

Sandra, Hello. My name is Sandra Jose SANDRA, JOSE. Today is Saturday, November 20th, 2021. We are at on the Bates College campus in Pettengill hall.

Baltasar Hello.

Sandra, And could you please tell me your name?

Baltasar, Baltasar Fra-Molineo, B,A,L,T,A,S,A,R F,R,A - M, O, L, I, N, E, R, O.

Sandra, Can you tell me what pronouns you prefer to use?

Baltasar, He, he's.

Sandra, And what decade were you born?

Baltasar, I was born in 1958.

Sandra, Where did you grow up?

Baltasar, In Spain, North of Spain.

Sandra, We're going to cover that in a bit. Did you have siblings?

Baltasar, Yes.

Sandra, How many siblings did you have?

Baltasar, four.

Sandra, four siblings.

Sandra, We're both of your parents present during your child?

Baltasar, Yes.

Sandra, And how has her birth family influenced who you are today?

Baltasar, Would you say that again?

Sandra, How has your birth family influenced who you are today?

Baltasar, Very much. In many ways Yes. They were always very important to me. They're still very important to me. My parents have passed away, but with my siblings, my relationship is excellent.

Sandra, Ok, Are your siblings in the United States?

Baltasar, No they live, one of them lives in England, and the other two remaining ones are in Spain. My eldest, my oldest sister passed away a few years ago.

Sandra, Ok, Do you get to see them often?

Baltasar, Well I haven't seen them in person in the last two years. But yes, Normally it's once a year, but now we'll communicate via Zoom and FaceTime. Whatsapp. We will talk to one another often.

Sandra, So it's been three years since you've seen them?

Baltasar, Two years, yes.

Sandra, Can you tell me why your definition of family is?

Baltasar, where it's as a group of people who consider one another very important in their lives, if not the most important people in their lives. And they care for one another. They like to be together. And they do things together. Is no longer a production unit like it used to be. We don't work together because each of us has their own ways of earning a living Nevertheless we consult. We, we, it's an emotional support system. All those things.

Sandra, That was lovely. So let's talk a little bit about Spain what your childhood was like growing up?

Baltasar, I have a happy childhood. I have to say I had loving parents who shielded us, the youngest children from what was going on outside. When I was growing up in Spain, there was a dictatorship. That as a child, you don't know what's going on as you grow up and become a teenager, start realizing that there are certain things that don't work properly, certain things that you cannot say, and you're giving warnings about that, and my parents explain to you what was going on. But other than that, I felt protected by my family. Homophobia was there, but I

wasn't aware because there was not even a concept. That was even in the minds of people. But Spain was officially homophobic. Sodomy laws existed and it was unthinkable to be gay, to be openly gay. I mean, he was against the law of the jail, simple as that. So later on in life, I learned that gay people, those who could afford it, either in the country, went to big cities. They had to live closeted lives. But that was something I learned later. So I had a good education. And my parents took care of that. And I had yes, I had good educators with teachers.

Sandra, So your early childhood schooling was in Spain?

Baltasar, yes.

Sandra, Where did you go to college?

Baltasar, in Spain, also my hometown, Santiago de Compostela in Northwest Spain, a region called _____ It was a good experience. And that is where I initiated myself in politics and political activity. Nothing terribly extraordinary. But it coincided with, just happened to the death of the dictator, General Franco's death in 1975, that was the year I started college. So those were very exciting years. There were political, profound political changes going on in the country. The return to democracy, free elections, free expression. So that was signs of change, and that's when I started hearing and reading about gay liberation movements. The first Gay Liberation Movement had started around that time. Dystrophy, yes. Area. And, and that was commended.

Sandra and that was around?

Baltasar, Between 1975, 1980.

Sandra, Okay.

Sandra, So what would you like me to know? What would you like to share with us about your coming-out story?

Baltasar, my coming out story came a couple of years, three years later, two years later, in 1982, I was working as an English instructor at the University of Seville in Seville, Spain, Southern Spain. And that's when I came out, I had a relationship with someone with a man from Mexico who was doing research at the archive of the indices, _____ than recessive for colonial Mexico. And we met. It was a short but, but beautiful, tender relationship that came to an end because he had to go back to Mexico. I had a fellowship to come to the United States to study. And, and basically, the relationship came to an end in a very friendly and caring way.

Sandra, So you had mentioned that Spain was very much homophobic, And then the change started to happen with that liberation movement in the early seventies and, But did you know your own sexuality before? When did you start to figure it out?

Baltasar, When I started I started realizing my own homosexuality when right after college. All the way. Until then, I guess I was suppressing my feelings. I was very involved in my studies. I was studious, the typical studious guy who had no time for other things. Then when I was on my own away from my parents. then, of course, you have more time to think. And I mean, it was, it was serendipity that I met this man and, and it took me five minutes to realize this is the way. But because there was a society that was at least feasible, I didn't run the risk of going to jail, for instance. Although in many circles, censure and animosity against the could happen, so you had to I had to conduct this relationship more in a kind of semi-closeted way with some people it was open, some friends, heterosexual friends was open, with my family, I wasn't open to them. I came out later to my family. So the process of coming out was in stages and in circles. And that happened when I came to the United States. I came to the United States in 1983, which is when I met the one who's now my husband.

Sandra, Ok, So can you say more about what that experience of coming- out, telling your siblings and your parents?

Baltasar, Telling my siblings was first and this was when I was still in Spain. And I told two of my siblings, then, I told them I came to the United States. I told another one of my siblings who was very upset, she got over that She loves me very much.

Sandra, she was upset?

Baltasar, She was very upset because what I guess her homophobia was running through her system. But, but I think it was like a virus. And she had to deal with it, okay, I love my brother. There is this problem. I had to deal with it. And, and that was it. Of course, the irony is that she has a daughter who's a lesbian, committed relationship, a grown-up woman, her daughter. So she has changed completely, She's now pro-gay and and and she's very, very supportive of my husband and me and our family. Our children, constantly caring for us. And this mask that I'm wearing, she made it super mask because the inside is, the lining is silk. Yes. She used her husband's old ties. It's complicated. But now, coming out to my parents was a bit more dramatic because my parents suspect is that I was in a relationship with the one who is now my husband and I thought and yes, visit one of my visits to Spain. And this was around 1987, 1988 or something like that. Then my parents' golden wedding anniversary came in 1992. And there was going to be a big celebration in my hometown. But they didn't want to invite my partner, Charles and I told him that if he was not coming I was not going. So they decided to accept him and they moved the whole celebration to another town. Out of homophobia, out of fear of being known,

which was ridiculous because, because everybody went to this, I mean, we were like 30, 40, 50. I can't remember how many people we're all family with. So when they saw Charles show up, who's African American black. And in Spain at the time, there were not that many black people. I mean, there were black people, but non-blacks did not associate or socialize that much with black people and still is the case. So they were asking, who is he? And of course, people are not dumb. So They put 2 and 2 together. And, and then so, so there were relatives who approached me, but that's okay. So the whole thing is like it was proven to be totally unnecessary, but those are stories of homophobia. And so that was the there had had moments that I remember those two days that were dramatic because they didn't know what to do with us. And they were nervous, to the point that one of my, my siblings lost her voice. I mean, literally she was so nervous she lost her voice. It was an incredible situation, but those things happen, and, and they try to act like my partner and I were two friends. Not, of course, they were not ready to acknowledge our relationship. And we make we made a stand. It's like no, if this continues we're leaving, we're leaving because this is insulting. And so, so there was a lot of crying, people are very nervous. And, and after the, the celebrations, we left instead of staying there a few more days. But that, that stand proved the right thing. Because everybody came around. But everybody came around because, because there was love there and love was the main, the main thing. And so it a helped also that, that my husband, is a beautiful person, a wonderful person. So it's very difficult not to like him, so that was it. And, and and then I had to talk to you about real estate. Yes.

Sandra, I am going to pause right here because I forgot to state at the beginning of the interview that you can refuse to answer any questions and we can stop the interview at any time.

Baltasar. Ok, no problem.

Baltasar, But let me tell you about real estate.

Sandra, Realestate? ok.

Baltasar, So years went by the relationship was complicated. You know Back and forth my father, at one of my visits to Spain told me that, well, if I continue my relationship, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, for me to, to visit them. I said, well, these are the conditions. Then a bureaucratic event happened, which was I was applying for permanent residence in this country. And because of that, I had to change my visa status and I for 18 months I could not leave the country. You are in a thing called parole, something ridiculous. That doesn't, we don't need to go into details. But my family interpreted that as I was rejecting them, I said No, no, no, no rejecting do is I can't literally I can't go back without having to start the whole process again. In the meantime, my youngest brother gets married and he repeats the same thing you can come but

your partner cannot come and say, well, it's a moot point. I cannot go because of this reason. But even if I could, I wouldn't go. But let's leave it like I can't go. And everybody will be happy if you need to give an answer. And, and then I got my, my job. Charles, my husband, got his position here at Bates College. And a year and a half later I got a position here at Bates College. And that's when real estate comes in. So as soon as we were together in the same place, we decided to buy a house. The house we live in. So we told our families that we have bought a house. Within a week both his parents and my parents, his parents sent us a lawn mower. My parents write a letter that was a time in which people still wrote letters. Write a letter inviting us to go to Spain for Christmas using the Castilian vosotros. The yield to. There was no ambiguity, which we did. And for gay couples who live together, there are certain things that are done or that were done that convinced other people, non-gay people, that somehow these two have a commitment. And there are things that they can understand like buying a house together. So that's a commitment. There's a contract, this and both his parents my Charles's parents. And my parents separated by 4 thousand miles of distance. Different cultures, but not so different. Both families being middle-class. Understood that. So I used to tell people, you know gay couples, real estate.

Sandra, So when you bought your house that was a sign of a commitment, and that was a shift for both families?

Baltasar, Within a week.

Sandra, within a week.

Baltasar, Of course, things have been moving in that direction. I guess. They saw that we were together, that yes. _____ we're still together. They didn't feel like telling their friends there because that's homophobia is a very strong force. But, but for the family that prove to them that we were really, really, really committed, committed to the point of putting our bank account to talk for us.

Sandra Right, What impact did that have on you and Charles?

Baltasar, Very positive. Very positive because for both of us, our family is important. And, and that allowed us to have a more fluid conversation. And fluid conversation is that then there's no need for silences or changes of conversation. So I always felt very comfortable telling them what we had done, what we were planning to do, what we ate, what Charles had done. His Success is a professional succeeded et cetera. And in some cases, the conversation shifted or they shifted. The converse is not interesting. Clearly, they were not interested in knowing about that. After 1994 which is when I moved here, that talking about Charles with my family was perfectly okay

to the point that when my mother passed away in 2005, there was a moment I wasn't present. But I was told there was a moment in which writing the equivalent of the obituary, which is a note in the newspaper, in which the person's name, the deceased person's name appears and then the list of relatives is nation and relatives and in-laws. And one of my sisters, the one who's now deceased, insisted that Charles had to be included and there was no resistance.

Sandra, What a beautiful moment.

Baltasar, My elder sister was someone who was always very supportive.

Sandra, And she had passed away then?

Baltasar, Yeah.

Sandra, And you had mentioned that there was some resistance with your brother and lack of acceptance, where do things stand now?

Baltasar, My youngest brother has gone to right-wing Catholic in ways that I never understood because we didn't grow up that way. We were raised as nice Catholic boys. Kind of the progressive side of Catholicism, if not liberation theology, but just a, And, and he is now part of this ultra-Catholic right-wing group. I think these Steve Banon and these types as an influence big channel money to those organizations. And he officially that he cannot accept us because I talked to him about, about us, about their family and he loves our children and he loves and likes my husband. But he you know that he doesn't feel comfortable talking about certain issues. And, and it's not like I avoid talking about it, but we have to talk about other things because if there are certain issues outside ideological differences we cannot touch because that would affect our relationship and it's not worth it. But clearly, there is no acceptance of when we got married in 2006. We got married in Spain because Spain had passed a law allowing same-sex marriage before, before the United States. And we discover that the state of Massachusetts and then later the state of Maine would accept what was called then marriages from other jurisdictions, including foreign countries. So they would honor them. I think this is a good opportunity. So we got married in Spain. Everybody was invited, everybody showed up. My youngest brother was the only one who did not show up for the ceremony but showed up for the banquet. But not show up for the ceremony. The Ceremony took place it was in December 29th of December 2006 in Madrid, in beautiful place downtown in Madrid at the City Hall in the _____ is this beautiful Square in downtown Madrid. So it was a civil marriage and that everybody attended, except my youngest brother and his wife who mounted an excuse that they got late because of

traffic issues. Yeah. Right. But they show up for the, for the So there was, there was some kind of principle that they couldn't, they couldn't support with their presence, things like that.

Sandra, How did you meet Charles?

Baltasar, I met him within a week of arriving in this country in 1983, in August.

Sandra, Where did you come? What State were you in?

Baltasar, Indiana.

Sandra, Indiana.

Baltasar, We were both attending Indiana University in Bloomington. Both were new to that campus. And I had been told by friends before arrival in the United States that when you went to a US campus by people who had had that experience of having a fellowship, come to the States, to study, it's like make friends in the first two weeks because then friends, friendships, and groups are created and then give you, if you are not fast, you find yourself in isolation. So it's like, hey, anyone who says hello to me or I say hello to him. So this is what happened. He was walking on campus from a hot August day of the Midwest. He was walking ahead of me and there was this siren that sounded every day at one o'clock on-campus. I, I don't know why. It just went off every day. So he looked back and I looked at him and he asked me, Do you know what that is? And I made a joke, Well, I hope is not an air raid. And he laughed and he introduced himself. I introduced myself and we walked and we realized that we were going in the same direction because we had to go to the cafeteria to have lunch. And we struck a conversation. The conversation I remembers that veered into I don't know if it was that day or the next day about German gay film. Reiner has been, there was in fashion then was a reference for gay people. And I was amazed that he had seen some of his movies like I had seen them in Spain. And I realized, wow, this is being on a US campus this is wonderful and this is a struck-up conversation with someone and they saw this. This was new for me. And and then in subsequent days because we had lunch and dinner in the same place, he invited me to join the group of friends he had most of whom are black. And I felt very comfortable because I also learned a lot from them. These were all graduate students and they were talking about things I knew nothing about. And I was very, I was shocked that I knew nothing about a black intellectual tradition. I hadn't even thought that that would exist. But these were people who were not only from the United States, there were also from the Caribbean, different, from the different places of what now is called the African diaspora. And they all shared reading, shared knowledge. And through those meetings as when

we, I thought, I think he was gay but I wasn't sure. So there were gay, friends, colleagues among the graduate students in the Spanish department at Indiana University where I had an assistantship, I teaching assistantship. And they invited me to go to the gay club in town downtown Bloomington. And I invited Charles as a group. I told him a group of friends from the Spanish department and I are going to a club dancing. Would you like to join us? And he excuses himself. Said he had a study group that night. And I could kind of like, Wow, Saturday night, he's in a study group and I do something wrong that maybe I should apply myself a bit more. Because this is like the third week or the second week of the semester, something like that. I was like oh. So I went to the club with my friends and as I was going into the club, Who do I see? Dancing in the floor? Charles, So this is your study group, he didn't know where I was inviting him. He had already accepted an invitation from other people. Curiously enough, both invitations went to the same place, but we told each other that's how the closet works. That's how the closet works because we suspected that the other was gay, but we were not ready to make a faux pas. And you know, homophobia was still in the books. So we laughed and we realized we liked each other. And then things moved from there.

Sandra, What a beautiful story, Is there anything else you would like me to know or our listeners to know about, did you always picture yourself in a marriage or long-term relationship?

Baltasar, That's the that's the interesting thing. As as soon as I met Charles and we started realizing that we were in a relationship. We talked very soon about the prospects and difficulties of having a long-term relationship. And we mentioned very early on that one of the problems for gay couples is not being, not to be able to have a family, not to be able to have children. Of course, this is 1983. 1984. You know where sodomy laws still existed in lots of states. Where gay parenting was strictly forbidden in many places. Was again, against the law, you could go to jail or you're trying to adopt a child. So, so that was, that was something that we saw as kind of pie in the sky. But something we, we aimed and we didn't know how, how things could work. Then in the 1990s, specifically when we moved here. Moved to Lewiston We started hearing more and more about gay couples who had children in different arrangements. Mostly adoptions. Some states allow for it some. And when that's when we started looking into that possibility. So the answer is yes. We saw soon in our relationship with we want it to be together for the long run.

Sandra, What made this relationship special?

Baltasar, I don't know how whether I want to call my relationship with Charles special. Is it was a meeting of minds. We liked each other, both physically and spiritually, and we had common things. We shared common interests. Both of us kind of bookish people. We like intellectual discussions. We are committed to, to causes of justice. And people-loving, people. So I, I saw in

him someone who is very committed, very honest. And that endeared him to me tremendously, I saw that we had, that we had many things in common, kind of similar backgrounds. Parents who insisted on the importance of education, work, a work ethic, interest in the arts. And so that was, this is when you realize that, that living with this person, is something very positive in your life.

Sandra, You were married in 2006 in Spain. But prior to that you'd had a conversation about children and the importance of children to your family? So you had provided information that you would like to talk about adoption, and you had mentioned to me that you have two children, can you tell me about that?

Baltasar, Around the year 2000 1999. 2000. We,we started looking into adoption. Then we realize that me not being a US citizen, for me to adopt the child was legally impossible. Adopt a child in this country, I don't even know, has to be to adopt in another country it would be impossible. Then I became a US citizen and in the year 2000. And that's when we started looking into it more, more closely. And we had a false start that gave us kind of cold feet. We had to read an ad in a local newspaper about an adoption agency in Portland. So there we went and, and they we realized as we went into the office that we were not it, that we were not it. This was whatever agency who this private agencies was. We were not. We didn't fit the profile or they were interested in. And I remember that they asked me a weird question. They asked me, are you from India? I said No, I'm from India. But why are you asking already? You ask and this lady tells us Oh because we had a lot of children from India. And Charles and I look at each and we were like whew. This is this is no no no. So for awhile for a for a year suddenly were a couple of years, we thought is is do we want to get into these kind of things? No. Charles just kept doing a bit more research and will realize no that was bad luck. There. They are bonafide ways to do this adoption. And around 2003, we started contacting, that's also when the internet started becoming more resource. And we realized that we had to contact DHHS, that is a state agency that runs adoptions. They were very candid and tell us we have these courses for licenses, seen people for adoption or for foster caring. We explain what we wanted. They had no problem with a gay couple adopting, but they told us that only one of us could adopt because of the laws of the State but they were open. Those there was this, this experience of people who were committed and they were open that we felt wouldn't have to hide anything because they were not expecting us. Is like they knew ahead of time what we work on to tell them. That was very positive. And we, we told them that we wanted to adopt small children under the age of two so they could become bilingual. And they told as well then you might go to private agencies because the children we have for adoption through the state. They tend to be older children, children from families that had this destructured that a state has deemed that they're better off being adopted. So who went through that process of taking those classes, and that's, when we told our families, my parents were still alive and our conversation with my mother. Okay. Son you had just come just totally crazy. Okay. Whatever you want to do. There were there was opposition on the part of members

of my family's, like, you're crazy, what is going to be the like, you're going to ruin the lives of these children. But it was like one of those things ,Okay, okay I know, I know what I'm doing and the distance being the United States, they then being in Spain or in England, it's like okay, you can say whatever you want but I'll do whatever I want. And, and then when the opportunity came for the adoption of our eldest son, Carlos, I remember that I, that I was in Spain. Well, I had already told I was in Spain. My father, my mother had died the year before. My father died in May of 2006. And so this was before we got married. But we were already planning all this because the planning of the marriage, I remember there was started in March, so my father was still alive. And, and the news came in June. And that's when my father had passed away that there was a child that could be adopted. No, I take it back. My father died in May. We went to the funeral. Then I had to go back to Spain for academic reasons. And I met with my relatives, my, my siblings because we had to decide what to do with my parent's home because it was an empty house we had sell it. So we had to sell it emptied and we will the process of painting it. And that's when Charles calls me, this was a time already have cell phones. Calls me I will remember it was at night I was next to a garbage container dropping stuff. I get this phone call. Okay. There's this child. And I say, let's go for it, and I inform my, my siblings. They say I was raving crazy. Don't do that. Has to submit two sisters. Don't do that. This is wrong. I said we're going to do it. So there's nothing you are going to say. There's nothing you can say that is going to change our minds.

Sandra, Why do you think they thought it was wrong?

Baltasar, Homophobia is that the idea of two gay parents, of two different races, raising a child was going to attract violent homophobia. So in a way, there was a way in which, homophobia take the form of attempting to protect you, against your own wishes. Because an intelligent homophobe knows that homophobia is violent, although they are not violent with you. They know that other people will be violent. So it's an attempt to protect you. But of course, by that attempt, you cave in when you perpetuate the whole thing plus your profoundly unhappy is in exchange for happiness. And this is something that my husband and I have discussed, the issue of happiness. We've, we go back to Reiner _____ the German film director. He made this movie, this wonderful movie called Ali fear eats your heart, is a story of a working-class Moroccan migrant worker in Germany who falls in love with a German woman who is 20 years older than him. She's in her 50s, and he's in his 30's. And they start a relationship. And both his friends and her friends, her neighbors. They are totally opposed to this relationship. They may say, or what do you see in that older woman gets yourself a younger woman? If you want to marry someone, Marry among your kind? Her people said he's an outsider. His racist, doubts, but then, he's even denied service at the grocery store. I mean, there are all kinds of but they stick together because they decide to be happy. And happiness requires work and sometimes resistance. And we took that movie to heart because it's like if you want to be happy, you have to

work for it. And that's what I did in the case of what we did in the case of the adoption of our eldest son. So I came back to the States real quick because the adoption was going to take place. We've had to go to Maryland, where Carlos was born and the adoption agency was from and we were united to Carlos. And I immediately informed my, my siblings. And there was again, this total change once the child was in your hands there's a child here. So the child, the love of the child speaks for itself. So they started giving me advice, these women, you know, I remember while they're yelling at me because well, because you know he was very premature. We had to be feeding him every hour and a half, every two hours. So he's asleep and they had to feed him. And he won't eat the formula because, because he's asleep and my sister says to me, Baltasar shut up. Don't do that again. If he's asleep, let him sleep. He's feeding through his sleep, Okay. It was like these two don't know what they are doing, We had to take over. So so that that change things. And at that moment, we were they also knew that we were getting married because we had started a process of getting married in Spain. That being Charles being from this country that requires a series of bureaucratic steps with the Spanish consulate in Boston. It was very interesting how, how happy they were these bureaucrats because I guess we were doing something that was out of the ordinary. It gave them something to talk about. So we got married in December of 2006. By that time, Carlos was with us. So what we had not planned at the beginning We showed up to our wedding ceremony with this seven-month-old child, which of course, it was very sobering because all the women in my family, they are only had eyes for the baby. And we were like, Oh ya ya you're getting married. We want to see the baby. It was, it was, it was a very happy event because it was just the presentation of the baby us getting married. We got married, as I say in downtown Madrid. And I say this to, to people in the very place, where gay people had been burned at the stake in that same square only a couple a 100 years ago. So, so this was a triumph. Triumph. And then we, we, had the banquet in this restaurant that is built underground in the old water reservoir that Madrid had when it was founded by the, by the Arabs, fed by the burgers in the 10th-century showcase. So these people found a town. And the first thing they built is a water reservoir. As soon as, as the, as the civilized people that they were. So this water reservoir is huge like two of these rooms. And they built, they built the restaurant inside this reservoir. So that's where we had the banquet with all my family, close friends, people came from the United States. And, and I know that they were relatives who, you know, they were a bit surprised and for all of them it was their first gay wedding and they were curious. But it was seeing us with Carlos. Of course, in the middle of the banquet, Carlos had to be changed, we changed him real quick. They saw it, that we were in our Finery, but things have to be done. And I think they saw normalcy. The normalcy that they expect. In a middle-class family. I'm not fooling myself. And, and it worked, but it worked because, because of love. I always insist that love it, it's a very strong feeling that has to be, that has to be fostered, has to be watered. And then it becomes very strong. It's like a palm tree. The winds come, but hurricanes do not uproot palm trees. They uproot oak trees, they uprooted buildings, but the palm trees. And they don't move down. They don't go down.

Sandra, What a beautiful analogy. You have talked eloquently about your happiness and your adoption and your marriage in Madrid, in a space where homophobia you could have been burned at the stake just a few 100 years prior to that. How did that feel being married there in that space, in that time, with your family present, and your new adoptive son?

Baltasar, It was, it was one of those moments of what you call a triumph. Because Charles had invited his parents and at the beginning, they were very reluctant. They didn't want to go to Madrid. He finally convinced them his parents were elderly and, and they finally accepted and his mother was one of the witnesses in the wedding ceremony. Spanish law requires two official witnesses. One was my older sister, who passed away, the other one was Charles's mother. And I remember that for them it was the first trip abroad. They have been once to Bermuda or something like that. I mean, the first time going to Europe, to Spain, they were understandably apprehensive. Black Americans going to the nearly all-white country. And I'm from the south. And I remember we had this discussion with Charles's mother. I told her that she had to wear her mink coat. She didn't want to wear her mink coat. I think if you could bring your mink coat to Spain you will be very happy. Madrid is called in the winter. You're from New Orleans. You need to have a real coat, otherwise you're going to be miserable. Plus I was thinking, and I want you to be elegant. So we finally convinced her to bring her mink coat. The first thing she noticed as we were going from the airport to downtown Madrid. How many ladies wore Mink coats? Of course, this is politically incorrect. Today, so what? Oh, there were mink coats And she looked like she was supposed to look wonderful. At the wedding ceremony where we were signing the papers at the end my father-in-law, Charles's father, decided to sing, he had a beautiful tenor voice and he broke out into an acapella song. And it was like, Whoa. So everybody was, everybody was in the spirit of, of something that there was something new happening, something there was a turning point in people's lives.

Sandra, And now you have two children, and you ended here in Maine you landed here in Maine?

Baltasar, Yes.

Sandra, What this experience has been like as a gay couple, teaching, being here on this campus, and raising a family?

Baltasar, Well, this is an issue when there was a possibility when I was teaching at the University of Florida in Gainesville and Charles just had accepted a position here at the Bates college. We were separated for a year, almost a year. So we want to get together. So I apply for a job here. He

applied for a job at the University of Florida. Well, the luck was that we both got accepted , me here and he got accepted into the position at the University of Florida. And that was through the good offices of my colleagues in the Spanish department, my senior colleagues who really loved me. They loved me to tears. And they say, for this man to stay here, his partner has to be here. Of course, they knew him. They knew his intellectual value. So he was offered a job and then we had to decide Florida or Maine. And we chose Maine because as a gay couple as what was being seen as an interracial couple. Florida, South Florida had sodomy laws. Maine did not have sodomy laws. Florida went even worse because they even passed more restrictive laws, especially about adoption. And Maine did not have those restrictive laws. At least it had a silence. And we were proven right. Because, because when we were in the process of adopting Carlos that month, of August, was it? No. It was two years later when he was two years older that the process of adoption is lengthy, is not something that you just get into the channel there is a period of a year that you are on probation. And when that thing was coming to an end and we were to sign the papers. Maine changed the law in a very positive way. Allowing gay couples, non-married couples, no matter what gender to adopt together. Because that is seeing has the benefit of the baby, of the child. Before we were I was going to be the adopting parent Charles was going to be a guardian. And the reason we decided that I would be the adopting parent was because that way our children, in that case, Carlos, would be able to acquire a Spanish citizenship, which is what we were going to do. And the law change in Maine through a decision from the Supreme Court, the Maine Supreme Court. And we, remember we had to start the process all over again. But in a very happy, it's like, okay, let all the bureaucratic hurdles be like this one because it's like okay, now we'll have to change them, put both our names you know as co-parents. And, and that was, that was Maine was we have seen that Maine has always been a very positive place for us as a gay couple for us a gay, couple with children has been a supportive environment. Homophobia is here. Homophobia is everywhere. But at least the political establishment is enlightened enough to, to be in the, sometimes at the vanguard that they are at the forefront of, of positive changes that the rest of the country has been following.

Sandra, So you both were essentially the adoptive parents?

Baltasar, acatally, legally.

Sandra, legally.

Baltasar, legally, which of course, it was interesting how To talk to Maryland Because Maryland it was, they were where Carlos was born, so we had to change his, his birth certificate and the birth certificate had to indicate clearly that we were both fathers. So they had to kind of scratch things, put things on top of, things were very new. Remember, gay marriage was not officialized in the whole country until 2015. So we are talking about 2006, 2007. But you could see the

disposition of, of all these entities to accommodate. We did not find, we did not find, we did not find and that was maybe our, our fortune. We didn't find resistance and bureaucrats have ways to delay things and make things miserable for you by just in-action. Then, to give you an example how positive things we're here in Maine. The judge and the judge of probate who had signed the decree of adoption because that's the title of the document. Was this gentleman, a French Canadian extraction, very Catholic, and our lawyer told us you had to have an interview in his chambers. Be careful. Don't say things and toward because he's kind of a conservative man. Okay. Fine. But I don't think it's going to be any problem. So the man comes out of his chambers and he tells us, so gentlemen. So you were both, both educated in schools of the De La Sol brothers, the Christian brothers. Say yes. So that was what synched it. We had been educated by Christian brothers, me in Spain, Charles in New Orleans. They could be nothing wrong with us. So we found an ally in the most unsuspecting of places. And he tells us, oh, and the ceremony should be made a public. Is there a place at Bates College where we could have it? A nice sunny day. I signed the decree publicly there. So this man officiates the adoption decree so we create we made up a party, festivity or the adoption signature, Carlos was already walking. And we invited our friends here at Bates College at the Multicultural Center, that no longer exists.

Sandra, Wow, wow I don't have words for that.

Baltasar, so happiness needs to work, but we and I, and I thank Charles my husband, because he's a very courageous man. And he's a black man. And he has put all his intelligence, his know-how his experience, of being denied, at the service of no. Those who are wrong can not have the last word. That is because otherwise, you'll be unhappy. And happiness is our right.

Sandra, How do you blend your cultures? In your family?

Baltasar, It is not difficult. I came from Spain, which was when I was growing up deeply Catholic. Country. Charles is not Catholic, but he grew up in a deeply Catholic place, New Orleans. So we have, we have things in common. And also our, I think I've mentioned this a few minutes ago. Our middle-class backgrounds. Coming, our parents came from working-class extractions who rose to the middle class. And the, I think they taught us by example that you have to work for what you want. And that, our work ethic, respect, of course, we have different. Charles never learned to speak Spanish properly. I accuse him of being absolutely imperial with his English. And he laughs at that. Our children are bilingual. He respects that, but our children are black. I respect that. So, you know I'm from Spain, I'm not from this country. I always there are so many things that remind me in the house that I'm not from this country. They're just tiny little things, especially another day and the children are growing up. And they realized, why do they know things I do not know and I realize that they are from this country. They have channels of knowledge that I don't have. And, and, and, and race is a very important factor in our family,

in our relationship. I'm constantly reminded that I live in a black family, that my husband, my children are black and something I don't forget for a minute.

Sandra, In what way?

Baltasar, A, a, the awareness of identity, the awareness that there is anti-blackness outside. And you have to develop strategies about it and you have to talk about it. And I listen. I used to talk more than I do because now as children grow up, they say more and they have, I think it's my duty to listen and to let them know that I support them. So, so those are the, the cultural differences. I think we are building them into a strength. More than a divide.

Sandra, Is there anything else you would like to say about race and Maine?

Baltasar, about race and Maine.

Sandra, and Spain.

Baltasar, And Spain, so much. Well, I always have said that Maine is one of the whitest states in the country and not because of the snow that, especially now that children are growing up you notice this more. Sometimes this reluctance, this, this voice of othering. You, we had to make choices, Charles and I about what to educate our children, two black boys. We soon discovered that the public school system here in Lewiston was not conducive. Basically, they do not know how to, how to deal with black boys, especially middle-class black, black boys. They have an idea of a black boy, but which does not correspond to the circumstance of our children because not all black boys are the same, but there is this stereotype. And that stereotype can transform into danger for our children and being seen as a threat. And when white people see black people as threats, they become violent. And that's something we had to take into account. And we have to decide to take them to a private school. A Montessori type school where they have thrived. And we're not we're not sorry, on the contrary. So that's one of the many ways in which race works in a place like Lewiston Maine. In Spain, I had an experience in 2014, 15, that academic year when I had a sabbatical. Both Charles and I had a sabbatical. And we decide to move to the Canary Islands in Spain, where I have family and to do research and to put the children in the school system, there for a year to strengthen their Spanish, to give it a good jump start. And, and there is when I saw, especially with my eldest son, with Carlos, how racism had weird ways of working against him against specifically in the school system. Again, they did not know how to address his difference. He's coming from another country, his, he learned Spanish very well. He learned it, he used it, his spoken Spanish, became absolutely fluent. But because he has a learning difference, type of reading dyslexia type, they were totally unable, unwilling, until the very end to deal with it. So he did not have such a positive time at the school. And, and that, that

told me that that this is complicated. It's complicated when in the case of Spain, Spanish that is totally unaware of how racist it is, has not even come to the nominal realization that we are a racist country. That actually we invented racism, because modern slavery started in Spain and Portugal and in Spanish and Portuguese Empires. So, so that's, that was at so many levels and you could see it in in birthday parties, you know, things that we organize and people didn't show up. But they would be okay if we showed up at other people's parties. But then I realized that Carlos only played with certain children with other children. It was, it was, it was interesting.

Sandra, And you do a lot of listening, You have these conversations with your children?

Baltasar, Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. We discuss that, for instance, yesterday we had a discussion over dinner about that Rittenhouse case. That Carlos is 15 now, analyze it and explain that to our youngest son, Bernardo who is 11. I haven't talked much about him, So Bernardo asked what happened? What was the verdict, what's a verdict? and Carlos proceed to explain to him what had happened, the ways of whiteness. How, if you're white, you can kill people around and you're found not guilty. And the proliferation of weapons, vigilantism, he explained all that to, to his 11-year-old sibling. And I felt proud because they said, okay, you are paying attention and listening, and you're processing this information. Our younger son, I haven't talked much about him. He was the result of the success with Carlos who were so happy that I believe we're going to try it again.

Sandra, Same agency? And it was a private agency?

Baltasar, Yeah a private agency in Maryland, who they called Adoptions Together. And they had a program for gay couples, which in 2000. Now it's, I guess more common, but in 2005, 2006 was not so common. But they say, Well, we've had success. Let's do it. And we adopted Bernardo. And, and, and we are very happy and Bernardo is very different from Carlos. Bernardo is more your average child who is very athletic, very, very energetic. And that sometimes puts him in difficult situations in the school system or the school, at church. Because and this is something we realize they see a black boy being very active and they don't know what to do about that and they recoil. And so it's interesting, he's very athletic and he wants to go to middle school at the public school system here because they have a good sports programs. And the school system is very small. The school doesn't have a competitive sports program and he's into soccer, basketball, lacrosse, track, and field, you name it, wants to try football. American football, not, not the real football, and we say no, and concussion, no. But anyway, so we are trying to convince you that he's much better off where he sat right now. Where next year if everything goes right with the pandemic, they will have this school trip to Washington DC. Those are the kind of things we want him to experience. Something that in a public school, he won't have but, of course, he is interested in sports and that is something with respect, because he

has, he has the ability. That makes him much more like the average black boy in the eyes of some of these white people, which has its pros and obviously cons. And we have to be watching out because he's a child and he doesn't understand things critically yet. He will. In a couple of years.

Sandra, It sounds like you have a lot of open dialogue about these very real factors.

Baltasar, yes.

Sandra, That are in your children's lives.

Baltasar, Yeah. Without traumatizing it, but without hiding it. We are not trying to protect them from, from what is out there. It's like it's a bit like you had to teach your children the meaning of the traffic lights. Why there is red why there is amber, why there is green. I also you have to tell some people will not obey those traffic lights. So we have to watch out because they might run you over. And that's how racism works,

Sandra, What has your experience been like, they are in a private school.

Baltasar, Yeah.

Sandra, As a mixed race couple, as a gay couple with adoptive children, what has that experience been like?

Baltasar, The school is very, very supportive, very positive. That's how we presented ourselves to them. And they, we are not in school, we're not the only, I think one of the only gay parents. And now in this young age in which children also declare their gender identity, and we're going through our children, come home and tell us such and such is no longer she's now he's, is now they's, they have changed names. It's like Charles and I look at each other and it was like, Wow, Are we old fashioned? We thought we were the vanguard that we were like the standard parents No. And the children and the school in the school we have had in the school we have had positive experiences, even in critical moments. There was a situation in which one or this one time who was with Carlos. They had this activity that they called the wax museum. And they were studying the American Civil War. And they would create a wax museum with different figures in the American Civil War, so each kid would have would be one of these figures, and they had to dress like them and they had to know about the biography. And Carlos was given the name of our confederate general. Have remember, I have, I've forgotten the name of this guy. And of course, Carlos was 11, 12 I have to do this and said No, no, no, this, this individual, no you're a black boy your're not going to impersonate these terrorist because he was a terrorist,

because after the Civil War he, he was around Washington DC. He led parties of terrorist attack, to attack black people, no, no, no, you cannot even be you, you are not going to be. And we went to the school and we told them that we had a tremendous problem with not only with Carlos being assigned this role, but with all these roles or not, to have a more critical view of, of the American Civil War and the response from them they were shocked and they talked among themselves and they cancel the entire exercise. Some other parents had also shown concern. But and that told us that we were putting our children in the hands of thoughtful people. Of very thoughtful people. People who took their careers seriously. So that was a learning experience that you had to advocate for their children. And if you're in the right environment, that advocacy works very well for everybody.

Sandra, We're coming to the close of the interview. Is there anything that you left out that you feel that you would like to share before for this interview to be complete?

Baltasar, That well Charles and I have been together for 38 years now. And we are reaching our old age, which is how we wanted it to be. That we have because of homophobia, we haven't been able to start a family earlier. So we are finding ourselves we are the age of our childrens, of other children, grandparents that we have a teenager close to teenage one of them close to teenage kids. And, and we are, you know, working for them, working for ourselves. And working for our happiness.

Sandra, What a lovely place to end. Thanks so much for sharing your story and your time.

Okay, Sandra, I'm going to close this.