



Introducing 100 Latina Birthdays from LWC Studios

We have a special treat this week. We've launched a new investigative narrative audio series documenting the health and well being of U.S. Latinas. Paulina Velasco, the editor, joins Juleyka for a conversation about exploring delicate topics with Latinas and their families for this project, and dives into the show's themes that most resonated with her as a first-gen.

Juleyka Lantigua:

Hi, everybody. Today we're doing something a little bit different. We have a special guest, but first I wanted to let you know that *How to Talk to [Mami & Papi] about Anything* is going on a brief hiatus. We'll let you know when we're back. In the meantime, we have a really, really special guest today. She is the editor of the latest investigative show from LWC Studios. She is a first-gen, and she led a group of reporters, fact checkers, audio designers, in making a series of 10 episodes that looks at the lifetime and health outcomes of Latinas in the U.S. Really, really groundbreaking work.

Her name is Paulina Velasco. She is a veteran reporter. She has covered the border, she has covered immigration, she has covered Latinos in the West Coast and throughout the country, and we were so lucky to have her edit this amazing series. Today, she's going to give us a behind-the-scenes peek at what it was like to work on the show. Now, without further ado, let's get into it. Hi, Paulina.

Paulina Velasco:

Hi, Juleyka.

Lantigua: Welcome to the show. I'm so happy you're here.

Velasco: Thanks.

Lantigua: All right, so the series we've been working on is called *100 Latina Birthdays*. Give us the top points we need to know to get the conversation going.

Velasco: *100 Latina Birthdays* is our newest narrative documentary series, 10 episodes of deeply investigated narrative audio, which is super exciting and really difficult to

make, and we've been working on it for about a year. The premise is that, if you care about the health of the country and of the country's economy, then you have to care about the health and wellness of Latinas, so every episode features stories of Latinas who live in Chicago. The storytelling is based in Chicago, and follows the health and wellness of Latinas through different milestones in their lives. It's called *100 Latina Birthdays* because we have a birthday scene in every single episode.

Lantigua: I am so excited for people to hear this. You are a first-gen. Did anything catch you by surprise? What were some of the takeaways for you as you learned about the lives of these multiple generations of Latinas?

Velasco: Oh, I mean, definitely. Every single episode I was stabbed in the heart, like, "Oh, my God, I didn't know I needed to hear this," because I'm assigning the reporters like an age range of kids or Latinos, that they should find their stories, right? Then they came back with stories about nutrition and cooking for your kids, about teaching your kids Spanish and what it's like to grow up bilingual in the States, and all these things that, yeah, for sure, I was like, "Oh, my God, this is somehow also about me."

One of the things that I've been thinking about a lot lately that I liked was this exploration of familismo, of the importance of family, because throughout the 10 episodes—I mean, that's a lot of storytelling—it's so much more nuanced than I think I would've thought. Familismo is like prioritizing your family before yourself, right? Or for example, checking in with your family when you make big decisions in life. I was like, "I can relate. I call my mom all the time."

I guess I'd always thought that this was something that held us back in some ways, and I think there are some cons to it, but most of all, it's just very different than non-immigrant Americans' experiences. It's like their framework is just slightly different, and it doesn't mean that it's better or worse. Hearing about how different young people especially are grappling with the pros and cons, and making that deep cultural value work for them.

One of the reporters did a piece about young Latinas, 18 and 19 years old, going to college, and familismo was cited in one of the studies as being a really valuable mental health resource for them. Latinas going to college, even when they're living on campus and far away from their families, the ability to still call their parents and value that connection is really good for their success in college. I just thought it was a beautiful exploration of the nuances of it.

In our first-season interviews, people sort of ... their stories from being pregnant, their pregnancy stories and perinatal stories, all the way to age 20. I'm really excited for what comes next, like exploring other age ranges, but basically we got

to talk to several teenagers and young adults who are trying to figure out how they can define what their culture gives them and what familismo can look like for themselves, and then also these new moms. What that looks like now that they're forming their own families, it's really beautiful.

Lantigua: I'm really glad that you gave that excellent and positive example of how familismo can be a force for good, because often when we talk about familismo on *How to Talk to Mami & Papi*, it is really complicated, and sometimes there are more drawbacks than positives. You've brought some clips with you to share, and this first clip I think really showcases that complexity. Can you set it up for us?

Velasco: Yes, of course. This is Dariana Rubina. She's about to turn 18 years old. She lives with her family in the suburbs of Chicago. She's got two really hardworking parents, two younger brothers and a baby sister. She's the eldest daughter, which I know is something that comes up a lot on *Mami & Papi*, and basically she tells us a story of how ever since she was really little, like a child, seven or eight years old, she was tasked with the responsibilities of another caretaker in the family, and not only caregiving for her younger siblings but also managing the family's budget, translating documents for her parents, who only speak Spanish. This is a clip of that, and explaining what that felt like for her growing up.

Dariana: I've always been treated as an adult. I've had a childhood, but it's not saying that you've had a childhood with toys and having a childhood with going on playgrounds. It would always be like, "Oh, help me on this," or, "How do you get into this?"

Lantigua: In psychological terms, she is what's called a parentified child. Now, as the oldest daughter in an immigrant family, I was also a parentified child. Listening to Dariana really, really touched some deep-seated memories that I have about having so much responsibility. What did you take away as you were editing this episode? Because you, as the editor working with the reporter, have to make sure that your subjects come across in a certain light, especially because they've entrusted you and your reporter with their story.

Velasco: Yeah. I mean, I thought about that a lot. We also interviewed Dariana's parents to get their perspective. Her dad's the one that went on the record, and so I wanted to make sure that they could hear the episode and be really proud of their family. It's what we were just talking about. This familismo is both a blessing and a curse. They all love each other very much.

This is a quince episode, so the birthday scene is a quinceañera because her parents had tried really hard to give her a really nice quinceañera, but it was during the pandemic and they're planning an 18th birthday party quinceañera for her. They love her. They appreciate everything she does. I mean, they know the

responsibility she's taken on. We delve a little bit into the mental health impacts for her, and how that put so much pressure on her and gave her a lot of anxiety and how she's coped with that.

What struck me was how this reporter framed it. The context in which she framed this family's story was about the rate of poverty among Latinos in the U.S. The idea is that Dariana's parents are really hardworking immigrants and they don't have the time or the resources, other than putting it on their eldest daughter, to help manage the house and manage their children. As we delved into that, we found a bunch of research that supported it. Impoverished families have a higher chance of adultifying their children because their lives are so precarious.

Pew Research found that in 2021, 18% of Hispanics in the U.S. ... they use the word Hispanics ... of Latinos in the U.S. lived in poverty, compared to 13% of all Americans across demographics. This felt like a really important framing device that doesn't blame the family for doing the best that they can with the resources that they have, but rather as a criticism, a critique, of why it's so difficult for this family to get ahead and have the resources to be able to take care of their children and allow their teenage daughter to have a childhood.

Lantigua: That is a really hard balance to strike, so I really commend you for that, especially because mainstream media stories about Latinos are full of tropes and stereotypes and negative archetypes about Latinos in the U.S. I love the subtlety. I love the depth with which you and the reporter really were able to tell this family story.

Velasco: We also tied it to policy decisions, right? I mean, child poverty in the U.S. has gone up significantly, especially for Black and Latino kids, since Congress decided not to renew the monthly child tax credits that were implemented during the pandemic. We have hard statistics that support the fact that it's harder and harder for working-class families, of which Latinos make up a great portion of those families in the U.S., to make ends meet. It's not just like a, "Hmm, oh, this just happens to be how it goes for immigrants or for Latinos." It's like there are decisions that are being made that make this the case for families like the Rubinas.

Lantigua: Absolutely. All right. You and the series also take on some really difficult topics like infertility and pregnancy loss. Tell us about this next clip that we're going to hear about.

Velasco: The next clip is from a doula that we interviewed in our first few episodes that were focused on perinatal health. Her name's Mayra Buitron, and she works with Chicago Family Doulas. She's specifically what's called a bereavement doula. A doula is a birth worker who helps with different stages of a birth journey. There's

postpartum doulas, there's pregnancy doulas, there's infertility doulas. They're not medical professionals, but their goal is to support the person who's pregnant or giving birth, and Mayra specifically supports people who have lost a pregnancy.

We call that miscarriage, but really it's pregnancy loss at any stage of the pregnancy. Mayra herself lost a pregnancy, and so in the episode she talks about her own experience and also the things she sees when she's a bereavement doula. The reporter asks her what she would say to the fetus that she lost, how she would look back on her pregnancy loss, and this is what she says.

Mayra: If it weren't for that loss, I would've not have gone into bereavement work, I don't think, so it was that baby that had a purpose in my life, and I think that was the purpose, helping other moms that have gone through loss. In the birthday card, I would thank her for that. I would say, "Thank you very much, my sweet little elephant, for allowing me to be who I am. You played a big role in that, even though your stay here was very short."

Lantigua: Her experience reminds me that infertility, difficulty conceiving, these are things that are actually really common among Latinos, despite the stereotype that we have huge families. A lot of Latinas have a hard time conceiving and maintaining a pregnancy. From talking to folks and experts, what other factors did we learn about that might influence these numbers?

Velasco: Infertility, pregnancy loss, this affects actually a lot of women and a lot of pregnant people in the U.S. We just don't really talk about it. I think the things that come into play when we're talking about Latinas is a lack of health insurance, a lack of access to quality healthcare, and that includes access to mental healthcare.

There was a conversation that kept coming up over and over in pretty much all of our episodes, which was mental health. I thought it was great, because we got past the, "There's a stigma around mental health, we should talk about it." A lot of people talked about that, but what I saw over the course of the 10 episodes was that we are talking about it. Younger generations and in our generations are no longer feeling that shame. We're teaching our parents how to talk about mental health. We're reaching out for resources.

What was really cool about Mayra Buitrón and some of the other birth workers in that episode was that they're Latina, and they talk about how we can reach back into our own cultures and our parents' cultures for support, for like traditional massages, for traditional mental health support that might look more culturally appropriate. There's a lot of conversations about making sure that there's Spanish-language therapy available, all of these things.

I feel like a lot of the people in these episodes show that we're ready to talk about it with our families, with our parents, with our partners, and we're looking for resources. The next part of the conversation feels like it needs to be access.

Lantigua: Yeah. I'm so happy to hear you say that, because I think not being culturally open to these conversations has really had a negative impact on many of us who could really benefit from mental health support. Actually, that's a great place to ask you the last question, which is that you as the editor and your reporters must have thought about and must have encountered a lot of taboos when talking about health with Latina subjects. How did you prepare for that? How did you anticipate them? How did you handle them as they came up?

Velasco: I was amazed every time the reporters came back with a really good story. Every time they came back, I was like, "Oh, my God, I can't even imagine my own family ever sharing all of these things," not because they were necessarily bad things or skeletons in their closet or anything like that, but they're private. The courage that I think that took, and the testament to the reporters being kind and thoughtful. I talk to them a lot about what it means to get informed consent. We have people sign releases and all of that, but do they know that the podcast episode will exist online forever? Really aiming for very informed consent that they're participating in the podcast.

Then I think that maybe people really want to be talking about these things. We did talk about a lot of taboos like pregnancy loss, like peripartum depression. We find that as we hear personal stories about these things that happen to people, these experiences they have, and start supplementing that with research and studies, that it's just much more common than we think. My hope is that all my friends who are Latina send this to all their friends who are Latina.

I also think that non-Latinos will hear this and find something that they can relate to and that they'll be really happy that someone's talking about. We give people resources. We show how people find their own resources, build their own support systems. A lot of the parenting episodes are like, "Build your own village? What does that look like in these really uncertain times?" People are figuring it out. I think ultimately the message is pretty hopeful, and I'm very honored that people were able to share those tough experiences with us.

Lantigua: Well, thank you for taking this on. I am so excited. Tell everyone where they can hear *100 Latina Birthdays*, please.

Velasco: Oh, wherever you listen to podcasts. Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Amazon. We have a beautiful website. It's 100, like the number 100, Latina Birthdays.

Lantigua: All right, Paulina. Always a pleasure to talk to you. Thank you.

Velasco: Thank you.

Lantigua: Thank you for listening, and thank you for sharing us. We have just over 162 episodes in our How to Talk to Mami & Papi About Anything catalog. Each of them has been possible thanks to you, your stories, your questions, your enthusiasm, your vulnerability, and your abundant sharing. Thank you for all the love and the support over these years. We'll be back soon.

How to Talk to [Mamá & Papá] about Anything is an original production of LWC Studios. Virginia Lora is the show's producer, Tren Lightburn mixed this episode. I'm the creator and host, Juleyka Lantigua. On Twitter and Instagram we're @talktomamipapi. Bye everybody. Talk to you soon.

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