And then it morphed into Johnson City. So I sort of grew up with the trains coming through. They go through the town, and you can hear them at night all the time, that kind of thing.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, really?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So do you not hear them anymore?

ERICKA BASILE: Well, now that I live in Brooklyn I miss hearing them. But they do still run through, you know, once in a while, through the -- through the town. Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So, do you have siblings?

ERICKA BASILE: I do. I'm the oldest of four. And I'm -- so I'm 31. I have a sister, Nathalie Basile, who's 28. My brother, Fritz Basile, is -- just turned 26. And my youngest sister, Victoria Basile, is 21.

JENNIFER SCOTT: And where do they live? Are they in Tennessee?

ERICKA BASILE: My sister Nathalie lives here in Brooklyn, and my brother lives in South Carolina. He's married and has two kids. And my youngest sister attends the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: So she lives in Knoxville right now.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did -- did you and your sister move to Brooklyn at the same time?

ERICKA BASILE: No. I moved to New York first, and she mo-- she's been here -- let's see. About three years or so? She lived in LA --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: -- and then she decided to move across the country and live in New York, while I was here.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you live together?

ERICKA BASILE: No.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK. But do you live in the same neighborhood?

ERICKA BASILE: We do. We both live in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh. OK.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So, your -- your parents, were they also born in Tennessee?

ERICKA BASILE: No. They were both born in Haiti. Yes. My mom was born in 1958. And then my dad was born in 1949.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What are your parents' names?

ERICKA BASILE: My father's name is Phanel Albert Basile, and my mother's name is Ginna.

JENNIFER SCOTT: And her maiden name?

ERICKA BASILE: Her maiden name is Germain.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What -- what part of Haiti are they from?

ERICKA BASILE: My mom is from Port-au-Prince, and my father was born in Jacmel.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Have you visited there? Where they're from?

ERICKA BASILE: No, I haven't yet.

JENNIFER SCOTT: You haven't?

ERICKA BASILE: No.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you want to?

ERICKA BASILE: I really want to, yeah. For years it was sort of -- in our family, it was a topic of -- we never really talked about going back. My -- my parents always sort of expressed a fear -- some sort of fear -- of going back, especially my mom. Because her family had to leave because of the Duvalier regime. [00:05:00] So it was a sort of violent and scary time for her family. And I think -- even up until recently she's said, you know, "If I go back to Haiti and someone knows my maiden name, what if there's --" -- you know, this residue of people that -- a remainder of people that were involved with, you know, the killing of some members of her family, things like that. So she -- you know, I guess it makes her a little nervous. My grandfather was arrested twice, and the Tonton

Macoutes came to my -- my mother's house once, and held a bayonet to my grandmother's stomach when she was pregnant.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh my God.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. There were all kinds of things that happened. So -- after the second time my grandfather was arrested, he decided that it was -- just wasn't safe. So him -- he and my grandmother left the country first, and then they had to send for the kids later. 'Cause there were seven children. My mom is one of seven.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK.

ERICKA BASILE: So they had to figure it out, and they all came separately.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What time was that? Around what time period?

ERICKA BASILE: I know my mom says she came -- they moved here -- they came to Brooklyn when she was six years old. And since she was born in '58, I guess, what would that make it? Like, in 19-- 1964, around then.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So your mother came to Brooklyn first. Before Tennessee.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So how did she end up in Tennessee?

ERICKA BASILE: My dad's a physician. And when -- after they met -- he was doing a residency at Cabrini Medical Center, in the city. And they met at the hospital.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: She was actually involved in a car accident when she was 16, that -- she had some back issues after the accident, and -- so she was required to -- or suggested that she go to the hospital to have a traction done on her back. But she had been putting it off and didn't want to go. And then finally there was, like -- I think it was around Christmas one year, she was just like, "You know, I'll just go and get it over with." So she went, and my dad was the attending physician that night. And they just sort of chatted, you know. There was a nurse on call that night as well that came into my mom's room and was like, "You should talk to that doctor, he's Haitian. He's really cute; he's a really good person." (laughter) And my mom says now she wished she had known, like, what that lady's name was, 'cause she could tell her, "We're married now! We have four kids!"

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, she never found out!

ERICKA BASILE: No, she never found her. So -- yeah, they just be -- they were friend-- like, friendly chatter in the hospital. And they started to date. And then they sort of, like, eloped, and he was like, "I'm gonna go to Tennessee for --" -- to Quillen College of Medicine is where he did the rest of his residency. "Will you come with me?" So she went with him.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What did you mean they kind of eloped?

ERICKA BASILE: They never had a wedding. So I -- I guess they just went to the -- you know, the Justice of the Peace. City -- City Hall kind of deal.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you know why they never had a ceremony?

ERICKA BASILE: I never -- I don't think I've ever asked her that. I just always knew that it was a whirlwind -- you know, whirlwind thing. And growing up, I feel like my sisters and I, we want to have a wedding one day, but I've never been the kind of little girl that dreams about your wedding, and that's, like, the pinnacle of my life, you know? I think that maybe that comes from my mom-- the way that my mom did it. That it was just something she wanted to do, so she did it. And she didn't make a huge to-do about it. I think one day they want to re-- get re-married and have a big thing, like, at their house or something.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, really?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So how long have they been married?

ERICKA BASILE: For -- they got married in 19-- maybe '79? Or '80? So like 30 -- 33 years?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, wow.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. Or 34 years.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Wow. So your father was already in New York, too? When -- what brought him from Haiti to New York?

ERICKA BASILE: He went to medical school in Haiti.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: And then he came to the States as a resident, like -- so, when he was finished with medical school he continued his studies here.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What's his area of specialty?

ERICKA BASILE: Internal medicine. And he's an emergency room physician.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So he came to New York around what time?

ERICKA BASILE: I know he was 27 years old. 27 or 28, he's told me. So...I can do the math.

JENNIFER SCOTT: That's OK. It's OK. Does he ever talk about his growing up in Haiti? Like, are there any stories he tells you?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. He was a rap-- rascalion in Haiti, when he was growing up. He was really -- he always talks about -- he's told us a lot of stories of being, like, a little [00:10:00] boy that caused a lot of trouble. You know, like -- what did he do? He once would take -- he took, like, a dog treat and put hot peppers in it or something like that. Like, mean things he did. Or, like, he would tie a -- tie someone to a tree with, like, red ants, fire ants, around them. Or just stuff that little boys would do, but kind of, like, awful. But he -- you know. I don't think he was a completely awful kid or anything like that.

JENNIFER SCOTT: No?

ERICKA BASILE: He was raised by his -- his aunt. Who I still call my grandmother. You know, we call her Chap-- Chap-- her name is Chapeloute. So -- so yeah. He was raised by her. And she was really strict and stern with him.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, really?

ERICKA BASILE: So he -- he has a lot of memories of that, of just being punished for things and -- I don't know if he -- going against that, he was sort of rebellious and -- you know. I'm -- I know that ever since -- he's told us ever since he was a little boy, he knew he wanted to be a doctor. So he was always very driven to do well in school and -- even though, you know -- he had friends, so he grew up with this group of friends that -- some of them ended up dead, some of them ended up in jail. You know. 'Cause they were --

you know, he came from a poor background, so people went different ways. But he went the -- you know, went the way that he always intended to go, I think.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Why do you think that is, when he was friends with, you know, people who went -- took different directions?

ERICKA BASILE: I'm not sure. Maybe it was -- maybe it was my grandmother? Maybe these other people didn't have someone in their lives that were, like, on them so much. Like, sh-- 'cause she was really strict.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What was his father like?

ERICKA BASILE: I don't know too much about my grandfather. I know that he -- he -- my dad has never had a really close relationship with him. I think he was sort of -- maybe he was there as a parental figure but sort of peripherally. He had other children by other marria-- well, other women, I'm not sure other marriages. That's the fuzzy part. I'm more -- I have more information -- growing up, we've always had more information about my mom's side, but my dad is just very tight-lipped about his side of the family. He doesn't really talk about them that much.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you --

ERICKA BASILE: And we're not as close to them as we are to my mom's side.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: All my siblings.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do most of your father's family live in the States or back in Haiti?

ERICKA BASILE: He has some in Haiti, but most of them -- there are a lot in Boston. He has some in -- here in New York. In Fl-- Miami.

JENNIFER SCOTT: And what about your mother's family?

ERICKA BASILE: My mother's family -- so, all of her -- her brothers and sisters, the boys -- my uncles Patrick and Fritz -- Fritz lives in DC, in Reston, Virginia, and my uncle Patrick lives here in Queens. In, like, Flushing. And her sisters -- so when my mom moved to Tennessee, two of her sisters moved there as well. So both of her sisters still live there, in Johnson City. Her youngest -- the one -- 'cause my mom is the third -- third youngest. Or, wait. So she's the fourth in the line of seven. And so the -- Marjorie and Sandy, her

two youngest sisters, who are the youngest of the whole seven, they live in Johnson City as well.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Wow.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. So I grew up a lot around my cousins, which was really nice. It was just, like, a whole gang of us.

JENNIFER SCOTT: That's great.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So did your mom talk much about her upbringing? With the -- how it was to grow up in a big family?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. She talked about it a lot.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What are some of the things that stand out that she's -- she talks about?

ERICKA BASILE: The thing that stands out the most is how she was a parental figure to all of her siblings.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, really?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. She took care of everyone. 'Cause my grandmother -- when they came to this country, they didn't speak any English at all. My grandfather got -- found work in a diner? My mom knows the name of it, but I do-- I can't remember what it was. And then after that he worked for a -- a place off of Eastern Parkway on Nostrand Avenue. It was a little shop, she said, owned by a Jewish guy. And he was -- he worked as a carpenter there.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, wow.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. And my [00:15:00] grandmother had -- when she first came here she worked for members of our family that were already here, as sort of, like, a domestic worker. Just, like, helping them out around the house. And then she just got really frustrated and was like, "I didn't come to America to be someone's maid." Those were her words. And then she decided to find a job elsewhere. So she actually worked at the World's Fair. What was it --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Wow.

ERICKA BASILE: -- 1960 -- the one that they ju-- I think they just opened the grounds of, that one?

JENNIFER SCOTT: In Queens?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. She worked there at a little stand serving drinks. 'Cause she spoke French, so I guess they had different -- you know, they could use people speaking different languages there. And apparently she -- Robert Kennedy came once, and she had -- gave him a cup and he signed it or something, so she had this little souvenir of his signature. But she lost it somewhere.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh no!

ERICKA BASILE: So -- anyways, so they -- when they first came here, they didn't have -- they didn't have much. They had to pretty much start over. Because in Haiti my grandfather came from a pretty well-to-do family. They owned businesses. They owned schools and a coffee plan-- coffee plantation?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, really?

ERICKA BASILE: So they -- when they came here, they had to start all over. And...

JENNIFER SCOTT: So they lived on -- near Eastern Parkway?

ERICKA BASILE: No. My grandfather commuted there. They lived in Brownsville.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: So -- yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK. Do they talk about those early years, in Brow-- Brownsville?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. My mom -- my mom says that back when they -- when they moved there, it wasn't -- you know, it wasn't as bad as it -- like, the crime wasn't as bad as it is now, I don't think. But at a certain point it started to get worse. Even in the -- I guess this was in the late '60s, early '70s. And -- so it was my grandmother and some other members of their family, they all lived in a multi-family building, I think that was owned by one of my mom's uncles, or something like that. And they -- she remembers that it was really small. She remembers it being, like, a railroad kind of thing? And she had -- she tells us this story of them getting crabs one time and, like, cornering my young-- her youngest sister in the kitchen and, like, letting the crabs loose and... Anyway. Random memory.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Getting crabs from where?

ERICKA BASILE: It was from the seafood market or something.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh my God. So with seven kids --

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah, seven kids.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- in Brownsville, how many -- how many rooms did they have in the house?

ERICKA BASILE: I think --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did they talk about the house?

ERICKA BASILE: -- I think they only had three rooms. So all seven of them shared two bedrooms. Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did you ever see the house, go back and visit?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. I've seen it. We didn't go inside, but once my mom came to New York with her youngest sister Sandy, and we -- we were like, "Go -- go -- go to the address!" So we went, and the neighborhood looked pretty rough, and there were some -- I don't know if they were Crips or Bloods, but some guys in colors, you know, on bikes, you know, circling around, and they took pictures with them in front of the stoop.

JENNIFER SCOTT: They took pictures with the guys?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. I don't know why.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So what did the -- what did the house look like to you? What was your first impression?

ERICKA BASILE: When we saw it?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Yeah.

ERICKA BASILE: It just looked really run-down and --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Was it -- were people living there?

ERICKA BASILE: Maybe. It didn't -- yeah, it didn't look like -- it wasn't boarded-up or anything, it just looked very -- it just looked rough, you know?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Is it -- was it brick, or wood-frame?

ERICKA BASILE: I think it was wood-frame.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you remember the address, by any chance?

ERICKA BASILE: I don't.

JENNIFER SCOTT: But it was in Brownsville.

ERICKA BASILE: I could get it from --

JENNIFER SCOTT: That's OK. Just curious.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. But my mom has good memories of that area before -- like, I remember her always saying there was a pickle factory nearby, and she could smell pickles in the air. And there was -- she talks about a lot -- she's talked a lot about areas, or this particular area, being Jew-- like, a lot of -- there being a lot of Jewish people? And then when minorities started to move in, the Jewish people started to move out, or the neighborhood started to change. And -- but that everyone was always very kind, and there was a little place where -- like, a five-and-dime store, where she would save up her money and go buy candy and, like -- she would buy Barbie outfits with whatever money she got. Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So what was the ethnic makeup of the -- the neighborhood?

ERICKA BASILE: The neighborhood that she grew up in there?

JENNIFER SCOTT: That she grew up in.

ERICKA BASILE: She said that there weren't a lot of Haitians. Like, people like them, that there were -- it was, like, a [00:20:00] lot of Jewish people, and some, like, Hispanic people. That it was pretty mixed, but then it became more -- like, less mixed. Just like what you would call "white" became less and less over time. But the neighborhood started to become -- there -- you know, the crime became worse and worse. My brother Fr-- not my brother Fritz, but my uncle Fritz -- he was really handsome when he was growing up, and he was just really popular with girls and boys. And so a lot of the guys in the neighborhood, some of them that were, you know -- weren't so great -- like, seedy characters -- they were still friends with him. And there were a lot of muggings happening. My mom remembers one summer -- my grandmother worked a couple of jobs at this point. 'Cause she didn't want them to be there anymore. She wanted to move them out. So she would come home really late at night. She would take -- I can't remember what bus it was, but my mom remembers the bus. And she would get home sometimes at 2:30 in the morning or something, and walk home. And -- but because these guys, like, knew my uncle, they would never hurt my grandmother.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Wow.

ERICKA BASILE: So she was always safe. But she -- you know, she said, "I don't want my children to be raised here, I'm -- gotta get out of here."

JENNIFER SCOTT: So she saved up money. And at this point, actually, my grandfather was -- he had -- when he was younger he had some knee and hip problems. He was an avid bicyclist, and his issues just got worse and worse, to the point where he had to have surgery. And he just became, like -- he couldn't work, physically. So my grandmother was the only one that could really go out and work at a certain point. And so -- you know, she saved up as much money as she could, and then she -- they moved to Queens, in Springfield Gardens, and she bought a house. Like, she saved --

JENNIFER SCOTT: To Springfield Gardens?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So she saved up and bought a house, you said?

ERICKA BASILE: Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh. Was she --

ERICKA BASILE: They all stayed in the house -- the house just sold a couple years ago, after -- she passed away in 2010.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: And we've had the house ever since.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Your grandmother did?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh. What was her name?

ERICKA BASILE: Marie Thérèse Germain.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Marie Thérèse Germain?

ERICKA BASILE: Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK. So you knew her pretty well, then. You got to interact --

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- with her?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: so what are your -- do you have, like, a favorite memory of her? Or a not-favorite memory?

ERICKA BASILE: My grandmother was amazing. She was really spunky and really sassy and full of life, and really smart. She liked to drink and smoke. She could keep up.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What was her drink?

ERICKA BASILE: What was her drink? I think it was -- it wasn't vodka. Or maybe it was. I feel like she just drank whatever she could drink. That sounds awful, but -- I don't -- or maybe I just didn't pay attention, 'cause I was you-- I was a kid, I just knew that she was drinking. But -- yeah. She was -- she was amazing. She was a really hard worker. And

--

JENNIFER SCOTT: Sounds like it.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: And you --

ERICKA BASILE: Really good person.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- your -- your grandfather, is he still living?

ERICKA BASILE: No.

JENNIFER SCOTT: When did he pass away?

ERICKA BASILE: He passed away in 1994.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK.

ERICKA BASILE: I remember I was 12 or 13. So that would be right, 19--

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you remember him?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So was -- what was he like?

ERICKA BASILE: He was soft-spoken. And...he was kind of intense. I don't know. He didn't say too much. He -- so wh-- he did a lot of observing, I feel like. And when I knew him he always had a cane, you know, 'cause of what I explained, the hip issues.

JENNIFER SCOTT: This is the -- the carpenter?

ERICKA BASILE. Yeah. Yeah. But he was still really active. So at one point when he was older he came to Tennessee and he stayed with us. My grandparents both -- I feel like they lived with us, but maybe just to me as a kid, they were there for so long I felt like they lived with us. But he re-covered all of our armchairs and the dining room, just all these things he was still doing work for my mom.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, wow.

ERICKA BASILE: I remember when I was a little girl, he made this -- this little stick? He carved it for me -- for my mom to put curls in my hair.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, wow.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. So he made all these, you know, little relics that we still have.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, that's great.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: That's great. Do you know where he learned carpentry?

ERICKA BASILE: I don't, no. I would -- I guess I would assume in Haiti. 'Cause it was work that he was doing pretty soon after he got here. One of the only things that he could do where he didn't have to speak English to people, you know?

JENNIFER SCOTT: You said that your mother-- your mother's side of the family owns a lot of businesses [00:25:00] and were wealthy. Were your grandparents very educated, too?

ERICKA BASILE: My -- my grandfather I think would have been -- would have had more formal education than my grandmother. My -- they owned a school -- my grandfather's family owned a school called l'école Parette. And my grandmother -- I'm not -- actually I'm not positive about her education. I know that she -- she got married when she was 17 and had her first child when she was 17. Her mother passed away that year as well, so she had to take care of her sisters. So I think whatever education maybe she was having, if she had any, had to be put on hold for her to become a mother, and...

JENNIFER SCOTT: What other businesses did they own in Haiti, do you know?

ERICKA BASILE: My mom says that it was a coffee --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: -- some sort of coffee business. And my grandfather had a trucking company where he would transport coffee around Haiti. And there are a lot of great stories about him -- his -- like, things that he encountered when he was going through the mountains of Haiti.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Like what?

ERICKA BASILE: Like -- like some sort of supernatural things happened to him, that -- like, you know, *vodou*-related, that -- we have -- we have a bunch of stories like that, that my

mom knows very well, that she's always told us growing up. And -- well, I don't know. There's one story about my grandfather driving his truck really late at night, and a country girl, carrying, like, a basket of things, like, from the mountains -- I guess it was really early in mor-- in the morning, but it was still dark. She just em-- crossed the road and came out of nowhere, and he hit her. And, you know, he was freaking out, of course, 'cause this girl. So he pulls her -- he brings her into the truck and tries to figure out who she belongs to, if he can -- I don't think she had passed away right then, but he was trying to ask her questions about where she was from, and he wasn't getting any-- getting anything. And finally I think he found her relatives or whatever, and she -- she actually passed away. After that, he would be driving his truck and hear a so-- a sound. Like a noise in the back of his truck? And he would have to keep pulling over. And this happened multiple times.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What kind of noise?

ERICKA BASILE: Just some sort of rattling, like something moving around in the back.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Wow.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. And he would go back there and there would -- he couldn't find anything. Like, not a trace of a thing. And then eventually one time this happened, and he went in the back and there was a huge python snake in the back of his truck.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh my God.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What did he do?

ERICKA BASILE: I don't know. But apparently, like, you know, my mom says this -- or the superstitious people say -- it was the soul of the girl he had hit in the truck, that was like, you know, a part of the truck then, so he had to get rid of the truck 'cause all these weird things kept happening with that -- that truck, where he had the accident.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did he get rid of it?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Wow. Why did they think that the snake might be the girl? Was -- is there something in *vodou*, you know, practice?

ERICKA BASILE: I'm not -- I'm not sure. Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Just curious. So are there -- would you say on your mother's side and your father's side that there's practitioners or believers in *vodou*, or there used to be, or how -- you know, how does your family engage that?

ERICKA BASILE: I've never heard about it on my dad's side. I've always known them to be very religious -- Catholic. But on my mom's side -- the only person that I've heard -- I've known to be, a, like -- I guess -- I would call her a semi-practitioner -- is my grandmother. She was actually religious as well, like, she believed in God, and -- it wasn't -- I don't think it was a Catholic-based faith. But she also -- I feel like she had -- I don't know that -- they call it a sixth sense. Or just some sort of power about her. Like, whenever you -- if you ask people in my family, or talk to my -- my mother about my grandmother, they'll say she was a very powerful woman. And using the word powerful in a way to where, like, she would have senses about things that would happen, or she would -- things like that. So I feel like she had a connection to that *vodou*. And she held several ceremonies in her house in Queens, in Springfield Gardens, in the basement. I don't know that she ever participated in them, but she allowed them to happen inside the house [00:30:00]. And growing up, my mother was always -- out of all her siblings -- was really curious about -- about it, and she would try to peek in to ceremonies. And my grandfather was very -- would always say, "Don't do that. Don't get involved in something that you don't understand, that you don't know the power of. So just, you know, forget about it." And I think my grandfather tried to do that as well. He would just say, "Oh, you know, Marie's doing whatever she's doing," you know, "but it's not really affecting my family directly, it's just happening in our house." So I never knew -- I've never known him to have any participation in it, or anything like that. But -- but my grandmother, yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did you ever get to see the -- the --those ceremonies happening in the house?

ERICKA BASILE: I didn't. But when I was a child I always had a feeling about that space, that the -- that the ceremonies happened in, ev-- I think when I was a kid I didn't know that that happened there, but I just was always sort of -- I -- I felt like that was a creepy space, you know? And it was just a den. It was a, you know, -- you would walk down the

stairs and there was a checkered floor, like linoleum checkered floor, and my grandmother had a little bar with a pink rotary telephone on the wall, and she had some neon signs, like “Beer” signs hanging, and there was glasses and liquor and stuff. And then there was a couch and knickknacks, and the laundry was down there. So it was, like, a normal, like, lower-level of a house, but I always had funny feelings about it as a kid.

JENNIFER SCOTT: You said that and -- when you -- when they were in Brownsville, they -- there weren't a lot of other Haitians? But how 'bout the Queens neighborhood that they lived in?

ERICKA BASILE: I think there were more there.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Yeah?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did -- so you used to actually visit from Tennessee, come to Queens --

ERICKA BASILE: Oh yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- as a child.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So what was that like?

ERICKA BASILE: It was scary. I was always so scared of New York. Every, like, where I turned, like, I was -- thought I was gonna get mugged or something. 'Cause coming from Tennessee, in the -- in the 80s, coming to New York, it wasn't -- it was kind of -- you know, it was a different New York, as everyone knows. And being in Queens was a whole 'nother thing.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Can you remember, like, the first time, or one of the first times, you came and made that change? Like what your impression was?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. I just remember it being really dirty. Like, “It's so dirty! Why is it so dirty?” And we would -- I felt like we would usually come in the winter, where, you know, it's like the dirty, wet, sn-- like, dark -- the snow is all brown --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, no. Mm-hmm.

ERICKA BASILE: -- and it's just -- every-- everyone was wearing puffy coats, and it's like -- you know, you just don't want to be -- be there.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did you ever think you would move back one day?

ERICKA BASILE: I didn't. I never thought that I would. I was -- when I was in college, I studied painting in undergrad. And I was the president of a couple different student organizations, like, where we would organize trips to come -- you know, we were living in Tennessee, artists; we were thirsty for culture, so we would travel to other cities to go to museums and things. And we would come to New York. And those were some of the first times that I would come here and I wasn't with my family. And I remember the -- one of the first times I did a trip like that, we were staying on the West Side, like in Hell's Kitchen. And I was gonna leave the hotel to go to a diner to pick up some food, and I was like, "Am I safe to walk the streets?" 'Cause I didn't know. I was -- you know, I had no idea. But -- and then later I visited -- the first time I came, I visited New York by myself, I just fell in -- I just was like a trip where I just fell in love with the city. And I remember the moment where I was like, "I'm gonna live here."

JENNIFER SCOTT: When was that?

ERICKA BASILE: I was in Times Square. That sounds so bad to say! But I remember that's where I was. I don't know. I just was in love with the energy of the place. I never go to Times Square now, but I just remember that's where I was.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Ironically.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: When -- what -- what made you come to New York that time, when you came by yourself?

ERICKA BASILE: I was visiting friends.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: It was around Halloween, and I love dressing up for Halloween. And then I also -- yeah, I was gonna visit -- I visited some pro-- I was applying to graduate schools at the time, so I actually also came to -- I visited the program that I ended up attending at NYU, I spoke to the director of the program there and looked at a couple schools.

JENNIFER SCOTT: And what program was that?

ERICKA BASILE: It was the Costume Studies program at NYU. At the Steinhardt School.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK. What made you go into costumes? [00:35:00] Costume studies?

ERICKA BASILE: I -- I've been sewing since I was a little girl. My mother is a seamstress. So I think one of her ways of coping -- of moving -- you know, being a city girl and living here and then have-- and then moving to Tennessee -- was she just had a lot of time alone. My dad was always on call, and it was -- when I was born it was just the two of us. And she would stay up all night and sew, and, like, have all these different projects.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, wow.

ERICKA BASILE: My mom is a very -- she's a Renaissance woman. She can do almost anything. She's a -- an avid seamstress. She's an amazing knitter. So I sort of -- I was brought up with those arts. And I continued to practice that up until -- or through -- college. And when I was in college I was -- studied painting, but I found myself painting drapery and folds of fabric and the things that I was handling when I was sewing.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: And so it made me want to explore further, like, the psychology of clothing, or why we wear what we wear, or what does costume mean in paintings. I was always attracted to those things. Or even, you know, deciphering -- if you're watching a film, how does -- how does dress, you know, affect the storyline or the -- the look.

JENNIFER SCOTT: How did your mother learn how to sew?

ERICKA BASILE: She -- she's partially self-taught. She also had aunts that worked. She had a cou-- several of them that worked for designers in the Garment District. One worked for Calvin Klein, as a seamstress, and then another one for -- I'm forgetting the name of the designer. But she had -- so she had the access to these, like, really lovely fabric scraps and things, sometimes, that they would bring her. Or they would make dresses for her. And she would watch. She watched and learned and taught herself. She also -- she told me once that one of the ways she learned how to knit was she was in -- she was traveling Europe and she remembers being on the train and two German ladies teaching her how to knit on the train or something. So she sort of picked up things around.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did she do that professionally, or did she work somewhere else?

ERICKA BASILE: No. She -- she never did that professionally. She just sort of -- once she had children she -- she, you know, just focused on raising us. She worked as a makeup artist before she -- she met my dad, she was doing that. She worked for Estée Lauder, at

Bloomington's here in the city. And so when she went to Tennessee, she, you know -- she got a job at a department store doing that and was really successful.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh wow.

ERICKA BASILE: She was really good at what she did.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Which department store in Tennessee?

ERICKA BASILE: I think it was a -- Hess's? Was it Hess's, or -- I'm trying to think of the name of department stores that are no -- 'cause it's no longer --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: -- 'cause it's no longer open, but --

JENNIFER SCOTT: It's OK. So your mom, I'm thinking about her family's journey from --

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- they've lived in so many different places and so many different neighborhoods. They were in Haiti, in a different con-- completely different context. And then Brownsville. And then Queens. And then Tennessee. How does she talk about those changes? Like, those are very different --

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- contexts.

ERICKA BASILE: I mean, I think that -- I think her connections to Haiti run deep, and her -- where she is in Tennessee right now. Because it's such a peaceful place to be. Like, all of her memories -- it's hard -- it's really hard for her, and my dad, I think, to deal with the Haiti that is now. Like, so -- so many of the problems that are in Haiti now. Or, you know, the parts of the country that have been destroyed. 'Cause her memories of Haiti in particular -- I don't know so much specifics of my dad's -- but because my mom's family had a little bit more wealth, they had a house, like a old sort of like plantation house by a river called Riviere Froide. Cold River. And they -- so her memories are really -- seem really idyllic. Like swimming in swimming holes and sitting around campfires and telling stories and -- you know, doing things like that. And she re-- she remembers the -- from the coffee plantations, like them taking the -- the tobacco -- or not tobacco but like whatever they'd use to make the coffee, like, the plants -- laying it out in the sun, having it dry with these big, you know, probably ancient- [00:40:00] looking contraptions.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So does she feel like that's closer to Tennessee?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. I mean, she's never said that to me directly, but I've -- I've always felt that. You know. The way that we grew up in Tennessee was sort of a parallel to the way that she grew up there. And then New York was this in-between place that's a really big part of her life, but I think she's really happy and comfortable being in the South and being in a slower -- a slower pace.

JENNIFER SCOTT: How does the neighborhood compare, ethnic-wise, where you guys lived? Or live?

ERICKA BASILE: In Tennessee?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Yeah, in Tennessee.

ERICKA BASILE. Wow. There is very little diversity there. We were the only -- it's like I -- I remember always feeling like -- as a child, taking stock of if there were any other Haitians or any other West Indian people anywhere. And we were -- my family was really the only one. There was one man named -- what was his name? Felix. This old man named Felix that my dad somehow randomly met. He drove a little -- or he -- I guess he still drives it -- this little pale yellow Mercedes with the top d-- top down. And he would come over and play piano. He used to be a professional pianist, and he would come over and play piano and hit on my grandma and... But yeah. He was Haitian. But we were -- I always felt like we were the only ones. There was one other -- growing up, there was a Jamaican family at my school. The Williams. And -- and I remember the mom always just being very kind of like aloof, and not super-friendly, and my mom was like, "Yeah. Jamaicans and Haitians don't like each other, that's why." (laughter) But that doesn't make any sense.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Why did she say that?

ERICKA BASILE: I don't know. Maybe something she heard? She's never really had -- I don't think she's ever really said very much about Jamaicans, like specific instances where that would -- she would have evidence of that, but...

JENNIFER SCOTT: How would she have encountered Jamaicans?

ERICKA BASILE: I guess in New York?

JENNIFER SCOTT: In -- in Brooklyn?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: In Queens? So you guys were -- it was a -- it was -- you were the only Haitians, West Indians. Does that mean your neighborhood was predominantly white?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So then how did people interact with you? How do you think they perceived you?

ERICKA BASILE: For me, I -- I always felt like I was part of -- I was one and the same. You know, I was part of just everything that was happening. But I always felt different at the same time. Like it was this thing I couldn't -- this ephemeral thing that I couldn't put my finger on, that I just never felt like I was really -- really fit in. I think when you're growing -- growing up -- a lot of, you know -- your sense of self sometimes has to do with the way you look, and I didn't look like anyone else, so -- at all. And so, you know, you're -- say you're hitting puberty, or you're going -- you're in high school and you're trying to deal with -- you know, "Do I look OK?" You know, you're just so focused on things like that. And then to compound it, you know, you just don't look like anyone else. So -- but, you know, I -- it wasn't such a huge thing to me, because I -- the way that we were brought up, we were brought up to have, like, a lot of pride, and feel like you were, you know -- you were fine the way that you were, and you're beautiful, and all these different things. So of course. So it's like I felt that, but then I also didn't feel that way. There was, like, a ha-- a -- you know, a confidence and then a -- a -- a dilution of that confidence when I was out in the world in this Southern -- small Southern city, around -- you know, having crushes on boys that, you know -- the only boys that were around were, like, whi-- white country boys that didn't like you back 'cause maybe they didn't like your type, or -- whatever the case was, it was sort of that happening a lot. It's like your choices were more slim and --

JENNIFER SCOTT: So what did you do, for dating?

ERICKA BASILE: I didn't date that much in high school. But I did -- I mean, I did -- I had a couple different boyfriends. What I did -- it wasn't, like, something that I planned beforehand. But when I got to high school, I just became a part of the -- the group of kids that were -- I was in with the theater kids and the punks and the skaters. And the, sort of,

you know -- not the popular kids. 'Cause the -- those kids accepted me. The ones that were, you know -- [00:45:00]

JENNIFER SCOTT: Yeah.

ERICKA BASILE: So that's just like where my default was. And I was already into music when I was in -- in middle school, and stuff. But --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Into music in what way? You played, or --

ERICKA BASILE: Sort of like alternative music and --

JENNIFER SCOTT: You mean appreciation, like you were a fan.

ERICKA BASILE: Exactly.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did you also play a musical instrument?

ERICKA BASILE: I never played music. I just -- I used it sort of as a coping mechanism, to get through teen-- my teenage years. I was just sort of focusing on the things that I loved, like -- like music and art and -- I was -- I was always making things. I was constantly -- just, like, I had all these different little businesses. I had, like, a -- I had a friendship bracelet business. I had -- I don't know. I was always coming up with some sort of business plan for something.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What kind of things did you make? Friendship bracelets.

ERICKA BASILE: Well, this was -- the friendship bracelet thing was when I was in middle school. I was also in the Environmental -- the Environment Club? I started a club with my friend Laura, and we were the only members. So I was really passionate about the environment.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Very exclusive.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah, very exclusive. But no one came to our meeting. And I remember telling my -- lying to my dad, telling him I was staying after school to tutor kids, but I would sell, like, bra-- friendship bracelets. I had a little kit, too. I still have it. It's like a piece of 8.5 by 11 paper that's folded in half, and it has, like, my logo on it. I designed it. And it has -- the bracelets taped on the inside, so it's like a little sampler you can show people.

JENNIFER SCOTT: That's great. My God.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So you said that you felt -- you kind of felt different sometimes, and then sometimes you -- you -- you felt like one and the same, but it was like -- sometimes you felt more confident than others, like, felt more pride. So when did you feel most confident? Like, what settings?

ERICKA BASILE: I think in the -- in the places where I knew that my -- I was usi-- utilizing my talents, like my artistic talents. I always felt really comfortable and safe there. Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: How 'bout in school, going through grade school and high school?

ERICKA BASILE: Where did I feel --

JENNIFER SCOTT: More confident.

ERICKA BASILE: -- more confident?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Or less confident. Like, where -- in that regard, if -- you know, dealing with being -- feeling different.

ERICKA BASILE: I think with -- in -- in those years it was -- I was re-- I loved being athletic. I'd never played any sports until I got to high school, but when I was in grade school I always felt like I was really good at -- you know, your PE class, and you outrun the boys, or you kick a ball further than boys or something, I was -- felt like, "I can do this. Yeah. I'm good at this." And then with art there too. And writing. That was one of my things that I was really -- that gave me confidence when I was younger.

JENNIFER SCOTT: And helped you to fit in more? Did those things help, or --

ERICKA BASILE: I don't -- I wouldn't say fit in more, just -- I think it was a form of therapy for me. Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did you feel like there was a certain point in your life, you know, when you're dealing with feeling different, that you just -- you accepted that you're just different?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: You did?

ERICKA BASILE: Oh yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you remember that? You seem like you remember when it happened. Do you remember the point that that happened, where you just sort of surrender to it. It's -- that -- you just -- you're just different.

ERICKA BASILE: I think when I entered high school.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Really?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. Because it was such a traumatic thing for me. I went to a public -- or, no. I went to a private school from pre-K through the eighth grade, which had 100 kids in it, tops. For all of the grades.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, wow.

ERICKA BASILE: It was like 100 children.

JENNIFER SCOTT: From pre-K to when?

ERICKA BASILE: To the eighth grade.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: So it was, like -- it was -- I was there until they kicked me out and I had to go to high school.

JENNIFER SCOTT: And you've --

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- you've resented it ever since.

ERICKA BASILE: It was a safe place. It was called Ashley Academy. So my class of -- there were about eight of us that were together from the time that we were in pre-K up to eighth grade. And then we all dispersed, and went to -- it was called Science Hill High School. A public high school, in my hometown. There was also another high school called University High School that was smaller, but Science Hill was a -- it was a choice. My choice. But -- so I was going from this class of -- graduating eighth-grade class -- of ten people to a class -- entering freshmen class -- which was the biggest at the time. I went into high school in 1996, and it was -- there were [00:50:00] 400 of us, or something like that.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So there were ten people who graduated in your eight-grade class?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Was that small?

ERICKA BASILE. Oh, yeah, super small. There were only two or thr-- there were three girls, and the rest were boys.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, my goodness.

ERICKA BASILE: I think there were only three of us.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So your friends were the other two girls, or --

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: And what was their ethnic background?

ERICKA BASILE: They were both -- they were both white. I'm not sure the details of -- past that. But there was one boy in my class that was Peruvian and Dutch, named Inti. He recently just passed away, actually --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, no.

ERICKA BASILE: -- in March. Yeah. It really affected me.

JENNIFER SCOTT: I'm sorry.

ERICKA BASILE: I think because I grew -- I went to school with him since we were really little kids, and then through high school, and then we were both applying to graduate schools at the same time, and we both lived in Johnson City, and I remember seeing him in a coffee shop and we were both, you know, working on our applications together. And then he lived here in New York.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: And he was in South America, and he got hit by a car --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, no!

ERICKA BASILE: -- crossing the street.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So young.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. I know. He was a really amazing person.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Sorry.

ERICKA BASILE: But -- yeah. Thank you.

JENNIFER SCOTT: That's tragic.

ERICKA BASILE: But yeah, it was a little bit of a mix. I mean, Inti was a -- besides me, was sort of -- his dad and my dad always, like, thought that they -- they were both sort of, like, not very tall men with bea-- white, you know, beards, and really quiet. So I always thought of his family as sort of a parallel to my family a little bit.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Wow.

ERICKA BASILE: And his dad was a doctor as well. So... But yeah. There wasn't a really diverse ethnic mix-up, of that class in particular. Well, this boy Richard that was in that class as well, he -- his mother was Filipino, and his dad was -- was white. I hate just saying white, because it sounds so -- but I wasn't sure what he was.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Sounds so what?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah, I know.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Sounds so what?

ERICKA BASILE: It sounds like -- I like to know what -- where people come from specifically. And so I hate to just say, like, black or white or, you know, because it's more than that. I think that's why I -- I hesitate to say that, but...

JENNIFER SCOTT: So how do you think that people saw you in school -- in both grade school and then -- you know, in high school?

ERICKA BASILE: In high school?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did they see you as Haitian?

ERICKA BASILE: I don't know that they -- 'cause I didn't really talk about my -- like, my parents' background so-- a whole lot. But -- and then grade school... I don't know. I don't know that it came up so much.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So did you get an idea of how they saw you, how they regarded you?

ERICKA BASILE: I feel like people were very -- it's like this conversation that we just had, the black and white thing. They would just say black. You know? Which -- and growing up, we never really -- I don't know. We just never thought that way. Because we just knew that we were from this other place. Like, our pa-- our family was from another country. Which was this complicated -- like, a lot of different things coming into play. Like, my -- my grandmother's father was French, and her mother was Taíno Indian and Haitian, and that was -- my mom was a product of that. And on my dad's side, you know, there -- there was less of the Indian and the, like, European in there. But, you know, there's -- I always just knew about the -- my rich family history, and all of the different components to it. So just for someone in Tennessee to just say, "Oh, you're black," you know, is -- I am. But to me -- living there, when someone says that, it's almost like -- not a dismissive thing, but it's like they're not doing the extra work to

understand what else -- you know, what other things comprise you. And also, it's the lines that are drawn there are so clear -- you know, like, there are parts of town where people of color live, and then there are other parts of town where it's, like, mostly white. And the -- in the lunch room at my high school, it's not like -- people weren't all friends, but they stuck to their own groups like that. But when I got to high school, I just decided, like, "I can't -- I don't fit in with the African American kids, they think I'm weird, they don't know where I'm from, they -- you know, they --" They had all gone to [00:55:00] public school together and I wasn't part of that, so they were like, "Who are you?" Like, "Where are you coming from? Why is your hair like that?" You know.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Why is your hair like what?

ERICKA BASILE: Because my hair is, you know -- it's just, I guess, a different texture of what -- you know, some of their hair was. You know. So I just -- I guess -- seemed like an alien. And that's how -- I -- my sisters and I, and my brother, we have had these discussions before, that we often feel like aliens. Like, you know? Not like real aliens, but -- but just in the fa-- like, when someone stares at you, and they want to say, "Where are you from?" And I'll say, "I'm from Tennessee," or -- you know.

JENNIFER SCOTT: That answers it.

ERICKA BASILE: You just say, you know, what your answer is. But I did feel -- I did -- I felt like that in high school, though. I just was this Other. I was always the Other. And even with my friends, the groups that sort of accepted me, I never really fit in with th-- I never felt like I really fit in with them. You know?

JENNIFER SCOTT: So the -- the -- what was the ethnic makeup of the people who did accept you? The skaters and the punks and the -- was it ethnically diverse?

ERICKA BASILE: Not really. No. No.

JENNIFER SCOTT: It was predominantly white?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: They just had, I guess, more of a broader acceptance of different --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Of difference.

ERICKA BASILE: -- music and different food and culture and stuff.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Right.

ERICKA BASILE: Stuff that I liked that I -- you know, enjoyed.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So did you feel like you could find a place somewhere along the way to express your Haitian culture? Or is that -- did you just feel that you kept it more to yourself?

ERICKA BASILE: I felt like when -- there would be small opportunities in school. Maybe there would be a potluck or something. Or we would discuss something in class where I had knowledge of it because of my Haitian background, or I could make some sort of food that my mom would make, and bring it in. And there would be, like, little injections of my culture that way. And then in college there was an international fashion show every year, and I would do that, and I would always be Haiti.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What would you wear?

ERICKA BASILE: I would wear the traditional dress of the affranchi. They were like the freed slaves. And I would wear, like, either an all-white outfit and maybe like a madras-print skirt, and have my hair wrapped up, and have a basket of something. I guess that's very cliché, but someone had to do it.

JENNIFER SCOTT: And that was in college?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What college did you go to?

ERICKA BASILE: I went to East Tennessee State University.

JENNIFER SCOTT: East Tennessee State University? Why did you choose to go there?

ERICKA BASILE: I -- I di-- I felt like when I was looking at colleges, I didn't look too far outside of my -- out of Tennessee -- for some reason. I looked at, like, University of Tennessee Knoxville, and, you know, UNC in Athens, and some places around there. And then I sort of decided to stay and go to East Tennessee State because it was -- I was gonna be close to home and, you know, I just sort of decided to stay close to home, and...

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did you live at home while you --

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah, I lived at home --

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- went to college?

ERICKA BASILE: -- for part of the time, yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: How was that?

ERICKA BASILE: It was pretty cool. I mean, my parents are really -- really fun and awesome. Whenever I would have parties, like, they would let me have parties at the house, and they would stay up really late with us and dance and stuff. I was really allowed to do -- almost -- you know, pretty much whatever I wanted. It was like I was living on campus, but I was living at home and I wasn't having to pay rent. 'Cause our house is literally a five-minute drive from campus, so --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, nice.

ERICKA BASILE: -- it just made sense for me to live at home. I don't know.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did you know before you went to college that you were gonna pursue painting?

ERICKA BASILE: No.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK. So what --

ERICKA BASILE: I was undecided when I first started college. My major was undecided.

JENNIFER SCOTT: How long were you undecided?

ERICKA BASILE: I think it was one semester I was undecided, and then I decided to do graphic design. So it was in the arts, but it was -- 'cause I knew I wanted to do something in the arts, but I was really paranoid and worried that my dad wouldn't approve because - - you know, like, how are you gonna make a living as a painter, or something? So I thought graphic design was a good choice. So I did that for a while. And then I just wasn't happy. And I started to get really jealous of -- seeing the painting majors and -- doing their thing -- and [01:00:00] so I switched.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Were you happy --

ERICKA BASILE: I was really happy.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- you made that choice?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: No regrets?

ERICKA BASILE: I was really happy that I made that choice. Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: How did your father feel about that switch?

ERICKA BASILE: He -- he was actually really accepting of it, more than I thought. More so than I thought. You know? He knows -- he -- he innately knows that I wouldn't be happy doing something that -- that wasn't arts-related. I think he knows me very well. I remember -- I have memories of him teaching me how to draw, and stuff. So even when I was a kid I think he saw that, and he -- he sort of nurtured it a bit.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So does he also do art, some sort of art?

ERICKA BASILE: He doesn't, but he -- he has a talent for it. I -- he just doesn't really -- he doesn't make things, but whenever he's had to draw something or, like, I've seen him do it, he has a talent for it. And his father was a painter. And his -- his -- his uncle, as well. So there's a lot of --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Lot of artist.

ERICKA BASILE: -- paint-- painters on my dad's side of the family. My father's uncle, Castera Bazile, is, like, the more -- the most famous one in our family.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Castera Bazile?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah, Ca-- Castra.

JENNIFER SCOTT: That's a great name.

ERICKA BASILE: In the '40s, after World War II, there was this sort of golden age of artistic production in Haiti. There was -- this man named DeWitt Peters came to Haiti and opened up a art center. And there were several men that sort of worked alongside him. My grand-uncle was one of those people, and --

JENNIFER SCOTT: That's Castera?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah, Castera.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Your grand-uncle? Wow. That's so interesting.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What was I gonna ask you? Do -- do you have any idea of where your name comes from, your surname, Basile?

ERICKA BASILE: No. I don't.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Or any his--

ERICKA BASILE: I know that it's -- so there was some confusion with my father about the spelling. So my -- in our family -- so, my immediate family, we spell it with a "s." And

then -- and all of my dad's relatives, they spell it with a "z." So, you know, I've -- I was -
 - I felt like I was told at one point that it was with a "z" and then when my dad came to
 the States that they spelled it wrong, and he just never had it corrected. But then later
 he's told me that it's actually supposed to be spelled with an "s." But I'm not -- I'm not
 positive. I did some research on it once, and it's -- Ba-- Basile with an "s" is actually a
 common Italian surname. Basile? So I met other people that were Italian, they were like,
 "Whoa, your -- you have the same last name as I do." And it's a -- it's a common Italian
 name. I had no idea. But the -- Basile with a "z" is French, the French derivation. So
 maybe my dad is wrong about that.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you -- do you know if you have Italian ancestry?

ERICKA BASILE: I don't. I don't know that much about my dad's side, so I'm always
 curious to see if maybe there's just something in there and that has to do with something
 about the name, you know?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Yeah. You said that on your mom's side your -- your -- it would be your
 great-grandfather who was French? Or your --

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. M-- yeah, my great-grandfather, the mother of my grandmother.
 On my --

ERICKA BASILE: Oh, your great-grandmother.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. I would call him my paternal great-grandfather, right?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, yo--

ERICKA BASILE: Not paternal, maternal. Right?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Maternal --

ERICKA BASILE: 'Cause he's on my mother's side.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- on your mother's side.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Maternal great-grandmother was French.

ERICKA BASILE: Not the -- not my grandmother. Or, wait. Sorry.

JENNIFER SCOTT: I'm sorry.

ERICKA BASILE: So my mother's mother, her parents, her father was French. And her
 mother was --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Your mother's mother's father.

ERICKA BASILE: Yes. So my mo-- my mother's grandfather --

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK.

ERICKA BASILE: -- was French.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So that's your great--

ERICKA BASILE: Like, from France.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- your great-grandfather.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you know much about him?

ERICKA BASILE: I know that he had another family. So this is something that my grandmother -- I never knew this till after she passed away, and she never said this. She's never spoken these words. But my mom has spoken to her sisters and gotten this information. But she -- so she was the product of -- so her father was a married man and had an affair with her mother, and so she was the product of that. So she was sort of, you know -- like, we would call it, like, an illegitimate child, or she was born out of wedlock, right?

JENNIFER SCOTT: And her mother was --

ERICKA BASILE: Her mother was a -- I think her mother was a [01:05:00] -- a domestic worker.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK.

ERICKA BASILE: Or she worked for -- I don't know that she worked for my great-grandfather's family, but he -- so she wa-- so my grandmother was a product of that. But she was so ashamed of it that she never -- she never talked about it to anyone. And then later, her father, this -- my great-grandfather -- reached out to her and said that she could meet -- like, he wanted to include her. He took care of her always, but he -- he wanted to include her sort of more in his -- with his other children. And just she never wanted anything to do with it.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Was she an only child?

ERICKA BASILE: She was the only product of -- of that -- of those two. Of that --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did she -- he took care of her, but did she have a relationship with him --

ERICKA BASILE: No.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- growing up?

ERICKA BASILE: No. She never wanted to have a relationship with him.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, wow.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So you don't --

ERICKA BASILE: I think 'cause she was so ashamed of the -- of the illegitimacy --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: -- of her birth.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you have any idea how her father met her mother?

ERICKA BASILE: No. My -- I think my mother would know, but I'm not sure. Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: And how did you learn about it?

ERICKA BASILE: My mother told me.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So did she -- did she ke-- decide not to tell you until a certain age, or did
you --

ERICKA BASILE: No, she actually just didn't -- I don't even think that she knew the details -

-

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: -- till recently. Because it's so -- it's been such a tight-li-- like, for years I
thought that my great-grandfather was German, that he was this German soldier or
something. Like, I feel like I've heard different stories that weren't true about -- but I
just knew he was, like, a full-blooded European man that had an affair with, you know, a
woman from Haiti that was my great-grandmother.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Was he in Haiti when he had the affair?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you know who -- how he got there or what he was doing there?

ERICKA BASILE: No. See, the -- the German thing would've made sense, if he was a soldier
stationed there. But maybe he was a French soldier stationed there.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. I need to get those facts straightened out.

JENNIFER SCOTT: But you're sure he was French, and --

ERICKA BASILE: Yes.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- you have his name?

ERICKA BASILE: His -- his name. Her -- I think his surname was Joseph, I think. Right? Or what -- sorry. 'Cause after my gr-- my great-grandmother was no longer -- you know, she didn't maintain a relationship with my great-grandfather, the Frenchman. She remarried. Yeah. So I have that wrong. She remarried another man whose surname was Joseph. And so my grandmother took that surname.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK. And did they have more kids?

ERICKA BASILE: They did.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK. So she --

ERICKA BASILE: So my mother --

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- has half-siblings.

ERICKA BASILE: -- my grandmother has -- I think there are four sisters. Two of them -- three of them are still alive. Two of them moved to Paris, 'cause they were unable to get visas to come -- so when they were gonna come to the States, you know, it was tricky. So two of them came here and stayed here, and then two of them went to France and still live there.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK. Oh, wow.

ERICKA BASILE: But they all look different because, you know, she -- well, my grandmother doesn't look like them, of course, 'cause she's -- she had the different -- different father. So she -- my grandmother was really fair, and they're -- they're a lot darker, from the -- the man that my great-grandmother remarried. Joseph.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK. And you said there were Taino -- there was Taino ancestry too?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Native -- native ancestry?

ERICKA BASILE: On my grand-- grandfather's side as well.

JENNIFER SCOTT: On your -- which grandfather?

ERICKA BASILE: Oh, sorry. My mother's father.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK, your -- oh. Your mother's father -- so your grandfa-- your maternal grandfather was --

ERICKA BASILE: The family.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- Taino? Or part Taino?

ERICKA BASILE: Yes.

JENNIFER SCOTT: How did you learn about that?

ERICKA BASILE: My mother. This is information about my mother. So my mo-- my mom has always talked about -- growing up she's always talked about how my gr-- the gr-- my grandfather's side of the family, you know, she's talked about them being wealthy and being a little bit snobby about -- about color, and about class. So whenever my grandfather, you know, married my grandmother, this was a source of pain for my grandmother, because she was this -- you know, her background was a lot different than my grandfather's background. So she sort of spent her life trying to -- this is what my mo-- my mother thinks. She spent her life trying to sort of prove these people wrong, or to, you know, show that she was better than them, or that she was worth something. 'Cause I don't think they were always very kind to her, that side of the family. And these were just -- I don't know who these people were [01:10:00] specifically, but she wasn't completely accepted on -- on my grandfather's -- with my grandfather's family. But my grandfather's mother loved my grandmother, apparently. Her name was Victoria L'Allemagne, and she was French.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK. Your grandfather's mother.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. And so she's -- my sister Victoria's named after her.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh! OK.

ERICKA BASILE: So she was French. And she loved my grandmother, she always thought that she was a -- a good person. And my -- my -- my mother told me that on her deathbed

that my great-grandmother asked for my grandmother to come-- to be there, I think, 'cause she wanted to -- 'cause she loved her so much.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, wow. So the -- the Taino part comes from where? Like, is -- what are some of the stories -- I mean, how do they know that -- that he was Taino?

ERICKA BASILE: I mean, I guess in -- in Haiti, you know, there are those -- these groups of people. There are some that are -- that -- that it's understood that they're descended from the native Indians on the island. And then others that are m-- you know, maybe have European descent, or others that have more African descent. So that's -- yeah, I guess that's the only thing that I know. I just --

JENNIFER SCOTT: But it was handed down?

ERICKA BASILE: Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK. Do you have pictures of everybody?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. And I've seen pictures of my great-- my -- yeah, pictures of my grandfather. And I've seen pictures of his father, who -- because of his -- the Taíno in him, he looked like Gandhi. If you look at pictures of him, he was like -- he really looked very -- I don't know, just very Indian. Well, Asian Indian, but he had, you know, some of that in him.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Interesting.

ERICKA BASILE: His name was Leon.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Leon -- his last name?

ERICKA BASILE: Leon. His last name -- Germain, I guess, was -- was my grandfather's surname.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Interesting.

ERICKA BASILE: And apparently my mother said that the Germain surname came from two brothers that -- from Canada -- that had that surname, and they came to Haiti and married some -- married women that were -- were of the Taíno ancestry. So they were -- I don't know that they were -- I guess they were French Canadian, I would assume?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Probably.

ERICKA BASILE: But that's where that surname came from.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So were there -- it sounds like there were at least a couple interracial relationships on your mother's side?

ERICKA BASILE: Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SCOTT: On your father's side were there also interracial --

ERICKA BASILE: Not as many.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- marriages?

ERICKA BASILE: I can't even really think of any on my dad's side. Yeah. My mom's side is much more...there was more interracial mixing, and just more -- like, people that considered themselves white on my mom's side -- or that could pass -- quote-unquote "pass" -- on my mom's side.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do they?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. I mean, I don't think they do -- or they did -- but it was always understood that they could, if they wanted to. And I met some of them and they, you know -- they do look like that. But --

JENNIFER SCOTT: They look very European?

ERICKA BASILE: Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Or Ang-- Anglo?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. And on my dad's side -- but -- yeah, on my dad's side, not as much.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So how do your parents -- would you say -- how do they feel about interracial dating, and interracial relationships?

ERICKA BASILE: I think they're fine with it. They've never -- they've always just wanted us to find someone that treats us well that won't hurt us, or -- you know, that we love. And it's never been an issue, I don't think.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So how did they feel when you first started dating when you were having - - you know, when you said you had limited choices? (laughter) When you were dating --

ERICKA BASILE: They didn't want me to date back then.

JENNIFER SCOTT: They didn't want you to date --

ERICKA BASILE: I had to sneak out and date.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- period?

ERICKA BASILE: Right. Yeah. I was their first child, so my dad was super-strict with me. I couldn't do anything. You know, he didn't -- I guess he -- it was his first time having a -- well, he actually -- I have a half-sister, so it wasn't his first time having a teenager, but he wasn't as involved in her life as, you know -- as he was with mine? My dad was married before he met my mother. And he was in the process of getting a divorce when he met my mother. But -- so my half-sister's name is Cindy, and she's -- if I'm 31 -- I think she's 37.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Your -- do you feel like your siblings have similar ideas about, you know, difference in race and ethnicity and identity that you do? Do you think -- would you say it's pretty similar, or are there -- are there people who have --

ERICKA BASILE: I would say --

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- different --

ERICKA BASILE: -- it's pretty similar. Yeah. We've all dealt with the same things, in the same -- living in the same town. I remember when my brother first came to high school, it was the same issues that he encountered that we did, of -- like, "Where are you from? What do -- you look weird." But he was a man -- or he was a boy -- so for him it was much more, like, this masculine thing, he had to act like -- he had to be hard, or -- he had to either, you know, hang out with the kids that played golf and -- or hang out with the kids that played basketball or something. Like, all of these different cultural signifiers wh-- that had to do with race, when you're a boy, you had to pick and choose which direction he wanted to go in really quickly. So I think that was hard for him. But he's really well-adjusted now, I -- I think.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What about between the kids and the parents? Do you feel like there's any generational differences in how you see racial issues? Or how they see race?

ERICKA BASILE: I think a little bit. I feel like -- in some ways I feel like my mom sometimes has a -- sort of -- she'll say words that sound sort of old-fashioned, regarding race. Like, she'll talk about hair a lot. You know, like, our hair texture. She'll say, like, "nice hair," or "nappy hair," or, like, things like that, you know? Which -- it sou-- it makes her sound sometimes like -- you know, a way that -- I know that she's not thinking

in a way that's judgmental or something like that, but the words that come out of her mouth...

JENNIFER SCOTT: What does she mean when she says "nice hair"?

ERICKA BASILE: I think just hair that's finer or, you know, less maintenance, or just, like, not as tightly curled, you know? Which is -- it's hard to talk about this stuff. It's hard for me to say this, but -- you know? I never say -- I nev -- I'm never like, "Oh, nap-- someone has nappy hair." I don't-- that's not something that my sisters and I talk about. But -- you know, my mom will comment on her hair, like, if my -- like, I think right now my hair's a little, like -- it's back right now, but if it's frizzy, she's like, "Your hair looks crazy! Why don't you do something with your hair?" You know? So it's always something that is an -- you know, that she's always commenting about.

JENNIFER SCOTT: How does she wear her hair?

ERICKA BASILE: She usually just pulls it back into a -- a ponytail or a bun or something. You know.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Just --

ERICKA BASILE: But -- we have this joke in our family -- 'cause we have this -- one of my mom's cousins was an actress at one point, and she went on Howard Stern once --

JENNIFER SCOTT: What?

ERICKA BASILE: -- and said -- she described herself -- when they asked her what she was, she said, "I-- I'm white French." Which is, like -- I can't even begin to understand what that means. But we all -- after that, we were like, "That's so ridiculous. What does that mean, 'white French'?" So we'll joke and say, "Oh, I'm white -- 'cause I'm white French." So my mom will say that, like, if you -- if I touch her hair or something, I'm like, "Your skin is --" -- not really her skin, but -- 'cause my mom's hair's pretty fine. And I'll be like, "Your hair's so soft." And it doesn't have anything to do with race or anything. I'll just say, "Your hair's so soft." And she'll say, "It's 'cause I'm white French." And it's a joke. It's not -- it's not meant to be anything so serious, but --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Does -- does -- did anybody ask her about that --

ERICKA BASILE: About --

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- interview, about that comment? Your cousin?

ERICKA BASILE: Oh, no, I don't think so. We should follow up with her about that.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Yeah. I'd be curious to know what she meant.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. I bet she wouldn't want to discuss it. She'd be like, "Oh, that time I went on Howard Stern. Let's not talk about that."

JENNIFER SCOTT: What was she doing -- that's the bigger question. What was she doing on Howard Stern?

ERICKA BASILE: Maybe I shouldn't say.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK. You don't have to. So the -- the hair stands out. What about like color issues? Do that -- does that ever come up? 'cause you mentioned that was a little bit in your -- on your mom's side of the family. Has it -- has it -- do you think it's still [01:20:00] with her generation, or with your gr-- with your grandparents?

ERICKA BASILE: I think there was some -- with my grandmother, there wa-- she had a little bit of -- like, she would make comments sometimes about things. My mom -- I feel like it dilutes, you know, with the generations. So -- my mom, I've never heard her really say anything really ignorant about that -- about color. But she'll often describe -- like, if she's talking about an old friend of hers from the '70s that she's trying to describe, she'll say, "She was -- she was really, really dark, but really beautiful," or something. Or, "She was, like, really fair," but -- I don't know. She'll just be descriptive and usually throw in, like, what tone of brown this person was, if they were Haitian or something. Especially 'cause I think she's always wanted us to understand that Haitians come in so many different colors. So she'll -- I think that's why she'll -- she'll say the words -- those coloris-- colorisms -- when she's talking about people.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So how would she -- or how would you -- describe her color?

ERICKA BASILE: How would I describe her color?

JENNIFER SCOTT: her color. The color she came in.

ERICKA BASILE: Almost like a -- café au lait? You know when you have a coffee and you pour milk in it, and you let it -- you have, like, a good amount of milk in there? Like that.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Is that how she would describe herself, or you're just -- that's how --

ERICKA BASILE: I don't know that she'd use the coffee and cream reference, but --

(laughter) -- but -- yeah. She tans really beautifully. I always thought that about my

mom. 'Cause she's -- you know, she's -- she has brown skin, but she's also kind of fair. So, like, during the winter, like, if you look at her legs, I'm always like, "Gosh, you know, you need to see some sun" kind of thing. You know. But then when she tans it's a really pretty color. And my siblings and I are all sort of different hues too. My sister Nathalie and my brother -- my sister Nathalie has sort of, like, more warmer undertones. And she's -- she's fairer than I am. And her and my brother are sort of very similar. And my youngest sister is really dark. She's -- and her -- the texture of her hair is different than ours. And I'm sort of in the middle. And -- you know. I don't know. It's funny.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Does that ever -- did that ever make a difference -- like the differences between you growing up?

ERICKA BASILE: No. I think for my youngest sister, I've spoken to her about this before, 'cause she was -- when she tans, she tans very dark. And when she was younger, I know that there were times where, like, my brother, being a little boy or something, would make comments to her and say something like -- what did he -- he say once? He would say that she was, like, a little...black midget or something? 'cause she was -- she was really -- she was the youngest, so -- you know, things like that. (laughs) Does that sound awful? And I was talking to her about this the other day. I was like, "Yeah, I know that --" 'cause growing up she would mention, like, "Oh yeah, I'm so dark," or something, but we would always co-- we would follow that by telling her, "You are so beautiful. Like, it doesn't matter that, you know, you're a different color than we are, or that -- what -- all of your friends at school -- 'cause they're all white -- that you have this completely different color than they are." We just always, you know, tried to make her understand that it doesn't matter and that she's really, really beautiful. 'Cause she is. But -- I think it's affected her a little bit. 'Cause she -- she comments about it. And she says still she even -- when she -- you know, she tries not to tan too much and stuff. I think she has this li-- this fine line of, like -- she'll just let go and she'll tan, and then there comes a point when she wants to sort of, like, cut it off and, like, make sure she's not tanning too much or something. I've let it go. Like, I'm really tan right now, 'cause I've been -- I bike all the time now and I've been to the beach several times, so I just -- I don't even care.

JENNIFER SCOTT: You don't think about it.

ERICKA BASILE: I'm usually -- I just have that attitude about it. But I've had friends -- Indian friends -- that don't want to go out in the sun or -- and I've met people that were, you know, Chinese, where they're like, "I don't -- I'm not gonna, like, be in the sun too long." So I think it's -- you know, it crosses boundaries with --

JENNIFER SCOTT: yeah.

ERICKA BASILE: -- you know, of course, with different --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Right.

ERICKA BASILE: -- ethnicities.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you think it's a -- more of a fear of skin cancer? Or the -- the social stigma of being darker?

ERICKA BASILE: I've always thought it was a social stigma more than skin cancer. I really -
- yeah, have to be honest, that it's not -- 'cause, you know, people, you know, will guard themselves with sunscreen if they want, for dealing with [01:25:00] skin cancer. But --

JENNIFER SCOTT: So --

ERICKA BASILE: -- the tanning thing.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- how would you say that you identify when people ask you about your background? You know, when they say, "What are you?" Or --

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- like, what is your most common answer? How do -- how do you answer that?

ERICKA BASILE: Like if I go past saying I'm from Tennessee?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Yes, if -- if you go past -- (laughter) --

ERICKA BASILE: Oh, OK.

JENNIFER SCOTT: --geography.

ERICKA BASILE: 'cause that -- that just mystifies everyone anyway.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Yup. I can see why.

ERICKA BASILE: I think -- I'll just usually identify as West Indian, with -- I -- I feel like I embrace the West Indian and the African and European parts of me, like, this trifecta. The African parts of me I feel like I'm still learning about. And I -- it's like a part of -- I'm more familiar with Haitian culture than I am with where Haitians before they were in

Haiti came from before that. So I feel like that's something I need to work on or to mo-- identify with more.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Is that what you mean when you say African?

ERICKA BASILE: Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: West African, or...

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: Like, I unders-- my -- I was spoken Creole to me. My mom still speaks Creole to us, and that's -- that is West African and -- and French together, you know? So -- but I've always -- I've learned all of French that I need to learn, but I haven't -- I don't know anything about the West African parts, you know?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Interesting. So you speak Creole?

ERICKA BASILE: Not fluently, but I understand it.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So did -- they -- they didn't want to teach it to you growing up? Or --

ERICKA BASILE: Creole?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Yeah.

ERICKA BASILE: I think that -- they spoke it to us. I don't think -- it's not that they didn't want to teach it to us. They're -- I think they were just kind of lazy about it. Because I know with French in particular, my mom says that French was the first language that I spoke, as a -- as a baby -- but growing -- living in Tennessee, I guess that maybe it was a challenge for her. She would have to force me to speak French. But I was in a -- in a place where I could just speak English with everyone --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Yeah.

ERICKA BASILE: -- so that's what I spoke. We all took French through, like, grade school, through high school and college, all of us.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK.

ERICKA BASILE: My sisters, both of them were -- are -- well, my sister Nathalie was a French major, and then my other sister's a French minor. So it's like they put it into their education as well.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: My brother has the least amount of French. I don't think he's ever been that interested in learning it. But -- but yeah, so we've sort of nurtured this French side of us. And the Creole part is just fun. You know, like, being -- just conver-- conversating, or hearing my parents speak, it just feels good. It feels like home.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Home.

ERICKA BASILE: Though that -- when they were -- when they were younger, they weren't -- they weren't allowed to speak Creole in public, 'cause it was considered a -- like a -- something that the lower-class people spoke.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: So you'd get in trouble if you spoke Creole.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Was that in Haiti or was that in --

ERICKA BASILE: In Haiti. Yeah. And it's pretty common. It's pretty true for children in Haiti. Like, you don't -- don't speak Creole. If you have -- if you're educated and you have a formal education, that's of course gonna be in French. You -- you don't speak Creole. You can speak it at home, maybe, I think, it's more -- it was more acceptable. But if you're...

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you feel like that's carried over here, when you were growing up, that they didn't speak it in public?

ERICKA BASILE: They spoke it in public, my parents did.

JENNIFER SCOTT: They did.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So they changed.

ERICKA BASILE: I feel like that's mostly what they speak.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, really?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. It's mostly Creole they speak. My -- like, my dad speaks French, like, more formal French. I think -- you know, because his education was in -- was in French. My mom's education was here, in -- in English. So he's better at that than she is. And he can jump into it. But when it's just us and we're speaking, or if I'm sp-- you know, my parents and some relatives are sitting around drinking on the back porch, they're gonna be speaking Creole.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Right. Wow. So -- so beyond speaking Creole, are there other traditions that you guys have at home, that you grew up with, that you would say are -- feel very Haitian and that, you know, you don't necessarily do in other places but that you carry on at home?

ERICKA BASILE: The thing -- the first thing that comes to mind is just in general, like, music -- playing music -- and eating and dancing and hanging out. Like, just -- my household was very alive. It was very -- it wasn't, like, [01:30:00] quiet and boring. It was -- I would come home and my dad would be playing records, or on the weekends we would -- it's like, we're all in the kitchen cooking, and there's music, and we're all -- you know, my sisters and I are all wearing aprons and we're all helping and stuff. And -- you know, that kind of thing. So it's always around -- it -- a lot of the traditions, I feel like kind of revolve around food.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Are there special foods that you grew up enjoying or cooking -- learning to cook from your mom -- that are Haitian? That you like?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. There's one in particular that we eat on New Year's Day. It's called soup joumou. It's a pumpkin soup. You can make it with, like, pumpkin or butternut squash. And it's to celebrate Haitian independence. Even if I'm not with my parents, I make it -- my sister and I, like, make it here.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: So we do that. And then there are other things, like, griot, we'll make that. Rice and beans.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What's griot?

ERICKA BASILE: It's -- they're, like, chunks of pork that you -- well, we put them in the oven and just let them crisp up, and... Yeah. It's really good.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So what's your favorite Haitian meal?

ERICKA BASILE: Probably just, like, rice. Rice and beans. And sauce pois? It's a pea sauce. Or, like, a bean sauce. So it's just sort of, like -- like, if you can think of a bean soup or something, like the con-- that consistency -- but you eat it over rice. That's my favorite thing.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you make it?

ERICKA BASILE: I don't ever make it at home, actually. I always leave that up to my mom.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What?

ERICKA BASILE: I feel like I can't -- I'll just wait for her to do it. I need to learn how to make it, though.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Really (inaudible).

ERICKA BASILE: Actually, I know how to make it, I just, like, never make it, so I'm out of practice. But...

JENNIFER SCOTT: You leave it to your mom because she makes it best?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. She makes it best.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: My sister Nathalie is -- she's culinarily talented, if cul-- culinarily's a word. And she's -- she's the best out of all of us at making Haitian -- like, traditional Haitian food.

JENNIFER SCOTT: How 'bout holidays? Did you do anything special for holidays? Or like, which were -- which are the holidays that were the most important for your family?

ERICKA BASILE: I think -- we never celebrated holidays, really, actually. I was brought up Jehovah's Witness for part of my life, so we never celebrated holidays.

JENNIFER SCOTT: You were brought up --

ERICKA BASILE: Jehovah's Witness?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. So that was, like, part of my life. And so it just stuck, since I was -- I think I was four or five. And then it just stuck. So we never have a Christmas tree. We never celebrate, like, Easter or things like that. And we don't really -- we're never really worried about it --

JENNIFER SCOTT: How did you become Jehovah's Witness? You said your mom was Catholic.

ERICKA BASILE: My dad's side is Catholic.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, your dad's side is Catholic.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. But on my mom's side -- I think there were some other Witnesses in her family--

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK.

ERICKA BASILE: -- but when we were in Tennessee I remember one of -- a woman came to our door and then she started -- sort of started that process up.

JENNIFER SCOTT: In Tennessee?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah, in Tennessee.

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK. Are -- is everybody still practicing?

ERICKA BASILE: No. It's -- it's funny. So, part of my childhood we would go regularly to church and -- but we never went as a whole family. It was usually just my mom and -- it was very rare occasions where my dad would go. It was sort of this splintered religious practice for us. And then -- the -- that religion in particular is a really tough one, 'cause it's -- it -- it requires so much. You have to -- you're required to go -- the church is, like, three times a week, and you have to go door-to-door, and you have to -- you know, there are cer-- all these different things that you have to do. You can't just, like, go to church. They expect you to grow. It's almost like going to a school, like, they expect you to go to the next grade or to -- to progress, in a way. And -- of course, when everyone else around you is also progressing, you would feel weird if you were just going and not making steps. So we did that. But it's -- so I feel like it was a little bit difficult to keep up with, and a lot to live up to. So -- we were also -- like, growing up, we were very liberal Jehovah's Witnesses, or my mom was with us. Like, you're really not allowed to -- traditionally, if you're a Jehovah's Witness, you're not allowed to date, you're not allowed to go to school dances, you're not allowed to go on certain field trips, or all these --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: -- things. You can't participate [01:35:00] in something in class if it has to do with Christmas or, you know, whatever. Or birthdays. You don't celebrate birthdays. So -- but she was a little bit more liberal with us. So we dated in high school, and we did all these different things that, like, normal kids would do, and -- or just kids that weren't in that faith would do. But we also -- my sister and I -- had points where we felt like we were really religious and we wanted to take it further. And I remember as a child being -- I think I was ten years old. And you -- to become -- to do the door-to-door thing, you have to make that decision on your own, even if you're a kid. And you have to have a meeting with the elders of the church. You sit down with them and say, "I'm ready to do this." And I remember doing that. And coming up with the idea all on my own, like -- it was never -- my mom never, like, told us, "You should do this" or this or this. We just did it ourselves.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Wow.

ERICKA BASILE: So I did that for a while, and then I just -- you know, I just realized when I was older that it wasn't for me.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Were you in college older? Or --

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah, I was in college. So --

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK.

ERICKA BASILE: -- this happened until I was -- I think I was in high school, early college, and then we sort of stopped going regularly. It was always very choppy, though. There were parts of my life where we didn't go for a long time, and then we would go again, or something like that.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Right. Interesting. OK. I wanted to ask you about your current situation. So now you live in Bed-Stuy. How does that compare to all of your past experiences of fitting in and, you know, feeling different and, you know, how you fit in to Brooklyn and that particular neighborhood, in general?

ERICKA BASILE: I'm -- I really like that neighborhood. I feel like -- I feel like it's my home. I -- everyone there is very friendly and welcoming, I feel. You know, there are other -- other elements that are maybe a little bit more uncomfortable -- it's more like the cat-calling parts that I deal with all the time. But -- it's funny, because growing up in

Tennessee knowing that I was of this cer-- this descent, this West Indian descent -- like, I knew it, and I lived it at home. But then you come to New York and it's, like, full force. I almost feel like I'm a fake Haitian sometimes, but I'm -- just kidding.

JENNIFER SCOTT: How so?

ERICKA BASILE: I'm not a real -- I'm not, like, a real, real Haitian. I -- but it's just a different experience in New York. Because the culture here -- you know, West Indian culture -- is so deep, and there's so many different -- people from so many different parts of the Caribbean -- and there's, like, real legitimate food here. And you can go to the grocery store and get things. Like, we would have to have my grandmother from Haiti bring ingredients to Tennessee for us. Or -- I don't even know that we ordered anything 'cause there was no Amazon a long time ago. Or just -- you know, like, we just had to find a way to get certain things. But here it's -- you can get anything. So it's a different existence, in a way, for being of that culture. If you're participating in that culture. But I feel like even though I -- I have the background that I do, I feel like people still look at me, and they don't see it. They just don't know what they see. So I still deal with that. I deal with people that stare at me, and I have the feeling, like, I'm an alien, or they'll say, "Where are you from?" and I'll say "Tennessee," but I know they really mean something else. And then -- I just don't want to have to explain it all the time. Yeah. So --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you interact -- how -- how much do you interact with the Haitian community in Brooklyn?

ERICKA BASILE: Not very much, actually. You know? It sounds -- it sounds strange to say that. But I just -- you know, it's sort of like -- I would like to make steps towards that, but it would have to be something that I -- be-- because I'm not necessarily already -- I'm not entrenched in that. I'd have to make steps to seek it out. I need to become better, though. That's something I've meant to. But it just feels good, like, whenever -- and I'm not -- I wouldn't say that I would seek it out just because, like, for -- just -- just because? But because it feels good whenever I -- I'm out, and I hear someone speaking Creole or something. Or I hear an accent. I always want to talk to them. Which sounds stupid, because it's like, there's so many -- there's so many people that speak similar languages, you don't have to talk to all of them. But it makes me want to go up to them and say, you

know, "Hey!" Like, just get to make a new friend. I always -- every time I hear that I want to talk to someone. But -- or reach out. [01:40:00] I think I'm still thirsty for that -- that culture. Because I -- I mean, my sister's here, but I live alone, and I -- I'm not around my family. My -- and then my exten-- I have some members of my family that are extended that live in the city, but...that's different, you know?

JENNIFER SCOTT: So what do you think's keeping you from interacting more?

ERICKA BASILE: I -- I feel like maybe in a way it's something to do with not feeling authentic enough, or being timid about -- about entering into a group of people that -- I feel, like, you know, Haitians in Miami or Haitians in New York or Haitians in Boston, they're -- they've been there for a while and they know each other already, and it's like entering another friend group, or -- where you're the new person. And even if I did enter, I'd always feel like I would still seem not Haitian enough, you know? Maybe, like, I don't look Haitian. Or people say -- will say that. "Oh, you don't look Haitian. I would never think that you were Haitian." Or...

JENNIFER SCOTT: Haitians don't think that you look Haitian?

ERICKA BASILE: No.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Was that surprising when you came here --

ERICKA BASILE: No.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- as an adult? You already knew that was going to happen.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. 'Cause everyone my whole life, it's like I -- I always looked like something they don't know what it is. So it's not surprising to me, you know?

JENNIFER SCOTT: So what do Haitians -- what do th-- where do they think you're from, or what do they think your background is?

ERICKA BASILE: I think sometimes they'll think I'm Dominican or something. Or, I've gotten -- I've gotten Ethiopian, Dominican, what else? Yeah. So North African, Dominican, things like that. Just things that aren't where my parents are actually from.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did your parents have the same issues? Did people--

ERICKA BASILE: My mom has.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Yeah?

ERICKA BASILE: My dad -- I guess my dad less so. Because he -- I don't know what a traditional Haitian looks like. But I know that in Brooklyn, like, a lot of -- they -- I don't know. There's a majority that they maybe just look like what you would think an Amer-- African-American American would look like, but they just happen to be West Indian. Which, I don't know that that makes any sense.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So what does an African American look like?

ERICKA BASILE: I know! (laughter) I don't know.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So what --

ERICKA BASILE: See, this is where the tricky part comes in with talking about this. I don't even know that I'm go-- I think, like, I'm going in circles, talking, trying --

JENNIFER SCOTT: No, no, no, you're not. So wha-- I'm interested in this thing about, like, not feeling authentic enough. What do you think -- or what has, or what do you imagine -- when -- when you're around other Haitians, would give it away?

ERICKA BASILE: That's a good question.

JENNIFER SCOTT: We know that the appearance thing --

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: -- they don't really -- but is there something else?

ERICKA BASILE: Maybe that I don't speak fluent Creole?

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, OK.

ERICKA BASILE: -- maybe a language thing? Or that I've never been to Haiti? 'Cause I know a lot of Haitians still go to Haiti.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Right.

ERICKA BASILE: And they're -- it's not that long of a flight. So. Yeah, that. I-- I've always felt -- I know my siblings, as well -- whenever we're around my dad's side of the family, they're -- they feel more Haitian. Like, Haitians that I would encounter in New York or Boston, than my mom's side. 'Cause my -- I don't know that it's a color thing, though. I just feel like -- I don't know. My mom's side is just more -- has more -- it's more diverse than my dad's side. So -- but when I'm -- we're -- around my dad's side of the family, we always feel funny. So my mom and my siblings and I, we just look so different than everybody that's there. And just -- I feel like the way that we act or the

way that we talk, everything -- I just always feel like I'm being watched, or that people are judging me, or something like that. Or that I seem that -- I seem out of place. And we -- we all sort of feel that -- like that a little bit.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So do you think you look more like your dad or more like your mom?

ERICKA BASILE: I look like my dad.

JENNIFER SCOTT: But not his family.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah, not his family.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Just -- just him.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. I'm a good mix of my mom and my dad, but I'm more my dad, I think.

JENNIFER SCOTT: [01:45:00] So would you ever describe yourself or your family as mixed-race? How do you feel about that category?

ERICKA BASILE: I would. I think that I would just because of the different races that I know encompass my family. So it -- for me it would make sense to say that. But I feel like in that context usually people mean that you have a mother of a certain race or a dad of a certain race, which I don't have. But I've always considered myself mixed-race. And I feel like all my siblings and I have.

JENNIFER SCOTT: All of your siblings feel the same way?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. (inaudible)

JENNIFER SCOTT: How 'bout your parents, do they think of themselves as --

ERICKA BASILE: I think -- I think my mom would. My dad -- I don't think my dad would. Or I've never heard him say that.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So, here's the big census question. On the census, or any kind of formal documents where you have to write your ethnicity in or check it, what do you check? What box do you check or what do you write?

ERICKA BASILE: I've always checked "Other."

JENNIFER SCOTT: Really?

ERICKA BASILE: Or I'll check -- or the-- there's one that says, like, Asian Pacific Islander Other or something -- or if you can write it in I would write "West Indian" or something, or... But it's usually "Other." I've always done that.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So, why do you pick “Other”?

ERICKA BASILE: Just because I feel like an “Other.”

JENNIFER SCOTT: Alien.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. I don’t know. I’ve never -- it’s always kind of weirded me out and bothered me to see the, like, Caucasian and black and Hispanic and Latino -- I just -- it makes me feel weird. So I’ve never subscribed to it. I’ve always -- it’s always -- for me, I’ve felt like -- it’s almost like a “Damn the man” kind of thing, where I feel almost political about it. I don’t -- I don’t like it.

JENNIFER SCOTT: And your si-- do you know if your siblings check “Other” too?

ERICKA BASILE: I’m not sure. I think -- I would assume so, but I’m not positive.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Do you also work in Brooklyn?

ERICKA BASILE: For the time being, yes.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What do you do here?

ERICKA BASILE: I am a freelance writer.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh. What are you writing?

ERICKA BASILE: I’m writing for a couple of different journals in -- out of the UK. *Catwalk* and -- I have an article coming out in *Fashion Practice* soon.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So doe-- the -- the journals that you’re writing for are fashion journals?

ERICKA BASILE: Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Is that what you hope to keep focusing on, fashion and design and...

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Did you -- when you were little, what did you want to be when you grew up?

ERICKA BASILE: Oh, that’s a good question. I don’t know. I think -- I think I just wanted to be an artist. In some capacity. Like -- and -- and it’s funny, ’cause I say artist, but I never thought, “Ooh, a painter,” or -- I never thought of the medium, I just wanted to --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Make --

ERICKA BASILE: -- make things.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So do you still see yourself as an artist, think you want to -- to make things? Continue to make things?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. I do. Yeah. I make things still.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, you do!

ERICKA BASILE: I work out of my studio apartment, which is -- can be challenging, but --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh!

ERICKA BASILE: I have -- you know, a work table, and I have paints and stuff.

JENNIFER SCOTT: What kind of things do you make?

ERICKA BASILE: I -- I do collages, I make oil paintings, and I do -- I've been doing some embroidery.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So, that's great. So are you planning a trip to Haiti in the future?

ERICKA BASILE: I am. My sister was the first of our family to go back.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh!

ERICKA BASILE: She went last February.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Your youngest sister, or --

ERICKA BASILE: No, my sister that lives here. She's the second --

JENNIFER SCOTT: OK.

ERICKA BASILE: -- oldest. Yeah. And my mother -- one of my mother's old flames lives in Haiti still, and -- and he sort of accompanied her on her trip and, you know --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh!

ERICKA BASILE: -- showed her around. And she had a driver, it's like a bodyguard, and stuff the whole time.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Wow.

ERICKA BASILE: I know. Which -- [01:50:00] it sounds kind of extreme, I guess, but she's a woman, alone, and, you know -- (inaudible).

JENNIFER SCOTT: So how did she like it?

ERICKA BASILE: She loved it.

JENNIFER SCOTT: She did?

ERICKA BASILE: She loved it. Yeah. She had the best time. And she even, like -- I -- I think she -- she wants to buy land there or something, or have some --

JENNIFER SCOTT: Wow.

ERICKA BASILE: -- make plans for our family to have something there again.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh, wow. Have your parents ever gone back?

ERICKA BASILE: No. My mom really wants to. I feel like my dad -- I've never really heard him say that he wants to, but I'm sure he would want to go.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Interesting?

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SCOTT: So maybe if your sister buys land. Do they have land there, or --

ERICKA BASILE: No.

JENNIFER SCOTT: Well, it sounds like there's still a lot of family on your father's side there.

ERICKA BASILE: Yeah. My -- there's some on my mom's side, too. I don't know that anyone owns anything. They used to. I don't know how that got transferred, or -- you know, like, the places that my mom grew up in, where she -- she described to -- to us -- I don't know what's become of those places. So -- 'cause they just had to leave everything in Haiti, so...

JENNIFER SCOTT: Oh my gosh. OK. I think we're at time. Do you have anything else you'd like to add or say about yourself? Your family?

ERICKA BASILE: No. I think -- I think I talked your ear off.

JENNIFER SCOTT: No! Well, thank you very much. We're going to end it right now.

END OF AUDIO FILE