

TAPE # TV 004, 1 OF 4
TANYA VILLANUEVA
08.05.02
JIM WHITAKER, Producer/Director
PROJECT REBIRTH

06.00.30 PICTURE UP

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: Let's start at the beginning. Where were you born?

06.00.46 TANYA VILLANUEVA: I was born in Vorberg, Netherlands. I was born uh, to a German mother and a Filipino father who weren't married.

06.01.03 And my mother uh, had to hide her pregnancy from her family, and my father was engaged to be married to somebody else in the Philippines. (When?) he met her in Germany. So he went back to the Philippines, and my mother, pregnant uh, she wound up, she told her brother, I think.

06.01.32 And she wound up going to like a house for unwed mothers somewhere in Germany. But was very unhappy there. And then wound up spending her last uh, months of pregnancy with my biological father's brother and his wife, who was American, in Holland. And then uh, she gave birth to me. I have such a crazy life, I'm telling you.

06.02.00 She gave birth to me uh, June 19th, 1968, and then she left me to, with them, September '68, so she could go find work uh, and start you know, a new life. And she was supposed to send for me, you know, later on. And December 17th, which I found out later on in life uh, she was supposed to come home for Christmas and she killed herself (LAUGHS).

06.02.38 Sounds like a drama. (~JW~) So I wound up, I was raised with my father's brother, Emilio and his wife, Ilene. Who have been my mom and dad from the beginning.

JW: December 17th was your (six months old?)

06.02.58 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Six months old.

JW: I was born on January 19th, 1968.

TANYA VILLANUEVA: Oh were you?

JW: Yes (?)

TANYA VILLANUEVA: Yeah. So I was, yeah, I was raised (STOPS)

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

06.03.16 TANYA VILLANUEVA: I didn't really, they didn't tell me all of this, you know, I wasn't raised knowing that I was adopted. They just kind of you know, uh, wanted to protect me. When I was 2, we moved to, to London.

06.03.30 And uh, I lived there for 4 years, 'cos my father worked for the Philippine consulate. And then when I was 6, we came to the States. Uh, and we landed in Hammond, Indiana (LAUGHS) for four years. And then uh, we came to New York in 1978. But I knew like, as a child like I had a sense that I was kind of different, even though my brothers and my sister, we look like we can be brothers and sister 'cos they're half Filipino and half Irish American.

06.04.07 And you know, so you have the Eurasian mix. But uh, I just, I, I had questioned it very early on, if I was adopted. And they just told me that you know, I, I was too young to know, you know, to protect me. And then (~JW~)

JW: You mean like you were like 10 years old (and you were going?)

06.04.26 TANYA VILLANUEVA: I remember I was 8 years old when I asked them the first time. I remember going around and telling people that this is you know, this isn't my real mom, this is my second mom. My real mom died. And it could have very well been that my sister, who is 3 (?) years older than me may have told me, you know, as children. I, I don't know where I started to get that idea from. But I remember finally confronting my parents at such a

young age, and they told me then I was too young to know, which I was too young to know, you know?

06.04.57 And then when I was 12 I found my birth certificate, and on it it just had my, my mother's name and my father's name it just kind of had like dot, dot, dot, dot. So I had no idea who my father was. And I kind of held this information back from my parents that I knew, you know? And uh, then one day uh, my dad, I want, I remember I wanted to go to a party, I was 12.

06.05.32 And uh, he told me I couldn't go. And then I said, well, I know I'm adopted. You know, 12 years old (LAUGHS) defiant. And he goes, what are you talking about? And I said, I found my birth certificate. So then that's when it first kind of came out, but it was kind of like you know, it (?) didn't really mention who my father was and uh, and they just said that they took care of me all of these years and you know, so.

06.06.02 Couple of months later then my younger brother was uh, getting in trouble. He, and we're 9 months apart. He's like my twin, not my brother. And uh, he asked my parents if he was adopted, you know, change the subject a little bit. And uh, they told, they told him of course, no, and then that prompted them to tell me about my father, who was this one uncle that I had never met.

06.06.31 And my father came from a family of 12 children. So out of 11 siblings, I had only, I hadn't met this one uncle who was in the Philippines with 6 children. So ultimately what had happened (?) I met him in '85. And the story was that he went back to the Philippines, married the woman he was supposed to marry and started a family right away and I have a sister who's 5 months younger than me.

06.07.02 A half sister. And five other siblings. In the Philippines. And there's just uh.

JW: And do they know (?)

06.07.15 TANYA VILLANUEVA: They know. I met them for the first time in uh, (~JW~) '85, no '88. I met my father for the first time '85. He came to new York. (~JW~)

JW: What was that like?

06.07.27 TANYA VILLANUEVA: That was just surreal, I think. I think what happened was our first contact with each other happened when I was 12 by, by phone. Or by letter. But uh, it was very hard for me, I was, 'cos I was so confused. I mean, it was just so all of a sudden you're told that, that your life isn't what you thought it was. You know? I guess it's very I don't know, parallel to what's going on now. But uh, you know, we started to correspond, but I had, I struggled with it because I didn't know what to call him, I remember.

06.07.59 I was like, what do I call you? Are you Uncle Bess? No, you're not really Uncle Bess because you're my father, but you're not my father because my dad is my dad, you know? So it was just angst-ridden, you know? And uh, when I finally met him it was weird because you know, I hadn't uh, up until this point there were no pictures of my mother and, and no one was very, no one told me how she died, you know.

06.08.29 It was kind of like I heard that she had gotten sick and then I heard that she had got into an accident. And then my cousin had told me that one of my other aunts told, you know, told the family that when I was a little girl 5 years old. See, what happened was, when my family came to the states, I, I wasn't legally adopted. So I had to stay behind in London with another aunt for a couple of months until they could straighten out some paperwork to bring me over. (LAUGHS) Such trauma, I'm telling you.

06.09.06 I, I had my share, I definitely do. So uh, (~JW~)

JW: That's pretty tough stuff.

06.09.12 TANYA VILLANUEVA: It is tough stuff. And, and what happened was, you know, I, I finally got to the States on a tourist visa, which expired in '75, but I was in the school system, so I was Ok, you know, but I was illegal here for (?) forever. Until they passed the amnesty law in '87.

06.09.32 So that was tough also. I couldn't go to college right away, it was all of this craziness. But anyway, I could go around in circles. This aunt who was watching me while I was in London told the rest of the family that she had walked in (?) into the room while I was playing one day, and I was talking to somebody. And she says, who are you talking to? And apparently, I don't recall this, I pointed out the window and I said, that lady.

- 06.09.57 And she said, what lady? And I said that lady right there. She's like this. So then they said that that was my mother, that my mother had hung herself, you know. So that I learned probably, that story was told me when I was probably 12, 13, on one of my visits to, to my cousins. We'd spend summers in either New York or Chicago, depending on where we were living, but. Uh, so I had this in my head, I had, well, she got sick, she got into an accident or she hung herself.
- 06.10.32 Uh, you know, and I asked. I said, what happened. It was no, no, no, no, no, my father said, no, she was you know, she, there was an accident and blablabla. But it was kind of I don't know. But I had no information about her, really. I knew her name, Sigrid Gisela Cousters. I knew that she was from Germany, and I knew that I wanted to look for her at one point.
- 06.11.02 So I guess I just wasn't you know, I wasn't ready and uh, when I, in '90, I went, I finally went to school, to college, (?) after I got my green card with the amnesty law, I went to Hunter College, and then uh, you know, I did, I did Ok there. It was, you know, city college, I was majoring in everything and (?) anything. And uh, then I had the opportunity to go to California. They had this National Student Exchange program.
- 06.11.32 If you had good enough grades you could exchange to participating colleges across the United States, Guam, Hawaii, whatever. So I (?) I'm going to LA. Why, I don't know. But I just, I'd always wanted to and that was my chance to kind of fly the coup. So I was 22. I left home, I got on a plane, went to LA, I knew one person (LAUGHS) I wound up in school at Cal State Domingus Hills in Carson, which was just like so far removed from what I was accustomed to here in New York, it was like, I got to go.
- 06.12.07 I quit school after a month, but I stayed in LA. I just kind of, I bumped into a friend that I had met in New York prior to, to her moving out there. So I crashed with her for months. So for a while, I was kind of like this vagabond until I could get myself settled. And then I created this kind of neat life for myself. I worked at, at uh, a hotel cocktailing. You know, I made decent money, had a lot of good friends.
- 06.12.33 Uh, and I had started my search there for my mother. 'Cos I had met the uh, there were, you know, the hotel I worked at, there was lots of Europeans, so somebody was German, I said, my mother was German, I need to find my mother, how do I go about doing it? And then they kind of told me it was pretty easy to do. All I had to do is write to these inhabitant registration bureaus.

- 06.12.57 So I uh, I started to write the letters, you know, and I, I found out that yes, I did have. My mother was buried in a Catholic cemetery in this little village called Unko. She died December 17th, 1968. She was born May 4th 1944. And it's, and that letter said that I only had, I had 3 cousins. And they gave me the names of the cousins. So that was the only information I had at that point.
- 06.13.28 And now I had information, that I could reach out to these cousins to find out what happened with my mother. I think I got that like in '90, '94. Ninety-three. Ninety-four, January 17th, the big earthquake happens. And I was like, I can't hang. (LAUGHS) (~JW~) I could not. I was like, no way, you know?
- 06.13.58 The little 5.0's are cute, but that 6.8 (LAUGHS) It was horrible. It was horrendous, and (~JW~)
- JW: It was like Poltergeist (I was in bed and ?) it was literally like poltergeist.
- 06.14.11 TANYA VILLANUEVA: (~JW~) It was horrible. It was the most scariest thing I had ever lived through. So at the time I was living, I had, I had a boyfriend at the time, Philippe. And I said, listen, with every aftershock I'm at the door with my suitcases in hands, afraid for my life. I got, we got to go.
- 06.14.28 So we decided to move to Miami, sight unseen, again. You know, so Philippe wound up going uh, home to France, to, to see his parents, and I wound up doing the move by myself. And he was gonna meet me in Miami. So I drove across country with my friend, Luca. And I got to Miami after 3 ½ days.
- 06.14.56 And I had my best friend there uh, from childhood, Deborah. Uh, that I, from childhood in New York. We'd been best friends since I was 12. So I stayed with her family. And then uh, Philippe was gone for a couple of months, you know, and, I, I met up with Sergio. Which I had met Sergio like in 1986. We used to go to the same disco. And you know, we had mutual friends.
- 06.15.31 And we're just acquaintances, maybe we'd dance a couple of times, but nothing, you know? And uh, and but in Miami, I met up with him, and I don't know. We just wound up kissing one night, and that led to one thing and then it was just like oh, my god, I love this man. And we spent these, this week together, five days, just together. You know.

- 06.15.58 And I remember telling him about the whole Germany thing and he's like wow. That's really cool and dadadada. So he kind of motivated me a little bit to, to pursue the next phase of, of that journey, you know? So he left, he went back to New York, he was a cop at the time. And Philippe was coming home from France and I was just completely torn, you know, 'cos I'd been with Philippe for 3 years. But I just knew there was, Sergio and I just clicked.
- 06.16.33 You know, uh, we just, we had so much in common. We, we had this, we grew up the same, in the same neighborhood. We liked the same music, you know, and such a wide range of music from you know, Latin hip hop club dancing to Frank Sinatra, you know, to Enya, to and one of the things that struck me, too, was that he, he had mentioned this, this book, Many Lives, Many Masters, by Brian Weiss, MD.
- 06.17.08 Who uh, who's a psychiatrist who does regression therapy, but it's past life regression therapy. And Sergio, when he was telling me about this book, he was so animated, talking about how we're here in different lives and reincarnation and blablablabla. So it was like, wow, not only is he like this super-macho gorgeous man, he also has this spiritual side to him.
- 06.17.29 So I totally fell head over heels in love with this guy. So he comes back to New York.
(~JW~)

JW: Before you go into (?) just, just a couple of things you said. I just want to uh, tell me, tell me uh, the kind of spike memories you had from that night in 1986 (at the disco?) Meaning like was there, you were just dancing and (?)

- 06.17.52 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Yeah, we had, we, yeah, we just had like kind of the same friends, so 10-18 used to be so crowded like. But Sergio had, I mean, today we (?) coin it, it's a, he had a mullet (LAUGHS). This black hair, it was just sweating, white V-neck tee shirt, baggy, baggy pants. And we used to just drink and, and, and dance all night, you know? But uh, we uh, we just had so many different, we had lots of different friends, so it was uh, you know, me and Deborah used to go like 3 nights a week.
- 06.18.34 Sergio and his friends used to go like 4 nights a week. You know, so. You'd be dancing with everybody. But it didn't really like he was just Sergio, you know? I didn't, it was just crazy.

JW: And then when you went to Florida, he was there, (?) in Miami, he was just?

06.18.52 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Well, his father, his father lives in Miami, and his father at the time had a restaurant there (~JW~) so what happened was we had mutual friends and, and then it, that I had stayed in contact with, and he said you know, they said that they would be at Sergio's dad's restaurant. So when I went that night with my girlfriend, Barry, who was my best friend from high school, she, she was living with me in Florida for, for a couple of months. Uh, I remember you know, Sergio and I saw each other and he's, he just says like wow you look great, you know? And uh, yeah, it as just a crazy night.

06.19.30 But we wound up kissing, and it was just like, it just clicked. It was like, it was like the perfect kiss, for me. You know what I mean? Like he just, there was no awkwardness about it. It just felt right. And then we just kind of got a little crazy, a little nutty and wound up together for 5 days.

JW: Now, you don't have to get into all the details (LAUGHS)

(SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION)

JW: (MID-STATEMENT) but I will say one thing about uh, the, I remember uh, I won't go into all the details myself (LAUGHS) but there's, there's sometimes occasion when you meet somebody and then there's just a suspended period of time where for 5 days the world is kind of like stopped in a way and you just spend like hours and hours in a room, or.

06.20.21 TANYA VILLANUEVA: And you just, and we talked and you know, we just had such a, I mean, everything. Like everything, about everything. Like he knew everything about me, and I knew everything about him at the end of 5 days. But it was kind of like we became best friends in 5 days. Like, you know, you would tell everything to your best friend. It was just that open and honest and, and I remember like he had, he was supposed to leave I think after the 3rd day. And he went to the airport and we, we dropped him off at the airport, did we drop him off at the airport?

- 06.20.59 And I was starting to get sick because of not sleeping and I, and I, smoked, we both smoked. I smoked like a fiend at the time, and I always got uh, strep throat. So my fever had started. I was like really getting sick, and then he calls up and he says, Big Daddy's staying (LAUGHS). So we went back to the airport, I'm sick, sick, sick. I mean, like, like you can't even imagine. Sick. And he came back and I had a 105 degree fever.
- 06.21.30 They went out and bought a thermometer. I mean, I was chills, my tongue was black. I was, I had like the (?) bubonic plaque. I was like so deathly ill. And what, what also captivated me was how well he took care of me. You know, besides he put me in a bathtub full of ice to bring my fever down. When I was uh, just couldn't get warm, he, he would just lay on top of me and he would say uh, I'll take care of you.
- 06.21.58 And he was just like this guy, my god, you know? So he left, and he was also very much like a playboy, you know? He was so good-looking. And, and he, you know, any woman. They, they would fall, I'm telling you. This, his eyes uh, his charisma and his, his personality. He was just so fun. You know?
- 06.22.226 And uh, so after he left, I was like wow, am I gonna? How can I convince this guy, how, how could I do this? Do you know what I mean, because first of all I had Philippe to, to have to deal with, and it was horrible, because I didn't want to hurt Philippe. Philippe was a, a good man. But he just wasn't, he wasn't Sergio. And it wasn't, it just wasn't. But getting together with Sergio under those circumstances was like oh, my god, trust issues. How's he ever gonna trust that, you know what I mean?
- 06.23.01 But I played it. I played it pretty cool. I was like all right, I'm not gonna let him forget about me. So even though I wanted to call him like every minute of every day (LAUGHS) after he left, I was like (?) let me play this. Let me just. I'm, I'm gonna pursue this, but I'm gonna do it, you know, slowly and, and what I would do is I would send him a card a week and just like we're friends, you know?
- 06.23.29 No matter, even though I was dying, I loved him. But I would just write like we were friends which is what we were, you know? And uh, then I would, I would call him like every two weeks, see how he was doing. And then what happened was, that happened in June, that was June 30th, the first night that, that he and I hooked up. And he left after his birthday. His birthday was July 4th. And then uh, he visited again.
- 06.24.01 I went back up to New York. So we had seen each other a couple of times.

JW: Now was he playing it on the down low, too? Or what was he doing?

06.24.07 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Yeah, I think he was thinking, uh, Sergio was very suave. And his whole thing, finally I made the decision when Philippe came back in September or (?) August or September of '94, and right away I knew, and I was like uh, I'm moving back to New York, you know? And uh, so I told Sergio I was moving back to New York.

06.24.28 So Sergio would tell his friends, I hope she doesn't think that I got to hang out with her (LAUGHS) now that she's moving back to New York, you know? (LAUGHS) But uh, I knew. I knew that he, I knew that he liked me, too. I did. You just know it, you know? Uh, all the times that we had spent together, 'cos we would hook up for weekends, you know? And we would be inseparable, and we would just have so much fun together. I just, I knew it. Uh, but yeah, it took a lot of uh.

06.24.59 I think (?) I took, I took major leaps but I knew I had to, you know?

JW: What do you mean you took major leaps?

06.25.06 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Leaps in like, you know, some people wouldn't drop their whole lives to, to go and pursue something? Some people are afraid of that kind of thing. You know? Especially because you just don't know, but I'm, I, I think I'm, I've always been one to just kind of you know what? I'll regret it if I don't do it, let me try. Let me do this, let me do that.

06.25.28 And I did, I mean, I knew I, I knew Sergio cared but I didn't know how it was gonna go, but I was banking on the fact that it would go the way it was uh, would ultimately go. But I knew I was taking chances, you know?

JW: So you came to new York for Sergio?

06.25.44 TANYA VILLANUEVA: I totally came to New York for Sergio. But in this uh, little time period, also, I moved back to new York, I actually moved back to New York uh, my mother's birthday, Sigrid's birthday, my German mother's birthday, May 4th, 1995.

06.26.01 And it was very important for me to get back. Like we, we drove, I drove a 17 foot Uh,-Haul truck with 4 other friends from, from Miami up, and it took us a couple of days to get up here, but I was like we have to be back in new York on the 4th, 'cos I just felt at this point now I had the information of when her birthday was. Like now I felt like I needed to start honoring these days.

JW: Why are dates so important to you?

06.26.28 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Uh, why are days so important to me? Because they have significance. They, they have meaning. You wouldn't have a birthday, it wouldn't be happy birthday every year unless it had significance. It would, it honors the day that you're born. And anniversaries that's a day to honor, you know, when we got together with somebody or whatever the anniversary may be.

06.26.59 Even like a death anniversary, too. You honor it, because that's a significant point, I think. It's a marker. Yeah. So. But uh, in January of '94, I finally reached out to Germany. And I, I sent them a letter uh, to my cousins. Wait, how did it go?

06.27.31 Was that October '94? January '94? Yeah, I sent them a letter and then by October '94, I got a letter from one of my cousins, saying that she was my cousin who was two years younger than me, my cousin Stephe, she has a brother, Roland and Claudia. Uh, but she couldn't help me because her father, who was my mother's brother, died when she was a year and a half old.

06.28.06 Or 11 months old. So I was like, Ok, well that's it then. Uh, you know, I had no idea what other family was there. Two days later, she sends me another letter. Oh, you have, we have another uncle, and he's gonna be writing to you. Edgar. So I said, ok. So this was October '94.

06.28.31 January '95 I get the letter from Edgar's wife, Hildegard, 'cos she speaks English. Saying that you know, she was, they were so happy to receive news of me and that they were glad that I was alive. That they had been searching for me, too. Which was like whew, because I was so afraid of what my, of what the outcome would be of my reaching out to them.

06.29.00 And I was afraid that they would say, well, we don't want anything to do with you. I was afraid that you know, uh, isn't that, it made me so crazy, but I guess that's normal human

emotions. But I was just afraid of that rejection so I, it took me that long to reach out. So when they said that to me, that they were looking for me, too, it was like wow. So I shared that with, I think one of the first people I shared that with was Sergio. He said, wow, that's great, that's so cool. And uh, blablabla, you know?

06.29331 So I moved back in May and then I, I moved in with my friend, Donald. Who was a friend of mine from Miami. He came, he came up with me, well, when did he come? He came up a couple of months later. (LAUGHS)

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

06.30.11 TANYA VILLANUEVA: That's funny. Uh, what happened? I moved back up, we start to date, kind of uh, you know, he would come over a lot, but you know, I gave him, I almost gave him a key right away, you know? But I, he wanted to keep kind of a distance, I think?

06.30.32 And I didn't want to come on too strong. Even though I'm like (?) giving him a key or whatever. Uh, but just to let him know that my house is always open to him and, and uh, you know. By August, he was almost over every night, and then September we went to a friend's wedding, Jose and Lorena. And he would ultimately become the godfather of their baby girl, Daniella. And at that wedding, I knew, like I knew that he loved me.

06.31.08 You know? We hadn't said anything like that, but I knew it. Just the, the way the day was, I just knew the way, 'cos we had had spent a lot of time together, we would go to the beach and listen to Barry White on the way to the beach. Uh, we have our songs, we have our things going on, but we weren't able at that point. I wanted to tell him every day, but I didn't. And I was afraid to tell him that I loved him.

06.31.29 And uh, oh, no, I had given him an ultimatum at one point, which is good. I told him uh, I asked him if he was seeing anybody else, and he was honest and he said, yeah, you know. I said, well, if you're seeing other people, I can't see you any more. And he said, Ok. (LAUGHS) I was like, ok? He's like ok. And I was devastated. I was so devastated, like devastated.

06.32.00 I couldn't believe it, like I expected him, though, after me leaving this is, this is how crazy I was. I expected him to completely, really drop his life, especially after I had just left this man that I'd been with for 3 years, fall head over heels in love with me, trust that I would

never, ever do anything to hurt him and, and (?) you know, not see anybody except me. You know, and then when I, when he gave me, when I gave him that ultimatum, and he said OK, it was like.

06.32.30 I was devastated and for like a week, I was like I can't believe I did that. That was so wrong of me to do that. How could I put that kind of pressure on him, when you know, we still have to get to know each other? It's not fair, you know, so I took a big old swallow of pride and uh, I told him that I was wrong and that I wanted to continue to see him, and I don't want to put any pressure on him, and he, he just take as much time as he needs, but I wanted to see him, you know?

06.33.05 And he was like, well, how will I know that you're not gonna do this again, and I'm like, I won't do it again. Like you just take the amount of time that you need. 'Cos I knew. You know? Crazy, right? But uh, (~JW~)

JW: Ultimatums can be good.

06.33.23 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Ultimatums can be good, because uh, well, for me it was good because it made me realize I can't do that to anybody. You can't, you can't force people into situations. You know, you have to let it unfold. And I wasn't giving it enough time, you know? But by September I knew at this wedding, I knew it. And I uh, I just knew that he loved me the way I loved him. Uh, because by this point we just were spending so much time together and the way he took care of me at that wedding, like he always made sure that I was, he was in the wedding party, but he always made sure that I was taken care of, that he, we danced. I mean, I just knew it.

06.34.59 And at that point I had started to plan the trip to Germany. You know, 'cos I had told, told Edgar and Hildegard that I wanted to come and meet them. and I asked Sergio if he wanted to go with me, and he said, at first he was like no, I don't think it's a good idea, you know, because this is such a monumental thing for you, you know? And you should have time with your family and stuff like this. And for me it was like, well, I, I want, I need to have support. And I can't think of anybody better to, to support me than you, you know?

- 06.34.35 And so he agreed to go with me. So we went on this journey where I would find out everything about my mother. Together. He was with me, like all the way. And uh, we got there, October 5th, '95.
- 06.34.58 And like I wanted to know right away, I'd asked in letters, I'm like how did she die, how did she die? That was like the first thing I wanted to know. But they, you know, everybody kept on skirting the issue, and then they told me in a letter, well, we want you to come and we want to tell you in person. So we get to the airport, and I couldn't sleep on the plane. Sergio had this uncanny thing where he could sleep anywhere. You put him in a corner and he's (?) and he's out like a light. And he slept and I couldn't (?) how can you sleep?
- 06.35.26 And I was just so nervous, I was just this, this ball of nerves. And we land in Frankfurt and Sergio, I got a video camera for it, so I have all this video that I (STUTTER) just started to look at. I hadn't looked at it since the trip. And uh, we went back to their house, and I wanted to know right away. But they were like, let's wait 'til dinner. You're killing me. Just let me know how she died. I just need to know. And uh, you know, it was so important for me to know, 'cos I just felt like I had to complete that circle, you know?
- 06.36.02 So later that night, you know, they told me that, you know, they didn't understand to this day they don't understand, you know, but she must have, she was obviously very depressed and uh, you know, she just felt that she couldn't turn to anybody and, and she killed herself. You know, so. My question was like now was like how?
- 06.36.29 'Cos I needed to know about the hanging herself, I needed to know that. You know? And when Hildegard, she just kind of went (?) like this, she went, she you know, she hung herself. And at that second it was just like primal scream. I, I just could not, I, I was just like, I don't know.
- 06.37.06 It was like at that second of like that truth, that. (PAUSE) So I was like ok. (PAUSE) Now I know she was, you know, she was depressed, you know, she killed herself.
- 06.37.36 But Sergio was right there. I could let out the scream and I couldn't stop crying and he was right there. And then after we left the house, like, and I gathered myself together and I was like wow, I did it, you know? I, I confronted that which I feared the most, you know, finding out the truth.
- 06.38.02 I did it. I came, I came all the way here, and now I know the truth. You know, and these, Edgar and Hildegard, you know, and, and there's another sister, Shita, beautiful. You know,

they welcomed me with open arms, and, and you know, and this is my, my family, you know? They uh, I felt like almost free, you know?

- 06.38.29 That I did that. I couldn't process yet the other stuff. I couldn't process the issues that come up with that yet, it was, it wasn't the time, but I remember initially feeling wow. I, I got balls. I actually. Not many people could do this, you know? Go, go around the world to go and find out their truth. But I did it, and I told him, I said, you know, that was the one thing that I was most afraid of in the whole world was, was to find that out.
- 06.39.01 And I did it, and I said, and the second thing that I was most afraid of, you know, or this was after, what happened was we had gone back to. We were in the room at some point, and I had traced it on his back. I remember. I started to trace out the letters, so he was figuring them out. He was like D-O and I was, do you know how much I love you? I traced it on his back. And then he just kind of was like (LAUGHS)
- 06.39.35 Oh, shit. But he was very affectionate and you know, loving. But he didn't say I love you back. And then after that, I told him, I said, you know, the, the one thing I was afraid of was confronting this, you know. And that the other thing was to tell you that I love you. And that I want, I want to spend the rest of my life with you. (LAUGHS) And he still didn't say he loved me back, that motherfucker (LAUGHS).
- 06.40.10 But I knew it anyway. I knew it. He didn't have to, I said you don't have to tell me anything. I already know. 'Cos I do. Uh, maybe call me cocky, but I just knew. I felt it in my heart. And how I knew was when we got home, we got home October 14th or October 13th. And he had, we both were crazy smokers and he bought me lighters.
- 06.40.33 He had gone into a store and bought me these little you know, miniature lighters, and he's just handing me the bag. And I didn't open the bag. I kind of just packed this little paper bag into the suitcase, and then when I got home and I unpacked on the lighter it said, love. You know? So I was like he loves me, this guy. You know? And then I had gone to Hallmark and bought him a card and he (?) he loved Yosemite Sam.
- 06.41.02 He had a Yosemite Sam tattoo. And I, I found these great key rings (~JW~)

JW: (Why?)

TANYA VILLANUEVA: Why did he have one?

JW: (Why did he have Yosemite Sam?)

- 06.41.14 TANYA VILLANUEVA: I guess he liked it, he loved Yosemite Sam, you know? He did. Like later on, like after a couple of years, he was saying he kind of wished he didn't ever get a tattoo. But he (?) had loved Yosemite Sam when he was younger. You (?) varmint. You know?
- 06.41.30 So anyway, I had. I had gone uh, I had gone to Hallmark, bought him these great key chains, and I bought him a card. And in the card I told him, I actually have it. I told him, I have so many cards. This is just such a handful. Oh, wait, I don't have it. Anyway, in the card I told him that I thanked him for coming with me on the trip and that uh, that again, I, I was so glad that I was able to tell him that I loved him, you know?
- 06.42.15 And after he read that card, he just looked at me, and he just said, you know, he was kind of like what am I gonna do? You know, he said, I love you, too. And I knew it. And he started crying. (PAUSE)
- 06.42.39 'Cos he was afraid. But I told him, I promised him I would never, ever, you know, hurt him. You know, and it was hard for him to, to see it, but that I would never hurt him. I always, I just wanted to love him forever, you know?
- 06.43.01 And then it was like bliss. Just bliss, we were so happy. Not to say we didn't have our arguments or, or fights, but one thing was that, you know, and I had been in relationships before, but there was such a commitment there for us that even in our most horrendous arguments, you know, we would, we would always say, you know what? We have to agree that we disagree on this, you know, and no matter what, I love you.
- 06.43.33 You can be pissed off, but I love you, you know, and it was just that. It was that you know? Which is very, we just went through so much together. And so then afterwards, you know, after uh, one really kind of big argument, it was like uh, I started thinking of all my issues and one of them was abandonment, you know?
- 06.44.00 And uh, I said, oh, I got to go to therapy. 'Cos I thought, you know, (PAUSE) I guess I thought that my mom, you know, killed herself because of me.
- 06.44.28 I mean, I was only 6 months old, but it was like (PAUSE) So I had to work that through. I guess I still have to work that through (LAUGHS)

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

06.44.54 TANYA VILLANUEVA: And then it was my, my fear, too, that you know, if Sergio and I had arguments earlier on, you know, that if we were to break up that that became such a fear for me, another abandonment thing, you know, and then I started thinking, well, you know, suicide. You know, they, if children of parents who commit suicide sometimes are more inclined to commit suicide. So that was one of my fears, and I never wanted you know, to go down that road. So that was like, I've got to make sure that, 'cos I was afraid of that, too, you know?

06.45.33 And uh, (~JW~)

JW: How did Sergio respond to all that?

06.45.38 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Sergio was just uh, he was just there. He, he thought that it was good that I went to therapy. He called it shrinking, you know, and I would tell him everything. I mean, he was just. And uh, the thing though that really helped me to accept my mother's death, her suicide, was.

06.46.10 I mean, I spent a year in therapy and I just, I still couldn't get the question answered, that's my whole thing. That is the, the question of why, why did you do it? You know, uh, a therapist could tell me that there, she was obviously depressed and blablabla, whatever. Sergio could tell me she was depressed, it had nothing to do with you, blablabla, you know, but I.

06.46.31 I needed to know why, and the only person that could answer that question was her. You know, but there was no letter, there was no nothing. And uh, this is how I got connected with channelers, I'm telling you. Such a crazy life. (~JW~)

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

06.47.07 END OF TAPE # TV-004

TAPE # TV 005
TANYA VILLANUEVA
08.05.02
JIM WHITAKER, Producer/Director
PROJECT REBIRTH

07.00.30 PICTURE UP

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: I'm just trying to connect a few dots here. Tell me about, well, I'm, I'll making a slight assumption which may be wrong. But you had a moment when you were 12 years old where you looked out a window. Tell me about what you saw and how that connected to what you found out, and is that connected at all (?)

07.00.59 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Uh, well, it was when I was 5.

JW: When you were 5?

07.01.03 TANYA VILLANUEVA: When I was five or yeah, 'cos that's when I was left behind in England.

JW: This when you (were looking out the window?)

07.01.10 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Yeah, when I was 5. but I don't, I don't recall that. The, that story was told to me, but when that moment came, when Hildegard said, she and she did that, it was just like, that in my head there was that connection. It was like, but I don't recall a visual of seeing her hanging.

07.01.33 I don't recall any of that. You know. But I do believe that that's a possibility. I, I do, especially now with uh, like my nephew, Danny, he's uh, 5, well, now he just turned 6. But he was 5 when 9/11 happened. And Sergio's god daughter is, she just turned 4.

- 07.02.33 She's, and both of them say they talk to him. You know, that Sergio comes and visits them, and Sergio tickles Danny, and Daniella says that you know, Padrino came and brought her to where he is, and it's beautiful and he's happy and you know, so. I believe that children are very open to that, and I think when that, at that second when Hildegard told me that Sigrid hung herself, I, I it connected the story in my head.
- 07.02.38 Of me being 5, doing that. But I can't, I didn't connect an actual visual. But, with, when all is, you know, I do, I've always believed that there was uh, something bigger. Than us.
- 07.02.58 And I remember when I first found out, you know, at 8, 12, whatever, that my mother wasn't here, you know, I would try, I would always say, you know, where are you? You know, I would try and talk to her, I remember. But I just didn't make the, uh, what I remember I didn't make any connections, you know?
- 07.03.29 And then uh, after the year of therapy, that was about '96 uh, I kind of felt like I, I went through as much as I could go through in therapy to deal with the issues of uh, you know, uh, the you know, of, of how I, how I respond to certain situations based on, you know, my abandonment issues, right?
- 07.03.57 But I still needed to just get that question answered. I needed to know why, I needed to know why, why did you? Why did she kill herself, why? You know, and was it really not my fault, kind of deal? 'Cos I think you always just carry, you carry it. So my friend, Glen, who also I worked with in Miami who I adore and uh, he, he was still living in Miami at the time. You know, he and I would talk very regularly, and he, he told me that he had seen this woman, Suzie, that she does channeling.
- 07.04.38 I'm like really? He's like yeah, but she's really, it's really cool. She does uh, she does it telekinetically. And I'm like, well, what do you mean? He says, well, you kind of sit at a table and you don't verbalize what your questions are, you, you ask them telepathically.
- 07.05.02 And the table moves towards you in response of yes, and away from you in the response of no, and I'm like get the fuck out of here. He's like yeah, he said, I'm telling you. And he was telling me that he knows for a fact, he had no doubt in his mind that he spoke with his friend and, and our other friend, Art, spoke with his best friend, and, and you know, that he said it was really, really cool.
- 07.05.28 I was like I'm coming down. It was just that like that, I'm coming to Florida, I'm gonna come and see this woman, because that was my in to, to talk to Sigrid. So you know, and I

told Sergio, I'm going down to, to a channel and everything. And he's so, he was just so good. See, he, Sergio was, he's like, baby you do whatever you have to do, you know? That's always the way he was. You do whatever it is that's gonna make you feel good, you know?

- 07.06.00 So I (?) got on a plane and I just knew it. Like the night before I had a dream that I was gonna talk to her, and I just knew it. And that morning, I knew I was gonna talk to her, I felt it in my bones. So they bring me to, to this woman's house, and I didn't know what to really expect, you know. And she answers the door, and she's got on these uh, denim overalls, very, very sweet face. She kind of looked like uh, a '60's hippy chick, you know, and she had like beautiful gray hair.
- 07.06.35 I think it was pulled back, and she just seemed very light. And she had these really long blue nails. Right? So (LAUGHS) I was like ok. You know, I was like the is, in my mind this is, I'm fucking crazy, what am I doing, you know?
- 07.06.58 But we get into the, into the house and we sit at this table and it's like uh, uh, you know those white plastic picnic tables? Round and there's a hole in the middle that you can put an umbrella through. And she has that set, has a, she had a beautiful home and she has this picnic table in the middle. And uh, with all these writing symbols on it, you know? And 'm with Glen and I'm with Art, and Suzie's across from me. And you know, if, we had a little small talk and she actually was helping .she, she helped uh, parents of missing children, you know, murdered children, find you know, find them connect them blablabla.
- 07.07.43 And uh, I sat down at the table, and you're just supposed to put your hands down on the table, and, and my head. I just said, Sigrid, are you here? And the table just went (?) and I was like, I know she's, I just, I knew it. I think I lost it at that moment, too. I started crying.
- 07.08.01 And then it just began, this reading, you know. Where like I, I couldn't, because you had to ask a question in a way that could be answered yes or no. But it was like how can I ask a question why in a yes and no way? You know what I mean? There's uh, you have to, I need to hear, I need why, but there's no, you know. So I couldn't form, I couldn't formulate my questions. I was getting very frustrated, and I was (?) very nervous and I was just like and finally she said just take a deep breath and you know, you know, of course I check underneath to make sure that there's nothing moving this table around.

- 07.08.38 But the way there was nothing. Uh, I have no, absolutely no doubt in my mind that Sigrid came through. I was uh, I'm losing, I'm you know, I'm just out of control. She says, just take a deep breath and just ask a simple question in your mind. You know. And then I was like, am I a girl? (LAUGHS)
- 07.08.58 You know, a stupid question. Yes. Ok, ok. Ok. Uh, are her nails long? (LAUGHS) Are her nails long? I mean, they were like, I'm not kidding you, they were like this long. And the table almost knocked me over. It was like (?) and uh, I started cracking up, because you know, I asked this question and, and so now I'm laughing, and then the table starts kind of bouncing up and down laughing, too, you know.
- 07.09.31 And Glen starts laughing, Art's laughing, and they could actually at this moment, they all knew. It's just like they knew. I just, I said I just asked if your nails were long, j,j and so we're all laughing at the table, the table, so Sigrid's laughing. And, and even at the moment when I was getting very emotional and I'm crying, you know, they're trying to calm me down and the table was kind of just kind of brushing against me, trying to comfort me. It was like the weirdest thing.
- 07.09.58 So finally I just said, I can't, I can't in my head, I'm not verbalizing anything, I said, I can't, I can't do this. You know, I can't ask these questions like this. Uh, and, and uh, can you, can you talk to me? And then the table moved towards me, it was yes. So now I'm waiting and waiting for somebody to start talking, you know. And I said, in my head, can you talk to me now, and then yes. And then all of a sudden, Suzie, which I should back up just a second, because what she did which was amazing, 'cos she had no idea who I wanted to contact, she had no idea what the relationship was.
- 07.10.36 She had no idea bout anything. And once we started she just says, I feel a lot of pressure from here up. Like a lot, like and then all of a sudden she did, she kind of shook her leg, and she goes, ok, I'm OK now. So it was like almost like she reenacted the hanging, which is.
- 07.10.59 Which flipped me out, you know? So after I said, can you talk to me now whatever, she (?) and then all of a sudden Suzie starts talking and she says, she's telling me that she did what she had, she did what she did because she thought that that was the only way she would be able to guide you in this life. That she was just breaking down mentally.
- 07.11.32 And had she lived in a physical body, you wouldn't have (?) been the person that you are today. That she could only guide you this way. She would have been an albatross around

your neck. You would have been the daughter of somebody that was mentally ill. And I was like oh. And that, that right there, that was it. That's what I needed to hear.

07.12.01 That was like, ok. You didn't kill yourself because (LAUGHS) you know, I was bad or anything like that. You killed yourself because and it came from your mouth, Sigrid, so to speak. (?) you know? And I just knew that I spoke to her, and that's what I needed to hear, and that's when I was like ok, that's it. You know, that makes sense. And I you know, and then there you know the, the reading went on and there was like little details about you know, I was saying well, what about, you know, she was very artistic and creative, I mean, do I get any of that from her?

07.12.37 You know, all these things that you want to know about where you come from. And then she said that, you know, she's mentioning some purple material or something? And I had a trunkful of purple velvet that I was trying to, I was, I had these big ambitious plans of reupholstering my couch, which I wound up doing after the reading. And so I just knew.

07.13.01 So that reinforced my belief that there's something bigger than this life, and. And uh, (~JW~)

JW: What do you think that is when you say that?

07.13.12 TANYA VILLANUEVA: There's something bigger. That you don't, that you person doesn't just die. I think that, that they go on somewhere else. I think that, I believe in reincarnation. I believe in uh, different levels.

07.13.28 One thing I'm having a hard time with, though, is, is you know, when people say that you know, as souls we come into the physical form knowing what our destiny is. And that we choose sometimes lives of difficulties for the acceleration of our soul's growth. And right now in the midst of this, you know, my mourning and grieving Sergio it's like how could I have chosen this, you know what I mean,?

07.14.00 This sucks. It does. (LAUGHS) I'm like what the hell was I thinking? But then it's like I have to say well, if I had to choose between having the time that I had with Sergio and going through this, or not having him at all, I mean, I have, I would d it a million times over, you know? But still it just.

- 07.14.30 And when I think about 9/11 and how everything happened, I think that faith in something else. Like I don't necessarily believe, I believe in a higher power, I don't like to call it God. You know? Because I just feel like people use the word God in ways that can destruct. And destroy. And it was proven on 9/11.
- 07.15.00 Like that word God always intimidated me. And I, I, Sergio and I had, that was one of our uh, differences was that he was religious, you know, he went to Catholic school, the whole thing, and he would cross himself at church, and every time we'd pass by and he would pray, you know? And uh, uh, every time I brought up my feelings about religion he you know, I would tell him, I just can't uh, I can't hang with it.
- 07.15.31 I always, whenever I hear God, I always associate wrath of God. I don't know why. I just, it just. I don't like to use, you know, and, and we you know, took some convincing on my part, but I didn't want to get married in a Catholic church. Because I felt also that it would be very hypocritical of me, because of my beliefs about religion, you know?
- 07.15.57 Which is funny 'cos now I find myself, we just got back from Europe and I want, went into like every church to light candles for Sergio. So weird (LAUGHS). But uh, when 9/11 happened, you know, first I couldn't, I couldn't give in that easy. That he was gone right away. You know?
- 07.16.30 I just couldn't. I was looking at, I was looking at all the (?) you know, my e-mails every week, well, it hasn't been every week, the past couple of months, but I was looking at my earlier e-mails and it was just like I was so full of hope. And uh, I guess I had to be. But I didn't want to believe that he was just taken, you know?
- 07.16.59 And the, the person that leveled that truth to me was Sergio with a channeler (LAUGHS). Crazy shit. You know?

JW: What do you mean he leveled that truth? You went back to a channeler?

- 07.17.17 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Well, what happened was when 9/11 happened uh, it was such, it's such, it's such a blur but then it's also so clear in my mind, you know?

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: Do me a favor and just go back a month or two before 9/11.

07.17.48 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Go back a month or two before 9/11? (PAUSE)

07.17.18 Well, June 30th was our 8 year, no our 7 year anniversary of the first kiss in Miami. And that was the day we got engaged.

07.18.38 So we were so happy, you know? Like everything which is finally, was had fallen into place, you know, we had, the week before that we had our housewarming party, 'cos we had moved into our new co-op that we bought in that past October, October, 2000.

07.19.02 And it took us that long to get the renovations done and for me to clean up and, you know, put things in order. And uh, so we just had this incredible year. I mean, you know, we had the store.

JW: Tell me about the store.

07.19.25 TANYA VILLANUEVA: The store? See Sergio was so good. (LAUGHS). Uh, when I moved to New York, I was waitressing. I'd waitressed for like 9 years. And as I was approaching my 30th birthday and nine, no what actually happened was my dad died. Not my biological dad. The one who raised me. My dad uh, he was sick for 5 years. He had a stroke after stroke after stroke after stroke.

07.20.03 And uh, and that started in '90, '93, '94. Ninety-three. So I had seen my dad, you know, progressively get worse over those years. And then when he ultimately died at 60, you know, I was like.

07.20.28 I'd always been one to do it anyway, it try and live life in a way that you don't regret. You know, and uh, one of my dreams had been to open this uh, a gift shop. Sergio and I had gone to a business you know, seminar, and I'd always talked about I'm gonna open a shop, I'm gonna open a shop, I'm gonna open a shop. But I needed to clear out all of my credit card debt, first, that I had acquired from all of my moves. Never give a college kid a credit card. Uh, so my dad died in October '98.

07.21.03 He actually died on the anniversary of the day that Sergio told me that he loved me. And that kind of like, that was my morality call. That was like, ok, you know, this is it, you know,

you're gonna die one day. It's ,this is your (?) this is reality. You know, and my dad had so many unfulfilled dreams, you know?

07.21.30 And it just made me say I, I want to make sure that I live my dreams, you know? And my dad was such a great teacher in that, you know, and he always, he always gave me the space. Him and my mom, to kind of just follow my path, which I, I uh, am forever grateful for. But I said, ok. This is it. I just basically had finished clearing out my debt.

07.22.02 I'm gonna open up. I'm gonna open up the shop. And Sergio was kind of hesitant about opening it up in our neighborhood, in Jackson Heights. And I told him, I said, honey. I'm telling you. I know it from my gut. Jackson Heights. We have to open it there. Look around, there's no other store like, like what we want to do. You know, there's an incredible amount of foot traffic, there's all of these things that are in place. this is the place to do it. He's like, you sure? I'm like I'm telling you, trust me, I know what I'm talking about.

07.22.36 And sure enough, we you know, by uh, January that, that dry cleaners away uh, uh, a couple of blocks away from our apartment, our old apartment you know, was, came, came open for rent. And I said, that's gonna be the store. And we walked in there, and it was such a shit hole. I mean, (LAUGHS) It was like oh.

07.22.57 We looked at it and I'm saying honey, uh, this is, I'm telling you, we're gonna make it beautiful. A little paint, you know? (LAUGHS) he's like, yeah? I'm like, yeah. And he trusted me. He did trust me. He always knew that you know, I could throw it together. So. We signed the lease February of '99 and then we opened it symbolically on the first day of spring, '99. New life, you know. And you know, Sergio just jumped right in with me. You know?

07.23.30 I uh, it was my baby, you know what I mean,? Like, 'cos I felt like I had always wanted to do it, and Sergio was a cop and, and you know, I just felt like it was my baby. He made it his baby, too. You know, and then we just worked it together. We went to all the shows together. When he wasn't working, he was with me in the store. He would take his vacations so that when it was busy times, Christmas, everything, he was there with me in the store.

07.23.57 And it was like people would come in and see me and Sergio there, and we would know the families. We would know your kids. You know, it was kind of like a neighborhood shop, and we couldn't have been happier. You know? And before we opened it, I was trying to

come up with names for it. And I had the two choices. One was Calling All Angels. Right. And (LAUGHS) that's based (~JW~) that's based on this song by Jane Sibberry.

07.24.34 She did a duet with k.d. lang, and then ultimately it was in the uh, eventually it was in the uh, Pay It Forward soundtrack. Calling All Angels. Beautiful song. It was between that and Inner Peace. 'Cos I used to always kind of just write inner peace, my quest for inner peace: Go to Germany, find out my, close that circle, get inner peace. It was all about inner peace. But then it was like, well, we'd also provide a sanctuary in Jackson Heights for people to go into, that they could buy things to make their homes sanctuaries.

07.25.07 You know, candles, picture frames, all of these things, books medication, all of this great stuff that. So hopefully all of us will have inner peace, right? And when we did it, it was just like uh, everyone who walked into that store was just like where did this come from? And there, they were just like it feels so good in here, and the, the I mean, just love.

07.25.33 Just love from everyone who walked into that store. Uh, who's still walking into that store, even though I can't be there. You know? It smells so good in here, what do you have for this? What do you have? And Sergio knew his candles. (LAUGHS) Sergio, he was just the ultimate, you know, ultimate. He was such a good salesman. He was everything, you know? And he, and to watch him also interact with other people, you know, he had like the patience was so extra.

07.26.07 You know? He was just amazing. He loved like senior citizens would come in. He would love to come and take them around, and he, he was so good. Babies. You know? All the, like the kids in the neighborhood, you know? And it was fun. I mean, he and I would work together and we would just kind of like sometimes stop and say honey, this is our shop.

07.26.34 You know, look how crazy this is. You know, and it was always like that. Yeah. So that's why I can't be there, which is so stupid, but I just can't. 'Cos that was like me and him. And even when he wasn't there, you know, he would call up and, and uh, tell me he's on his way to work. He's about to drive by so I could run out and give him a kiss, you know?

07.27.01 And uh, or I would kiss him in the store and he was like, come on, honey, the customers are gonna see. Come on. You know? And he was just, it was home. That was our second home. That was our baby, you know?

JW: He at the time was a cop?

TANYA VILLANUEVA: He at the time was a cop, and then he got (?)

(SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION)

07.27.25 TANYA VILLANUEVA: He was, he was, Sergio was a uh, first of all, he, first he grew up in the restaurant business. His father owned a restaurant.

JW: Yeah, give me a little bit of that (?)

(SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION)

07.27.37 TANYA VILLANUEVA: (~JW~) Who Sergio was. Sergio was the child of uh, Angelo and Delia, Argentinean immigrants. Angelo came to this country with \$50 bucks in his pocket and uh, they built this life for, for him, his brother Steven and sister Maricell. He worked like crazy his dad, to, to put food on the table, to send them to Catholic school, to you know, give them everything that they wanted.

07.28.04 And Delia, you know, stayed home with them and really kept them straight, you know. And very loving. Born on the 4th of July, which is just unbelievable, you know? But anyway, uh, his father eventually after working as busboy, dishwasher, whatever, in a restaurant, opened up his own restaurant, and Sergio worked with him in the restaurant for many years.

07.28.32 And then he took all the tests after graduating high school, he went to uh, Queens College for a couple of years, but he took the civil service exams, policemen, fireman, uh, electrician, you know, and he got called for the cops uh, and started the academy in June '93. Two. June, '92, some, somewhere around there. Worked in the 4-6 in the Bronx, very busy precinct.

07.29.04 Uh, and he loved it, he loved being a cop, he loved, he loved the action. He loved making arrests. He loved hanging with his boys, you know? And he has like medals, medals, you know? Very (~JW~)

JW: For what?

- 07.29.21 TANYA VILLANUEVA: For various arrests you know, excellent police duty, meritorious police duty, commendations. You know, he's in the law, he's actually in the law book, law books, for one case that he worked with his partner. They had uh, uh, recovered a gun from somebody running and they had to, they made it law that uh, it was a concealment of weapon kind of things uh, kind of. But it was an important case, so it made the law books. And he was just very ambitious in it also.
- 07.29.56 You know, he, he wanted to, he studied for the sergeant's exam and he didn't make it. But he then went the detective's route. So he moved over to OCCB, Organized Crime Control, and he worked in narcotics for uh, a year, two years. And then he became promoted to detective. And then he had taken the fire exam early, like '93, I think. And that list, it's such a long wait.
- 07.30.30 They finally called him. And at this point he was already so established as a cop he really was like, do I want to go? I, I, you know, I love being a cop. I love doing what I do. I love this, I love that. And my whole thing was, you know, you have more time in the store. And also once we start to have kids, we'll have more time with the kids, and it's a safer job, you know? I think, I mean, it was. I thought it was.
- 07.30.58 You know, and at that time, too, there was, there was just such a uh, bad feelings between the city and cops. Like they weren't as respected any more, you know, and. So I just said, you know, so we said, just give it a try for a year, you know, and you can always go back if you didn't like it. You could always have gone back. So finally he, he said he would do it, you know, everybody told him.
- 07.31.30 Not just me. Uh, all of his cop friends said, you'd be crazy, try it, you know, go for it. So he went to the academy (~JW~)

JW: Did your, do you think, think you were sort of (?) regrets attitude influenced him? I mean that in a good way, I don't mean that in this particular situation. (?)

- 07.31.49 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Yeah, I think so. I definitely did. I said, if you don't try it, 'cos this is your only opportunity, you'll regret not trying it. You can always go back to being a cop. You know? And everybody was telling him, you should at least try it, 'cos so many firemen, they love that job.

- 07.32.05 So I did, absolutely, you know? And uh, and then his first day he hated it (LAUGHS) I felt so bad. 'Cos he went in and he was late and, and they didn't cut his hair short enough, so they kind of like pushed him out in front of the whole class, made him do push ups, uh, you know? And here he was from being a very established detective, he's a probie again.
- 07.32.32 So it was very hard for him. The only difference was he was able to carry his time over from, from the cops, which was good, you know? 'Cos a lot of, a lot of fireman are called at 34 years old and they're making \$24,000 a year, which is like nothing, you know? But he was able to carry his time over, so he had some seniority there. But you know, he, he's, he was starting to get into the job, but he still always said how much he missed being a cop.
- 07.33.04 You know. And that was one of the things maybe, if I could uh, I, I kick myself. You know? That I'm like no, honey don't go back this is such a good gig, blablabla, you know? 'Cos he would, he would still question. Maybe I want to go, I miss being a cop. I think I want to go back. He would talk, he would see his cop friends that would make him want to go back more.
- 07.33.32 And they would tell him, don't, are you kidding? Don't go back. You know, you got it made. You know? And even uh, the, the week before 9/11 when we were, we were on a cruise, we got back on September 2nd on that cruise, he said that he doesn't know something about the job.
- 07.34.00 He just wants to, you know, he doesn't know. He misses being a cop. So that kind of like fucked with me. It fucked with me a lot. And 'cos I was telling him, no honey, you know. Don't go back. It's a different job now, being a cop.
- 07.34.28 And then I, you know, I feel like Sergio left me like a little things to whenever I start questioning you know? Like I was questioning myself, I was (?) saying, how could I tell him not to go back to being a cop? Maybe he was sensing that something bad was gonna happen, you know?
- 07.34.55 And then uh, in his, you know, in one of his drawers of all of his cop stuff, I found uh, an article from uh, the Daily News. And it was about a fire in the Bronx when he was a cop. And it was on New York 1, I remember. And his name wasn't mentioned in this article, but he was at that fire as a cop. And he scaled the side of the building to rescue this little boy.

07.35.29 So I said, Ok, whether he was a cop or a fireman, I, I have to tell myself this, you know, he would have been at the World Trade Center that day. I have to, you know? (PAUSE) It's so stupid. (PAUSE)

07.36.06 I just. I still can't believe it. (LAUGHS). And those couple of months, you know, in between, we were just so happy and uh, we had so much to do. We were supposed to go and book our, our hall. We found the hall.

07.36.28 And we're supposed to book our hall on Thursday the 13th. For our wedding, you know? And I just, it's so surreal to me, like I can't believe it. (PAUSE) So anyway, I keep feeling like I keep on going off on all these tangents.

JW: You're doing great.

07.36.57 TANYA VILLANUEVA: I mean, I try to tell myself all of these different things to keep myself you know, going, so to speak, you know? One of them is uh, you know, whether he was a cop or a fireman or a construction worker or a taxi cab driver, Sergio was the kind of guy he would have been there that day. Another thing is they say, well, if he was, if he survived it, would he have been the same after that?

07.37.31 Knowing that, you know, so many of his friends are gone and seeing such, I mean, devastation you know? And I was looking at my e-mails and I was thinking that, too, early on. You know, all I could think about, I didn't want to give into Sergio not coming home. And all I could think about was, you know, he's in there for a reason, 'cos he wouldn't be able to handle it outside, you know?

07.37.58 Uh, it, it's too much, and I would tell everybody in my e-mails, please send, send strength and love to all of the firemen and rescue workers who are working around the clock to, to get them out, to bring them home, you know? Because Lord knows what they're seeing every day. (PAUSE) And that's one thing I say. But bottom line is that, you know, it shouldn't have happened.

JW: But uh, that's a really mature uh, response to the other side because it sounds like his commitment to what he was doing not only would have brought him there but how he would have felt afterwards. It's just (?) interesting.

- 07.39.58 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Yeah. I just feel like, you know, I, it's so easy not easy, I can't even say like, I want to grieve in a way that's, it's so stupid. Like all of these things you think about, but I want to make sure that I'm doing the best that I can in my grieving. You know, that I'm not ,you know, drinking and I'm not, I'm trying to get as much sleep as I can and I'm trying to you know, eat as, as well as I can. And I'm trying to go to therapy and I'm trying to do all of these things.
- 07.39.33 And then with that I say, ok, in those moments of complete and utter despair and hopelessness, you know, there's always like you always have to go two, two sides to every coin, right? So besides the firemen, if he wasn't a fireman, police construction worker, I say, you know, for me I have to be thankful, right? I have to be grateful. Have to be grateful that you know, for the time that I had with Sergio.
- 07.40.02 I have to be grateful that I'm not in, you know, that I'm, I'm in a position where I, I don't have to go back to the store right now. I have to be grateful for you know, for my therapy, for all the girls. Uh, I have to be grateful that I, I can grieve with people who understand what I'm going through, right? But then at the same time, it's like how fucked up is that?
- 07.40.29 That you're grateful for people to, to grieve with you. 'Cos that means that they're, they're grieving because they lost somebody too. So it's like so you're grateful that they lost somebody uh, it's. It's just crazy. It's like uh, I feel all over the place. And I'm trying to keep balanced. I'm trying to keep balancing.
- 07.40.57 I say, OK, I'm not the first one to go through this, you know, I'm certainly not gonna be the last, and I'm certainly not alone right now. You know? Suffering goes on all around the world. Every minute of (?) every second of every day, somebody's suffering somewhere, you know? But (?) why? Why does it have to be the suffering in the first place. That's my, I said, those are my big questions. That's where I seek out all of my spiritual counselors, you know?

JW: But your nature is, I mean, clearly from your life and the way you (?) lived your life, you're a (why?) person.

07.41.41 TANYA VILLANUEVA: A why person, yeah. And I've always been one, too, that, that has said, you know, you never know what tomorrow's gonna bring, right? And (?) but still. I think, it's still unbelievable.

07.42.02 You know what I mean? It's just still, you never know what tomorrow's gonna bring and then it, it really brings you something this horrendous. It's like what do you do?

JW: Can you talk about the day.

07.42.20 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Yep. That morning, Sergio was working uh, see and this is another thing, too. Like that I think about. Sergio wasn't scheduled to work that night. The Monday night. We were the Sunday, the 9th, Sunday the 9th we were, he got up to go play soccer. The opening game. And he scored the goal.

07.42.59 And then we were on our way to uh, our friend's daughter's first birthday.

JW: He loved soccer?

TANYA VILLANUEVA: He loved soccer. He did. (~JW~)

JW: Tell me about that.

07.43.09 TANYA VILLANUEVA: He was crazy about soccer. He was just nuts. It was all (LAUGHS) about the pick up games of soccer, you know? Even the day that we got engaged, he was at Flushing Meadow Park. I guess he had to also kind of run off a lot of his nerves, but he was at Flushing Meadow Park, and he came home late, to for us to go to dinner, 'cos he was playing soccer. And at nighttime, the game, the TV would come on and it would ESPN soccer.

07.43.32 Or Fox Sports News soccer. Or the Spanish channel, soccer, soccer, soccer. And you know, he had the goals in the trunk. The collapsible goals in the trunk. His jerseys. And (?) one of the times that I remember the most that like wearing you know, he just, Sergio and I, we were able to, I could just go up to him and go, I love you so much.

- 07.44.04 I would just go and give him a hug. I love you so much, and then he would go, well, what was that for? And then I would say, well, I was thinking about the time when you (?) and that's why I love you. Ok, and then he would do it, say, I love you, honey. What was that, why? What were you thinking? Well, I was thinking about (?) So. We were always, and we could always tell each other that we loved each other.
- 07.44.27 It was never, you know, 5, 10, gazillion times a day. And uh, just hug each other and just tell him. We were so happy.
- JW: So once you got past that initial saying I love you, it kind of?
- 07.44.40 TANYA VILLANUEVA: It was just opened. It was just a whole can of worms, you know? It was great. But uh, one moment that I remember was that, 'cos he loved soccer so much. You know, we have the, the Argentina jerseys. And he took me once to, to watch a game in Corona, and here I am with (LAUGHS) this Argentina soccer jersey on,
- 07.45.02 And he bought me a hat and him a hat. It's this Jokers hat with the tassels hanging on it and a bell here. Light blue and white. You know, and here I am in this bar in Corona, watching a soccer match with all these Argentineans. And I hate soccer (LAUGHS). But I wanted to be there with him, you know? And they lost that day. He was devastated.
- 07.45.27 People were crying in the streets. And during the summer, last summer, Argentina was playing a game and he was, he would catch every game, whether it was 2 o'clock in the morning, whatever, he would catch every game. And he was in the living room, and I remember I knew how I, I loved to make him laugh, and I knew how I would get him. Was that while he wasn't looking I went in and put on the jersey and the hat and I'm in the kitchen and I'm just waiting, I'm listening for the, for the guy to scream out, you know, goal.
- 07.46.00 So I'm chopping vegetables or washing dishes or doing whatever it is that I'm doing in the kitchen. And I'm waiting but all of the sudden he comes into the kitchen and he finds me there, just standing there like this. And he was behind me. And he (?) starts laughing and he says, what are you doing? And I said, oh, I wanted to run out, you know, and, and scream goal when (?) they scored. And he just grabbed me and he just, I love you so much, you know?

- 07.46.27 That made him like the happiest man in the world. So then he made me run. He said, show me what you were gonna do, show me what you were gonna do? (LAUGHS). So here I go running at top speed in the house (LAUGHS) screaming goal. Hating soccer, but doing it just because it made him happy, you know? And another time he came home and just we had gotten back from (?) come back from the cruise, that was the week before. And I did a good, I, I felt like I needed to cleanse the house.
- 07.47.59 But you know, cleanse, like do a spiritual cleansing, which is something that I you know, I had done maybe twice before. Where you light the sage and you, you ask for protection in the home and I don't know why. So I cleaned all the floors, and I done, gone around with the, the sage doing, and brought rose quartz in, rose quartz for love and, and uh, protection. Weird, you know? Had all the candles on, I had the windows open, and he comes home from work, and he just looked at me like, I love, I love this, I love this.
- 07.47.34 You got the candles out. He just, he was so happy. You know? And it made me so happy. (?) (PAUSE) This shit sucks. (PAUSE)
- 07.47.58 Soccer and golf (LAUGHS). So on the morning, so the day we were supposed to, the 9th we were going to our friend's house (STOPS)

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

07.48.31 END OF TAPE # TV-005, 2 of 4

TAPE # TV - 006
TANYA VILLANUEVA
08.05.02
JIM WHITAKER, Producer/Director
PROJECT REBIRTH

08.00.30 PICTURE UP

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

- 08.00.49 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Ok, so the day, the 9th he was uh, scheduled to work the Sunday night into Monday, into Monday night. Twenty-four. And we were on our way to our friend's uh, daughter's first birthday.
- 08.01.07 And he says, oh, it's too bad I, I can only stay like a half an hour. I said, oh, that sucks. He was like, you know what? Let me call. And so he called the firehouse, and whoever answered uh, said that they would switch with him. That they would take his, he would work, they would take his uh, Sunday (?) I can't even remember the days. Then they called back and said you know what better, work for me the following Saturday.
- 08.01.38 So he says he was so happy. You know, that's great, whatever, so we had time to go to this, to Chloe's party. So we had this great day at the party and, and uh, we stayed late, you know, we had a beer with Chloe's mom and dad, Fitz and Lorna.
- 08.01.57 And then we went home. And like in, like in, I said at his eulogy, he had such a great last week. You know? And then he left me that next morning. And I, I struggled to really remember. I know that he left me with a kiss, 'cos he always did. But I'm trying to remember if I was up out of the bed, if I stayed in bed, I can't, I can't remember. I do remember the last time that we spoke, which was on the Monday night uh, right after midnight.
- 08.02.31 And I remember that it was that time 'cos I was on the computer. And we, you know, I was, he was on the phone with me. How is your night, blablablabla, and we're talking. And I kind of felt like I wasn't giving him all of my attention. You know? Ok, honey, bye, I love you, I love you, too. We hang up and, and I felt that at that second, so I wrote him an e-mail at that moment.
- 08.03.00 Twelve, I think it was twelve ten AM. Just I love you. Just so I felt you know, so that's how I know that that was the last time we spoke. And then Tuesday the 11th, that was the first day I was ever gonna vote in my life. Because I had become a citizen in 2000, no, '99, I think.
- 08.03.29 Sergio was there when I became an American citizen, which was a big deal for me, I cried. And he was the only one there with me. And uh, so it was a big deal, I was gonna vote. And I was also voting because our lawyer, Rudy, was running for city council. So I remember I was up, it was like 8 o'clock in the morning, I was doing my nails. And I had New York One on, and the report starts to come over that a plane crashed into the World Trade Center.

- 08.04.00 But you know, it was like, what everyone thought, it was a small plane. It was an accident, it was, you know. And I saw it on, I mean, I saw the, I saw the video of it, and I still couldn't conceive of what the size of it, the enormity of it was, because it's on TV and I didn't really know those buildings too well, so I didn't really, I couldn't put it into proportion that was relative to what it was, you know?
- 08.04.29 So I remember I, I called my mom at work. Ma, plane crashed into the World Trade Center. I called Sergio's mom, and I think I called the firehouse. I don't know if I called right before or right after the second. I'm sure I called the firehouse, but it was busy. And I called Dalia, and then I started worrying about Maricell, Sergio's sister's husband, Lewis, because I know he worked at the World Trade Center.
- 08.05.08 And the second plane had hit. So now it was like, I'm calling everybody saying, you know, I called up uh, my girlfriend in California. So it was 5, like 5 o'clock in the morning there. I'm like girl, we're under terrorist attack. And it was kind of like, it was like so, when I think about how I was, it was kind of like almost removed from it, just like a commentating in a weird funny, stupid way.
- 08.05.35 Girl, we're under terrorist attack. Called my mom at work, you know, and then, now I started really getting concerned about Lewis. Where's Lewis? And then I started thinking that the guys from Sergio's assigned firehouse, Sergio was assigned to Engine 4 at the South Street Sea Port, but he was rotating, because he was a probationary firefighter at Ladder 132 in Brooklyn.
- 08.06.00 So I started thinking of those guys while they're at that job, you know, it's a big job. And I called the firehouse a couple of times and no answer or busy. And then the buildings, the building came down. The first tower came down. And I watched it as it came down, and again, that primal scream. That scream.
- 08.06.29 It was (?) just like that feeling of like what I felt when Hildegard told me that uh, Sigrid hung herself. It was that you just can't, it just, and I felt like for a split second, Sergio's in there? No he's not in there. It was just that quick. It was, Sergio's dead, no he's not. And I couldn't believe that, you know? And then I said, no, he's supposed to be coming home, you know, he's on his way home.
- 08.06.57 And then I called the cell, but his machine kept on picking up right away, and so I said, shit he didn't leave yet. So then I started thinking, they probably are gonna go down. He's

gonna look for his, his boys. From Engine 4. 'Cos that's, that's you know, I was like, all the guys from Engine 4 are gone. That, that was the other thing. All the guys from 4 are gone, you know? The second tower. I mean, collapsed. It was just, couldn't believe it.

08.07.28 And by this point, by 10 o'clock, we found Lewis. Lewis had been in Building (?) 7, and as soon as the first building got hit, they all started leaving. Which was a blessing. I mean,, could you imagine? So Maricell found him, and it was, I remember feeling so awful for her, 'cos everyone was calling her, where's Lewis, where's Lewis? And she's like, I don't know, you know, she was flipping out. And, and then uh, I didn't hear from him.

08.08.00 Uh, but I'm saying, he's working, he's just working. You know, and then people are calling here, have you heard from Sergio, have you heard from Sergio? And then my house just started filling up, people, friends started coming over, my mom comes. My, and before I know it I have like 20, 30 people in my house. All of our friends, you know, neighbors stopping by.

JW: Where's your head right now?

TANYA VILLANUEVA: Right now at this moment?

JW: No, at this point in time (?)

TANYA VILLANUEVA: At this point here?

JW: No, no, at the point in time when everyone, when the house started filling up?

08.08.37 TANYA VILLANUEVA: My head was like, I was focusing on. Sergio, all I could think about was Sergio is looking for his friends from Engine 4. All those lives, and all those lives. All of those lives lost. And Sergio is looking for his friends from Engine 4. And.

JW: Sounds like you couldn't conceive that he was almost (?) The imagine I'm painting in my head is (?) that everybody started to fill the room, were you kind of going like (?)

- 08.09.13 TANYA VILLANUEVA: No, I was like uh, that they went there after the buildings collapsed. And they're there working. They're there working. And then they started to put on the news, and then you see the Pentagon get hit.
- 08.09.31 Uh, I mean, it was just, it was such mayhem, right? And I mean, I was fixed on the news, and then they started to broadcast the number for the fire department families to call, which was Metro-tech's number for information about the firefighters. And I remember Mayor Guillanni coming on also and saying that it's beyond you know, what any of us would ever want to imagine, uh, the amount of lives lost, you know?
- 08.10.05 But I still would not, I could not give in that Sergio was there. I uh, Sergio was dead, no, you know? My whole thing was he was working, trying to find the guys from Engine 4. So much so that when we went, somebody instructed us to go to Fort Tatten, which is one of the training areas for the fire department to get information.
- 08.10.30 So we went to Fort Tatten, and there was a wives, sisters, there were some other people there upstairs. They sent us upstairs. They said, we'll (STUTTER) get a list from the hospitals coming up, or whatever, you know, or list of. And it was just so like, (?) this is so weird to me. It was just very strange, you know? And I remember seeing somebody and I think she had an Engine 4 sweatshirt on.
- 08.11.00 And I, said, who are you, you know? And she said, my brother. He was from, I think, I think it was Engine 4. He uh, it was Engine 4. And all I could think was I'm so sorry. I knew that he was gone, I'm so sorry, you know? And then somebody came in and told one of the wives that her husband was on the missing list.
- 08.11.28 And she dropped to her knees, and she let out such a wail. (PAUSE) And then I just looked at her and, and I looked at Delia and, and Maricell, it was me, Delia, Maricell, Lewis, 'cos Steven was still in Seattle. And I think Jenny might have been there, and I was like we got to go. We just, we have to go. I didn't want to stay.
- 08.12.00 This isn't the right place for us, you know? So we went home and my house is packed. All of my friends were there, there was food (?) it was just, it was just craziness. And my girlfriend Jenny, she's a massage therapist. I don't know what I would have done without her, but she just was massaging me, massaging me. She just kind of like, you know, everyone was there sitting vigil with me, basically waiting for news.

- 08.12.31 And I was just trying to stay very you know, we're gonna hear from him, just a matter of time, you know, the communications are down. I was very calm and was, you know. And I kept on calling that number. And then his name, I don't know if uh, if, if they told me from the firehouse first that he was on the list, or, or if Metro-tech told me. I, I can't remember what, who told me first, that he was on, that none of the guys from the truck can be found.
- 08.13.03 They're on the missing list. But there's so much confusion, we don't know where anybody is, blablablalaba. I started getting calls all, I remember getting calls from everywhere. From my family in Germany, my family in the Philippines, my friends in California, I mean, everyone started calling me, and so I started thinking right away, I've got to keep people posted. So I started to send out e-mails.
- 08.13.31 And I, I looked at the first couple of e-mails and it's like (?), it's so far from where, you know, it was just like stay hopeful. You know, that they, I thought in my mind also when he was on that list, I said, well, he's in a pocket somewhere. But the way I envisioned it was like kind of like The Terminator almost, like you know, when they show these underground cities after Armageddon, where there's like, there's standing around uh, it was just so silly in my head when I think about it.
- 08.14.06 These big oil drum garbage cans with fire coming out and everybody warming their hands. And this is how I conceived of where Sergio was. He was in a huge, dark area with a fire and but there was food and everyone was Ok, and just waiting. You know? And I kept that image. I, I held on to that forever. And uh, anyone who mentioned, anyone who said I'm so sorry, anyone who gave me a card saying that he's in a better place, I wanted to rip their heads off.
- 08.14.38 I was like, you don't know that yet. You know, I mean, it was just (?) what was the worst, the worst besides the fact that we first go the, there (?)two moments that stuck out in my head. Two things. One was Wednesday, they told me at 2 o'clock in the morning Tuesday that he was on that missing list. I don't know if it was the guys from the firehouse.
- 08.14.59 Or Metro-tech. Wednesday, some, one of Sergio's old friends who I had never met before comes running into my house. I don't know who this guy is, and he's heading straight for me, so I'm thinking he's here to bring me the news that Sergio's not coming home. Uh, I'm, and I go up to him and I'm like how are you, I'm Tanya, you know. And he goes, hi, I'm

Andy, whatever. I was like (?) don't ever run into my house like that again. You, you know what I mean? I was just like, I don't know you.

- 08.15.33 You're running at me uh, and all I'm, all I'm (?) I'm on edge for is that somebody's gonna come into my house and tell me that Sergio's dead, you know? Well, he gets on the phone, and everyone's calling Metro-tech now. Everybody is to get the information who is on the missing list, who's not. Turns out that Sergio's name isn't on the missing list any more. They got it, he's ok and accounted for.
- 08.15.57 He's Ok and accounted for? Ok, so what (?) you're telling me he's not on the missing list. So he's (?) not dead? Nope, he's, it says right here he's Ok and accounted for. Ok, well, where is he? Well, we don't have that information for you yet, but he's Ok and accounted for. And then there was this list that came up on the internet. I don't know if you remember hearing about this. And they listed, they had a list of all of the missing people and what their status was. And Sergio's name, sure enough, OK, accounted for.
- 08.16.32 But no hospital, no nothing. So after ten calls to completely make sure that you're absolutely positive that he's not on the missing list, he's OK. Yeah, he's not dead, he's ok. Now I'm telling everybody, everybody who's in my house. He's Ok, and accounted for. I remember, He's OK and accounted for. And we're all jumping and whooping and we're hollering and screaming and crying and tears of joy and so happy, and I'm like ok, I got to get ready, I got to go, I got to, I got to put make up on, I got to take a shower, I don't want him to see me all busted looking, and I'm gonna go and find him, you know?
- 08.17.08 Where do you go? We had nowhere, we had no idea where to go. We're waiting, we're waiting for a call. We're waiting, somebody tell us what hospital he's in, what hospital's, what hospital, nothing. We have no idea. So then they're like (you know?) we should go out there with fliers, because now on the news you see everybody out there with fliers, you know? So I'm like ok, ok, ok.
- 08.17.30 So I uh, automatically I put up, put up a flier, I print up a flier on the computer. I scanned Sergio's picture, which happens to be a picture that I, the last picture I took of him on September 9th, when we got home from Chloe's party, I had one roll left in the camera. One picture left in the, on the roll in the camera. And I snapped this picture of him when I had it developed. So and I put on, I put out his, his missing poster, you know? Which is just so surreal to me. You know?

- 08.18.01 And uh, I even photocopied his ID, I, I put so much information on that poster, you know? To, tattoo on his right pelvic bone. Uh, previously fractured wrist. Tax ID number, what the fuck did I have to put his tax ID number for? Uh, (?) former detective badge number. Uh, (?). All this stupid, crazy information. My home phone number, you know?
- 08.18.30 And I had to, not just make copies. It had to be color laser copies (LAUGHS). 'Cos I'm it's just like the craziest things that you think of, you know? So my friends, and I remember and it was so campy like. I said, let's all get into a prayer circle. Somebody suggests we have to get into a prayer circle. So we all joined hands and we formed this huge circle in my dining room. And I think about that and it's like how fucking weird was that? That we have this? And I'm like, ok, we have to pray but here, who am I?
- 08.19.03 Miss Religion, I don't pray right? (LAUGHS) and, and all the sudden my mom starts talking 'cos she didn't know what to say 'cos every, I was just waiting for somebody to start and my mom just said, ok, Sergio come home. Tanya, Tanya wants you to come home. You know, just come home. We're gonna (?), you know, and now we're all crying and, and now it's like, all right everybody, go, go out and go on home and bring home my man, you know? And then people are coming up to me, don't worry he's in there, he's not, he's not gonna uh, uh, not marry you and soon as he gets out of there he's taking you straight to church and, you know.
- 08.19.37 All of this. (PAUSE) So then this fucking guy, Andy, gets on Spanish TV saying my cousin (LAUGHS) with Sergio's poster and it's like are you kidding?
- 08.20.00 And then nobody, nobody calls. And then Thursday, the second day that sticks out of my head that I just want to die over is the firefighter's call. We just want to come over. And bring you some food. Well, what do you mean you just want to come over and bring me some food? Now I had met the firefighters once at the picnic, the company picnic that summer, you know? And we just want to come over and bring you some food.
- 08.20.31 Ok, well, what do you mean you just want to come over and bring me some food? Yeah, no, we just want to come over and bring you some food and sit down with you for a while. Are, are you coming over to tell me that Sergio's not coming home? No, no, no, no, we just want to come over and bring you some food. Ok. Hang up the phone. Maricell. I don't know, the firefighters said that they just want to come over and bring us some food. Why do they want to come over and bring you some food?

- 08.20.59 I said, I don't know, it doesn't sound right, right. Uh, you think that they're gonna come and tell? I'm gonna call back. Are you sure you're just coming over to bring over some food? Yeah uh, we just wanted to bring you some food. You, you mean to tell me you're not coming over to tell me that Sergio's dead, because from what I understand the only reason why a firefighter's gonna come to my house now is to tell me that Sergio's dead. They said no, no, we just want to bring you some food. Are you sure? (PAUSE)
- 08.21.33 They said, yeah, we just want to sit with you and talk and bring you some food. And then they came with trays of food (LAUGHS). (PAUSE) And I felt so bad. (PAUSE)
- 08.22.00 And they brought these rice balls over and I'm like ready to lose my mind now (LAUGHS) because I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. And I told them, I told all of my friends, I don't know how many friends in my house, save me one rice ball (LAUGHS). Sure enough, they ate all the rice balls (LAUGHS) and I, I, that was it, I lost it. Who ate my fucking rice ball? (LAUGHS) And the person who ate the rice ball can tell you how crunchy they felt. They were just (LAUGHS) like that wasn't supposed, oh, man.
- 08.22.33 It's horrible. In the meantime I'm trying to write e-mails to keep everybody posted and to (?) you know, and (let's?) stay hopeful. I, you know, I'm sticking with what I know. You know? I know that I have to take this minute by minute. I know that Sergio's unaccounted for. That's all that he is. And until somebody tells me something else, that's what I have to stick with, you know? I know that Sergio left with no regrets.
- 08.23.00 I know that (?) you know, all of these things. I know that I know how to take care of myself minute to minute. And then uh, weeks go by. And I didn't want to give in because somebody said that (PAUSE) it's been documented that a person trapped, you know, from an earthquake (?) lived up to 28 days without food and water. You know?
- 08.23.35 So I said, well, I, I can't give in until at least that point. Because who knows what's down there? No one knows what's down there, no one has any idea. You know? And uh, it was the 4th weekend and uh, I was at the end of my rope, you know?
- 08.24.01 And uh, I remember it might have been after 2 weeks, somebody from the firehouse called and said they're gonna do a vigil for the guys at 132, for the Brooklyn companies at the Brooklyn Museum. That's another moment that sticks out in my head. And the families are all invited to go down. And that was I think the first time I left my house. I didn't want to

leave my house. I wanted to stay near the phone, I wanted to be there for when Sergio came home, you know? And uh.

08.24.35 I go to this thing with my family, this is the first time I've, I'm in the firehouse. I had driven by, picked up Sergio a couple of times, but I'd never gone in. And I'm looking around it just felt so surreal and, and there's all these, you know families and people and, and uh, I (?) overhear somebody talking and, and then I just said uh, I think they were talking about it like it's all final.

08.25.01 And I said am I, am I supposed to be giving up hope now? And they said, no, no, no, not at all, you know? And then we got to this what's supposed to be a vigil and they're talking about them like they were dead. And I was like, the nerve of these fucking people, you know? It's only 2 weeks, and now I think I'm like (PAUSE) you know?

08.25.30 I, I had to, I had to hold on to that hope for that month, I had to. And but, at 4 weeks, I started thinking and I'm, I'm, I think I'm losing my mind now because like you know, uh, I start, I start doubting, I'm doubting. Did Sergio and I, did we exist? Did you know, all of these little signs that I was getting, I was getting the craziest signs.

JW: What do you mean?

08.26.01 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Like uh, like bunnies (LAUGHS). And I'm saying, is he sending these to me to tell me to hold on, or is he sending them to me because he crossed over? I don't, I (?) you know, I, like one, one was my vows. Our wedding vows came to me, you know? Which was just the most bizarre thing. 'Cos I had, we had chosen our wedding vows.

08.26.30 I had found them on the internet and I had printed them, and I had shown them to him, and I said, what, what do you think? And he says, oh, I love these. You know, so I saved them in my wedding planner that I made. You know, and then this was our wedding planner. And uh, and then that, that week, the following weekend some wedding books came that were addressed to my (?) store, but they wound up in my house.

08.27.01 And in those wedding books, the page that I opened up to was our vows, it was just like bizarre. And then bunnies everywhere. Just I have to, I would have to read the e-mail 'cos it's so, there's so many. Could I read it? (LAUGHS)

JW: Do whatever you want.

- 08.27.25 TANYA VILLANUEVA: And this actually gives you the history of the. Here we go. I wrote this e-mail on Valentine's Day. Ok. Uh, My heart is heavy because this is not the way I envisioned Valentine's to be for the rest of my life, without Sergio. But I'm up. Trying to get through this day and I had been wondering how I would honor him today, and decided that I would share with you all of the little messages, miracles really, that Sergio has sent me since the 11th.
- 08.28.03 Some of you know about them already, and I just felt I wanted to share them again, so bear with me. First a little history. Those closest to us knew that Sergio and I called each other Bunny. And the teasing was relentless, but it was our pet name and we didn't care what anyone thought. He bought me a magnet, which I still have the wrapping paper for which says, some bunny loves you. And I have a picture of us near our bed which is in a frame that says Honey Bunny. As we were planning our wedding, I did a lot of research online for our honeymoon, an Eastern Mediterranean cruise which I'm still planning on going on, which I didn't go on, and put all of the links in a favorites folder I labeled Bunny Moon.
- 08.28.34 He loved that and we cracked up about it. In our last e-mail to each other, I had sent him our wedding page, which I had set up at The Knot.com, a wedding (?) resources website. Which includes a picture of us, our history, etc. And I asked him what I thought. Hi, Daddy, what do you think? Hey, babe, great job. I love it. And this was September 8th. You are so talented. Love the story, very funny. Now we really have to go to the Fountainhead and reserve the hall.
- 08.29.00 I love you so much Bunny. Big Daddy. And the last full message that was saved, that he left for me on September 6th at 7:25 PM, was at the store, and thankfully my friend, Will, was able to put it onto CD before it got lost. His voice was hoarse, since Argentina beat Brazil the night before, and he was on his way to play pool. Hi, Honey, it's me. I just got home, got my pool stick and I was on my out, and I said, you know, you know what? I didn't call the Bunny while I was there, so I tried to catch you at the store, but you're not there. Uh, maybe I'll see you walking down the block.

- 08.29.29 Ok, (?) Ok, by honey. I love you, bye. Now the miracles. My girlfriend, Christina, works as a set decorator for Sex and the City, and on Monday the 10th, she Fed-exed a box to our store which is 3 blocks away from where we live. We never opened the store on the 11th, and for 3 weeks after that. But somehow or other, the box was delivered to our house on that Wednesday, even though the box was clearly labeled Inner Peace. Since everything was so uncertain, Christina intercepted that box and hid it under the couch, knowing that inside were wedding books for me.
- 08.29.59 By that Sunday, my friends cleaned up for me, they're truly the best. And somehow or other, that box wound up on my bed. I opened it, saw that they were wedding books, opened the one titled Vows and Traditions and turned to a page that had this vow on it: Today I join my life to yours. From this day on I will be your partner and companion, for you're my dearest love and my best friend. I look forward to the joy we will find in each other's separate successes as well as our shared ones. And welcome the challenge of whatever obstacles we encounter, for I know that whatever we face, we face it together.
- 08.30.31 Because your happiness is vital to me, I will help you to grow as an individual. I will also strive to be more fully myself, because you deserve no less than the best of me. I pledge that I will listen to you when you speak, encourage you in times of doubt, comfort you in times of sorrow and be a refuge of strength in times of uncertainty. (PAUSE) I will be faithful to you all of my days, will always be honest with you and will cherish and adore you every moment of my life. This is my solemn vow.
- 08.30.59 I remember wanting to throw the books against the wall, but instead I marked the page and threw the books in a corner. Then the following Tuesday, the one week mark, our friend, Tony, who was, who also has a store in the neighborhood came to my house to bring me a box that Paddy, our UPS guy, passed off to him. I was so angry because it was a shipment for the store and at that point I had told Paddy to hold back anything until further notice. I remember making Tony feel so bad, sorry Tony, and screaming out, I don't want anything for the store coming to my house.
- 08.31.30 I threw the box down, sat down and saw the box from, the box was from Chronicle books, one of the vendors I regularly (?) deal with. Something at that moment told me to open the box, and when I did, there was an invoice for books that were back-ordered from an order that I placed in June. And the title that jumped out at me was Bunny Wishes. Now, when I

placed this order, I must have ordered at least a hundred different books, and I did so from a catalogue. I had (?) never read Bunny Wishes.

08.32.00 I just thought it looked like it might be cute. Especially because of mine and Sergio's bunny connection. After digging around the packing popcorn, I pulled a box out, the top of which read, Bunny Wants To Read With You. I knew that this was something from Sergio, that it was too much of a coincidence, so I nervously opened the box and out popped a bunny holding a little book of shapes. I took the box to my room so that I could read it in privacy. And then it has this little book, Bunny peaks out from under the covers, the stars twinkle above. It's a good night for wishing, Bunny whispers.

08.32.33 A wish upon a star. (PAUSE) Twinkle, twinkle, little star. Star bright, starlight, I wish my wish comes true tonight, Bunny whispers. I wish the wind would fill my sails so I could race across the, the sea. Full speed ahead, Bunny. I wish I could build a tower of blocks as tall as the trees, Bunny whispers. Build, Bunny, build. I wish I could fly a kite.

08.33.00 Way up in the sky, Bunny whispers. Up, up and away, Bunny. I wish a balloon would carry me to the moon so I could tell it good night, Bunny whispers. Good night, Mr. Moon, good night, Bunny. I wish I were tucked back into my bed with a hug and a kiss, Bunny whispers. Hugs and kisses, Bunny. Now tuck Bunny into bed. Good night, sleep tight, what do you wish for tonight, Bunny whispers. Of course I broke down like I'm doing right now (LAUGHS) but then I start thinking that this was an obvious sign from Sergio that there had to be some others.

08.33.30 So I immediately thought of the wedding vows. I had put together our own wedding planner right after we got engaged using a white loose leaf binder with pocket folders and named it Big Daddy and Nana's Wedding planner, original, right? (PAUSE) I placed clippings of dresses, hair and makeup ideas, wedding favors, music lists, menus, etc., in the folders. And in the one folder labeled program, music, photography, I put the vows that I printed from the internet in August. I had showed them Sergio and we agreed that they were right for our ceremony.

08.34.00 They were exact, they were the exact same vows that I had marked in the book that Christina sent. So now I'm floored, but I start thinking of other things. On Thursday the 13th, Jenny had just come from a client's house and after telling her about Sergio, and how sad it was that there was an alter here with a bunny on because that's what we called each other. The

client gave her a crystal bunny to give to me, which was completely out of the blue that she would have one to give in the first place. Another good friend of ours, also named Tanya, brought over lots of candy to snack on, and Maricell, Sergio's sister, was eating a bite sized Laffy taffy, and when she passes me the wrapper which had a joke on it.

- 08.34.35 Where do rabbits go when they get married? On their Bunny moon. Since when did Laffy Taffy put jokes on their wrappers? I thought that was a Bazooka Joe thing. Then a few weeks after that, after the fact, another good friend of ours, Ledanna, brings Sergio's goddaughter, Daniella over. Daniella had a box of beads and wanted to make a bracelet for me. There were beads shaped like butterflies, stars and regular round ones. And the biggest bead in the box was shaped like, you guessed it, a bunny.
- 08.35.00 A week before Christmas, I went with my mom, Delia, my nephews, Danielle and her dad to the Battalion 1 Christmas party. A magician comes up to our table and starts doing magic tricks for the kids, pulling out handkerchiefs from his mouth, etc. He starts to do the old red (?) foam ball, which multiplies trick, except he didn't have red foam balls, he had red foam bunnies. Hundreds of them. I had to ask for one as a souvenir, telling him that it was extremely symbolic, and he reluctantly forked it over. Little did he know that Big Daddy was running the show.
- 08.35.29 One day as I'm walking down 37th Avenue in my neighborhood and feeling so completely alone, I look up and see a van pass by with the words 1-800-My Bunny on it. I think it was for a landscaper or something, but I can't find a listing. And it turns out it's for children's insurance. And we can't forget the Energizer commercials, which had a campaign running, do you have the bunny inside? Every time I was watching TV and ready to have a breakdown, that commercial would come on. I'm sure many of you have heard of John Edward, a psychic medium who's been gaining a lot of attention lately with his show, Crossing Over, which airs on CBS and the Sci-fi channel.
- 08.36.04 I've always believed that there are people who are gifted, and had actually gone to one back in 1997 and was able to connect me with someone who was very close to me. It was my mother. I have absolutely no doubts after the reading that this person came through. Back in October, I was talking to my friend Glen who lives in Toronto. And he was telling me that the woman that he usually calls (?) for tarot readings, Elaine in Miami, was pretty accurate. As

he was going over his notes from the reading he had given him over the year, and everything she said came to pass.

08.36.33 So this was the point where I'm at my wits end, right? And I'm talking to Glen and he says uh, oh, Elaine, his tarot card reader, you know, she's pretty accurate, you know? Uh, give me, give me her number. Just like that. Give me her number. So I call, I call her up and I tried to stay very neutral in my voice, you know? (STOPS)

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

08.37.01 TANYA VILLANUEVA: I call her up and I try to stay very neutral, and you know, she starts off saying, she asked me what my birthday was, she does my numerology and she says you're a 13-4 in the number of Karma. And right now you're being stripped of your foundation so that you can come into your own power. And I'm like, Ok, you know (LAUGHS)

08.37.27 And uh, then she goes, ok, I'm gonna pull out your cards. And she said, ok, she starts to lay out her cards and she just says, oh dear. You just lost someone. And that's it. That was my defining moment. The tarot cards. You just lost someone. Like after a month of waiting and hoping and you know, wanting him to come home and knowing now that this was it.

08.38.02 She just, she says it was in my cards. And I just, I couldn't stop crying, you know, and she said, hold on, I'm gonna channel him for you. And I'm like Ok, and I had no idea that she channeled. And neither did, did Glen. And then uh, she said, she goes into, she goes into prayer, this is how she works. She goes into prayer, she rings these Tibetan bells and she goes into prayer.

08.38.34 And then she says, oh, my god if only you could see how beautiful it is. Uh, what he's showing me is so beautiful, you know? Uh, I, ok, I'm just gonna read it. I had no idea and neither did Glen that she could do this. (STOPS)

JW: Can you tell me?

08.38.50 TANYA VILLANUEVA: She said, she said the feeling that I'm getting more than anything is that he's so proud. He's just so proud. She says, and what he's showing me is that he

went from the glow of a fire, it almost looks like a sunset, straight into the light. That there was absolutely no pain and he wasn't scared and it was so he just, he was spared. He didn't suffer at all. There was no suffering. And she said, she said if only I could see how beautiful it is. Then she said, then she starts going into the reading. She says, he's telling me that there is some people gonna be helping you.

- 08.39.31 She said, he's saying Matthew, Raymond and Jimmy. And each firefighter family, they're assigned liaisons from the perspective houses, fire houses. And our liaisons, Matthew, Raymond and Jimmy. And he, you know, she said uh, he came through with (?) messages for his mom, which are very profound, and for his sister and brother.
- 08.40.03 He talked about his relationship with his father also. But the thing that like totally clinched it for me was when she goes, I think I called her like another time, (?) I don't think it was the first reading, it might have been the second reading. Uh, anyway, she just said, he's saying something with B? She says, it sounds like, sounds like buddy? And I went, bunny?
- 08.40.32 And she says, yeah. Oh. So like, I was getting all these messages but I, I didn't know at that time if it was because he had crossed over and he was sending them, or if he was sending them to me, you know, to keep me hanging on, you know? And I remember even having a dream where, like that week after when he came to me, it was so vivid.
- 08.40.58 And we were dancing 'cos uh, ([PAUSE) sometimes we'd put music on and just dance, you know? Slow dance. And the week before he gave me my ring (PAUSE) we were playing uh, The Very Thought of You by Natalie Cole, and we were slow dancing in, in our dining room. And I remember he was wearing his blue silk robe (LAUGHS).
- 08.41.36 And uh, we're dancing and he said, (?) we stop and he was crying and I was like, why are you crying? And he just said, I just love you so much, you know? So I had this dream where we were dancing, it was so vivid and uh, and he kissed me,
- 08.42.00 And I was like, questioning this, kissing me because you crossed over? Or is he reaching out to me 'cos he's still there? (PAUSE) And I'm telling all my friends, you know, I'm losing my mind. So Elaine turns out, you know, that she's, she also had lost somebody uh, the love of her life like 6 hours after they closed on, on their house.
- 08.42.33 He died of a heart attack. So we had all of these, found out we had all of these things in common, and the one thing that cracked me up was that the fact that Sergio, that I got to this woman, you know, at my most desperate time, and somebody who could really counsel me in

a way that she's so empathetic, 'cos she's been through it already, and she also can speak to Sergio, you know?

- 08.43.01 Her, I went to go, I want to say, oh, I want to add you to my e-mail list, what's your e-mail address? And it's bocastars @aol. And Boca, Boca, Jr. is Sergio's favorite soccer team from Argentina. So I said (LAUGHS) Sergio chose you just for your e-mail address alone. You know, but it's like so (LAUGHS) so crazy. That like I know he's with me, you know?
- 08.43.31 And I think that's what my, I mean, he sends me all these messages all the time. I mean, just bunnies. Like (?) I would least expect them. And really at moments when I'm really having a lot of despair. And uh, I just, I feel that it's so uh, it's such a blessing that I could get these things.
- 08.44.01 But at the same time it's just, why can't you just come home? Why can't you, instead of conjuring up bunnies, conjure up flesh and bones (LAUGHS) You know? Uh, one of my fears is that as more time passes, I forget. And I'm, I'm gonna forget.
- 08.44.28 And sometimes I doubt, you know, I say, you know, like I said before, do we exist? Do we, do we love each other, you know? And then I say, I go to my boxes and I've saved everything. So I mean, everything. Like every card, every note, every thing. Like, and then when I look in the box, Ok, of course we loved each other. The funniest thing I found was a couple of weeks ago. And I had to bring it because it just cracked me up.
- 08.45.01 And I can't doubt, but I do. That I don't know if that's just the grief. It's my album that I carry around. Right? (LAUGHS) Aluminum foil (right?) This is how Monday, May 13th, 1996.
- 08.45.29 You had to go to the city during work and you met me at Jimmy Walker's bar in your uniform. Sporting your rack of medals that I hadn't seen. You bought me a hot dog, and it was the best one I've ever tasted. This is the foil. (LAUGHS) I saved everything. So I say, Ok, I could never question the fact that I loved this man, you know? And that he loved me, from the cards that he left me, you know?
- 08.45.58 But as time goes by and all of this stuff, I mean,, I just don't know, I don't ever want to have to keep on, I don't want to have to keep going into this to, to remind myself. You know, like the person that you, I was supposed to spend the rest of my life with (PAUSE) You know, I don't want, I don't want to feel like he's that distant from me, that I have to go remind myself about where we were with each other (PAUSE)

- 08.46.33 And then I'm caught between having to move on because I'm still only 34. (PAUSE) But I don't want to. (PAUSE)
- 08.46.59 And then I say, this project is supposed to take 7 years. Where am I gonna be in 7 years? (PAUSE) You know? And then I look at women that I've sat with you know, in groups. You know, and some of them have kids. And some of them don't have good relationships with their in-laws. And you know, all these things.
- 08.47.30 I said, ok, you have to be, be grateful for what you have, you know? Be grateful you have all these things, but it's just like uh, I just. I just want him to come home, still. (PAUSE) And I feel like life is so fake. And I try to you know, do things, make myself you know, like keep going.
- 08.48.01 And get my motorcycle license like an asshole (LAUGHS) Jump out of a plane like an asshole (LAUGHS). Go to you know? But everything just feels so fake. And then I feel horrible, because with grief you have all of these other emotions that like you never had before in your life, you know? Envyng people, you know? I, I hate that I look at couples now who are happy and I'm just like and I, and I just feel like shit, you know?
- 08.48.33 I hate that I, I I'm never gonna be able to go anybody's wedding. Any of my friend's weddings. I mean, thankfully most of them are married already. You know? Uh, or that I'm not gonna have Sergio's children with him. (PAUSE) And then I say why, why?
- 08.49.01 And they say, well, you can't ask that question now. These are this, you know, this is (?) life. You can't ask that question. You say why you, but why not you? Right? What makes you, I mean, it's not to be cruel, but what makes me so special that I shouldn't be going through this as opposed to this person, you know? And then I think what, ok, let me try and be.
- 08.49.32 Try and get my lessons from this, then, if this is something that I'm supposed to this is for my soul's growth, let me try and be as productive as I can be and try and be as move as forward as I can move with it, and try and. But it just feels so fake. You know? It just, it just feels like life is so different than what it was and what I expected it to be now.
- 08.50.04 So now that's one of my big lessons that I send out in the e-mail. You can't expect anything in life. You just can't. You can't pin your hopes on anything, you know, you just kind of have to live moment to moment, but then living, you try and find your joy in every moment, and I'm hoping, I mean, I could stay hopeful. I'm hoping I could find joy again, you know?

08.50.34 But it's like then I think well, how, and I, I said this before, you know, how, how you have to hope that you find joy and just not count that that joy can be taken away. You just have to do it in a such a way that you have to detach from it at the same time. Which is like fucked up.

08.51.00 You know? (PAUSE) And it just happened for, for nothing almost. Like uh, there was no reason. There was no good reason for that to happen, and then I have to remind myself well, there's no good reason that Oklahoma City had to happen, and there's no good reason that famine in Africa has to happen, and there's no good reason that you know, that I have to keep on getting away from my grief and thinking of the bigger picture.

08.51.33 And that's how I kind of try and stay a little bit sane. But this, this life. It's like how, it's uh, I'm so torn because I'm torn between saying, you know, thankfully I have a little peace in this and that Sergio and I we, we loved (STOPS)

08.51.52 END OF TAPE # TV-006, 3 of 4

TAPE # TV-007, 4 of 4
TANYA VILLANUEVA
08.05.02
JIM WHITAKER, Producer/Director
PROJECT REBIRTH

09.00.40 PICTURE UP

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: So I'm (?) philosophical questions are interesting to me. If you uh, one thing you said is that you have to approach life with a certain amount of joy, but a joy based on a certain amount of detachment. (?) How you think you do that?

09.01.20 TANYA VILLANUEVA: I, I don't know. Because how, I think, as, as humans, I mean, I can only really speak to myself, uh, for myself, but I know you attach. How can you detach?

You know, when something feels good, you want more. You know? And I don't know if it's the conditioning, I don't know what it, what it is. You know, I try.

09.01.59 I think maybe it's (?) maybe by just reminding yourself that everything is so uh, fragile, maybe? Maybe to be appreciative for the moment, because that thing that's giving you joy or that person that's giving you joy, or whatever it is, can just so easily be taken away. I think to remind yourself, maybe that's how you do it.

09.02.28 You know? So (?)

JW: People always talk about you know, I remember (?) do all that, but what you said is different. Is that I never heard for before. Is that you live every moment but without I think this is the word, expectation.

09.02.54 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Right because prior to 9/11 I had expectations. You know, I expected that at 33 years old and I'm engaged to be married to the absolute love of my life. You know, that we were ready to book our hall and we've created so up until that point, such a beautiful life together, I expected that it would, we would grow old together and be able to carry out all of the plans that we had.

09.03.28 Serge, and I, we used to walk down the street and see older couples holding hands, and we used to always say, honey, that's gonna be us one day. You know? And or we'd see parents with their children, you know? Honey, that's gonna be us one day. And our big joke was, honey, we're gonna have a boy and a girl set of twins, conceived on our honeymoon, they'll be toilet trained, and that way we get it out of the way, it's over and done, you know?

09.04.01 And everyone, it was (?) Sergio and Tanya when the twins come. Everybody, everybody, all of our closest friends knew that we were gonna have twins, a boy and a girl set of twins, that, that was just the way it was, 'cos that's how I expected it to be. You know? I (?) expected, I was gonna have a beautiful wedding day. I expected I was gonna have a glorious honeymoon. I expected that I was gonna be under the skylight of the little chapel in the Fountainhead saying my vows to Sergio.

09.04.33 You know? I expected that. And 9/11 happened, and my wedding day was a couple of days ago. And now it's like what do I do? What do I do on this day? And here we go back to dates. How do I honor this day? How do I honor the day we were supposed to be married?

- 09.05.04 We were supposed to be married, I expected that we were gonna be married. I expected now, I would be, my twins would already be conceived, 'cos we'd be on our honeymoon today. You know? So now anything that comes my way right now I just feel so numb, and I'm hoping that this numbness and this feeling that life, that everything I'm living, that every day that comes is, is gonna start to feel less and less surreal and more and more real.
- 09.05.32 I'm hoping that that's gonna come. I think that this is grief and this is just how you feel, speaking with people who've gone through it before. You just feel numb. I'm hoping that one day I'll be able to really like, you know, connect again a little bit, you know, and just. I mean, I went to (?) Europe.
- 09.05.56 You know, I went to, I had my dream vacation with my mom. And I looked over and I saw you know, beautiful lavender fields in Provence and all these old, little villages that have been there for centuries and, and I was just like you know? This is my, this is where, I expected this would be, I expected that this would give me more joy (LAUGHS). But right now it's nothing, you know? I mean, I'll take what I get from it, but.
- 09.06.36 They just can't have expectations any more. But I think that in those relationships that you have, I think it's so important that you know, you, people realize the, the uncertainty of things, you know? 'Cos even with, with I had gotten to a point with Sergio, I, you know, if we had little a silly little disagreement about something and if he was kind of hold it in, you know?
- 09.07.04 Even on our cruise. He got upset because I lost the disposable camera, which had pictures of it from Jamaica. Now I'm kicking myself because I would give anything for those pictures again, you know? But I was like honey, you can't let this ruin our whole cruise. You don't know what tomorrow's gonna bring, you know? And he was out of it. He left, you know, he let that go, 'cos it's true. You don't know what tomorrow brings.
- 09.07.31 So. Had he held onto that, I mean, I think about a lot of the, there's a lot of, I don't know how many, but I mean, I'm sure when people lose people? There are a lot of people that lose people and they have differences that weren't resolved, you know? And you carry that with you forever. And then I think, see I have, I have that peace.
- 09.07.57 Now, it's about how do I get back to feeling that way again, so that if I, like right now, if I say I lost my mom. I mean, I, I wouldn't regret because I know we went on this beautiful

trip, and I know I had some good time with her. But I would regret that I was mourning. You know what I mean? You know, like that uh, (~JW~)

JW: It's the catch (?)

09.08.31 TANYA VILLANUEVA: It's such a Catch 22.

JW: That's the catch in the whole idea of it. In order to have joy you have to be in every moment and you can't (?)

09.08.43 TANYA VILLANUEVA: But being in these moments right now, this is where, this is where I'm being in these moments of it's like emptiness. Loneliness the most. Almost it is (PAUSE)

09.09.00 And yearning. It's hard to connect with other people. Like my friends, all of mine and Sergio's friends, like I can't see them a lot. You know, I can't see them because, and I was talking about this with Elaine the other day like small talk, right now. You know, you tell me how your babies are doing and how work is and everything, and I can't even.

09.09.29 It's like I can't, what comes up for me is like you've got that. You got your babies. You got, you know, you've got all of these things. So like if I were to die tomorrow, I would regret, see this is what's making me nuts. I would regret not being able to connect with them at this time. But uh, (?) I also have to give myself the time to grieve. I don't know, it's just crazy.

JW: You said, but. I'm looking for a lesson, and I'm also appreciating that, you know, if you're an old soul that's learning (to be?) older. Is this the, is the lesson that pain comes between the joy and the expectation (?)

09.10.23 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Is the lesson that the pain comes between the joy and the expectation? Wow.

JW: 'Cos if we could endure without expectation or pain without (expectation or pain without yearning?)

09.10.43 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Right. Like I wish I could get to that point. You know what I mean,? I think (?) but I guess that's, that's what the next levels (are?) all about. I think this is, this is our school. I guess. But uh, in that, on the way there, I mean, you have to experience so much suffering, you know?

09.11.10 I, that's the one thing I just don't get. Like why, why does anyone have to suffer? You know, and is it, it's supposed to be so that you really understand what the joy and the love is? You have uh, it's that you have a reference point?

09.11.34 That sucks. But hopefully like the next levels that you go to it just gets better. I mean, uh, I have to hope that I, I mean, I have to. You know?

JW: You think you'll meet another man?

09.12.00 TANYA VILLANUEVA: I got to tell you, when I, when this first happened, you know, my whole thing was, you know what? What Sergio and I had, you know, that's enough for me, for my whole life. You know? But then when I think, and that's, that was at the beginning, and as more time passes, and I think I have this whole life ahead of me, I'd be so lonely, you know?

09.12.32 I think there is that thing that you want to share yourself with someone. And I know I share with Sergio on this, still, you know, but because we're physical beings, you know, I'd be lying if I said that, that I didn't want to have contact with someone again, you know?

09.13.03 'Cos that felt so good. And Sergio was so good. I mean, he, the affection that this man gave me, you know, whether it was in a hug or a phone call or, or just driving by to tell me he loves me, you know? Uh, I can't imagine.

09.13.28 I mean, like, part of me wants to fast forward, you know, get me past this, this (?) 'cos this is (?) done. I don't think anyone should have to grieve for more than an hour (LAUGHS). You know? How fucked up is that? But you got to. But uh.

JW: Well, I mean, it becomes (?) becomes easier?

- 09.13.54 TANYA VILLANUEVA: I want him so much to come home, you know, and that realization that he can't is uh, kind of I think drives, drives that thinking of like well, he can't come home, then what would be next for you, you know? Uh, so (?) I don't know, I guess I just have to wait and see, and until then I have to allow myself this time to grieve, because what I lost was tremendous, you know, and traumatic.
- 09.14.30 And 'cos it wasn't just losing the love of my life, you know. The person that I shared everything with. It was also losing all of my expectations. I was losing my dreams. It was losing my future, what I thought would be my future, you know, so in essence I lost a part of myself with Sergio. You know? A big part of myself. So now it's just kind of like trying to find something to keep me going.
- 09.15.04 And what keeps me going right now is remembering, remembering him, of course. Remembering that I was capable of a tremendous amount of love and joy and guilt (LAUGHS). Guilt keeps me here. All of my friends and family, they keep me here. 'Cos believe me, sometimes the pain is so much that you just don't want to be.
- 09.15.34 But you're guilted into staying, you know? I would never want to do this to my mom. Or you know, to put her in a position where she feels such anguish, you know, uh, I'm just saying if I ever would to take my life, I wouldn't do it because I'm guilted to staying here. I wouldn't want to do, put that on my mom, I wouldn't want to put that on Sergio's mom, I wouldn't want to put that on his sister or brother or my brothers, and of course my brothers and sisters, my nephews, you know, my friends.
- 09.16.06 But sometimes I'm telling you, you just feel like life just sucks. You just want to, you want out. And then I say, ok. I call the people I need to call to keep me, and they're the ones who, the people who really, whose uh, advice and counseling that I trust the most right now are the people who've been through it.
- 09.16.38 Or who are going through it, you know? Like they talk about this period as being one of just uncertainty and despair and, and surreal and emptiness. And just to allow myself the time to go through it.
- 09.16.58 Like the best, the best thing that anyone said to me was Elaine, and she said to me, the truth is, you're gonna feel like shit. I'm like, Ok. All right, I feel like shit, and that's the truth. And somebody's been through it before, so she knows. And now Elaine's OK, so I'm banking on the fact that I'll be OK one day. I won't expect it, I might hope for it. (PAUSE)

09.17.35 This shit sucks. It does. And then like part of it is like, you know, I feel like I've got a mission here still. The reason why I'm here still is 'cos I have a mission, you know, it's all, it's just crazy.

JW: What's your mission?

09.17.57 TANYA VILLANUEVA: My mission is number one, there's a reason why those of us who are affected so closely by 9/11 were affected. I don't know, I mean, there's a reason, and I think my, my, what I could do is, my mission is I just don't want people to forget. And I don't want people to forget that there were people, that there were lives, that there were dreams, that there were loves that were just so senselessly taken.

09.18.40 You know? And I wish I knew what the answer was to, to that so this wouldn't have to happen again. Anywhere in the world. You know? But what I can be responsible for is my story, Sergio, make sure that he's not forgotten.

09.19.03 You know? And he won't be forgotten. But I just feel like, you know, sometimes when you meet (?) you come across people, even now and it's almost a year, and I feel like they've just forgotten, like they've forgotten what people have gone through, or what people go through. That people who are rude or nasty or, or you know, uh, uncompassionate or you know?

09.19.42 It's like don't you get it? You know? Be nice to everybody. I don't know. Just be nice. Be good. You're only here for a little while, there's no need for you to be so damn greedy. Or you know, selfish or rude or (?) (PAUSE)

09.20.10 There has to be lessons that people learn from this shit. There has to be. It can't have all been just for nothing. That's all I got to say. (~JW~) (PAUSE) This shit sucks. And that (LAUGHS).
(UNINTELLIGIBLE CONVERSATION)

09.20.56 TANYA VILLANUEVA: And now I got to go just do and just be. My own little widow world. That's my world right now. (~JW~) And we got the Widows on Wheels crew. Get all my girls together, get motorcycles and we're just gonna go across the country like mad women on. Hell on wheels. I don't know. I'm trying, I'm trying.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

09.21.41 TANYA VILLANUEVA: I hope I didn't put foot in my mouth disease. For according to my horoscope. Frank, my horoscope today was beware of food in mouth disease. Watch what you say carefully.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

09.22.20 TANYA VILLANUEVA: Can you believe I saved the hot dog foil? Is that love or what? That's love. That's some serious love.

09.22.32 I'm glad I did that, though, I really am. It makes me laugh.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

09.23.36 END OF TAPE # TV-007, 4 of 4