**Transcription of Interview with Sandra**

Location: Sandra's house,  
Day and time: December 08, starting at 10 am  
Duration: 56:18 mins

Observation notes: I arrived at Sandra's house, and someone from her family invited me into the living room. I sit at the dining room table. Before starting the interview, we go through the information sheet again. I explain what the interview will look like and let her ask me questions about the project. I thank her for taking the time to receive me at her house. At the end of the interview, Sandra agreed to complete a participant diary.

Participants: Interviewer [A] ; Sandra [S]

TRANSCRIPTION

A: We can start with a short presentation about yourself, Sandra.

S: Thank you very much. First of all, thank you very much for reaching out and allowing me to speak my testimony. I'm Sandra, I'm 60 years old, and I'm currently a secretary in a hotel. I was a secretary for a long time in the government sector, but then you get married, and your husband tells you not to work anymore... And well, here I am, but now I work again. I appreciate you being here.

A: If you want, we can start with your first memories of being and living in Santo Domingo, what those first years of being in the colony were like, and above all, connect it with the issue of water, to find out what the situation was like back then.

S: My mother came here alone with my nine-year-old brother and left him here to guard the piece of ground she had invaded, we could say. Because the announcement of this land invasion grew from word of mouth, from voice to voice, to spread the news that the 'pedregal', this land, was being invaded and that we had to be quick. People from all over the republic "dropped" here. They came from all over the republic: many cultures, ideologies, and different educations. And above all, there was the need for a piece of land, for a property. We lived in the Ruiz Cortines neighbourhood, and we rented there from a lady landowner.

My mom was a single mother with three kids. I am the second. My brother was nine years old, I was eight, and there was a little boy who was seven. And well, yes, my mom came here with two cardboard sheets she arranged in a triangle where they were kept from the sun then.

She then walked down to Ruiz Cortines, going between caves, stones and so on, for water. So how did the water get here? In a four-litre container, the kind people probably used for something industrial. This is how the first little jug of water arrived here. And later, the lady we rented from also gave or lent us glass bottles. They were like sherry carafes, so you understand me. And my mom tied them with a ribbon and would put them on her back, two here on her left arm and two on her right arm. And that's how the water got here. Later, the water issue was... not regularized, but the need was more visible.

The women went down to wash clothes in the baths of La Conchita. I had to go to the laundry room with my mom and accompany her to wash clothes in there, where the Solidarity garden is now, I think, behind that family centre member next to the La Conchita church. There were bathrooms, washrooms, showers, and laundry washboards. Many people would bathe and wash clothes there. I think they charged one peso.

A: The church of La Conchita in Coyoacan?

S: Exactly

A: So it was a good distance away…

S: Yes, and in San Pablo, next to the church of San Pablo on Calzada de Tlalpan street, near Division del Norte street. There were also some public washboards there. And towards Santa Ursula, there are also other public washboards. I don't remember the address well because I was very young.

The mothers arrived there to wash. I want to take advantage of this opportunity to mention that women and children built up this place, and lifted this neighbourhood. Because the men went out to work and just came in at night. Obviously they did the 'faena' (community work) when they got here, which was on their days off. But in itself, actually, the neighbourhood is founded and sustained and made by women. Those seasoned women who struggled and had to overcome obstacles, who had to find courage wherever they could. In this case, my mother, who was a very strong and determined woman. She was like a warrior and did not let anyone take advantage of her. My mom was always a person who took a step forward and was ahead of others, so you can understand me. She was always very visionary and clever and she would be ahead of everyone.

At that time, people would use the water holders (aguantador) and carry them on their backs. What is a water holder? It is a straight pole to which people would tie two strings or ropes, one on each edge. There, people would hook and hang a bottle or bucket or jug or something that they could bring back here on their shoulders. And they walked between stones and rocks with the water holders on their backs. They would hold the water holder on their shoulder [she moves and gestures to her back and shoulders with her arms as if carrying the water holder], they would hold it from the front and back, like this, so that the holder would not move and the bottles would not wiggle so much so that the water would not spill over.

A: One hand in front and one behind the back.

S: The hands were on the ropes or directly grabbing the bottles. So well, that is how water first arrived in the neighbourhood. In water holders.

The mothers also went to wash clothes on Aztecas street. There were some volcanic rocks there, sort of like slabs, and a water pipeline that went through the street. So wherever there would be any water leak in the pipeline, there the mothers settled down to wash. And some were abusive and wanted to take possession of those stone slabs, and well, big fights would start there on the street.

A: Fights over access to these stones…

S: Yes, for the space and the right to wash. Because I understand that neighbourhoods such as Ruiz Cortines, Santa Ursula, and Ajusco also suffered from this situation. In other words, all these neighbourhoods around us suffer from this shortage and this need for water.

After some time, people from the government and neighbourhood leaders came to measure the land of everyone. A leader would arrive and say “now we measure from here to there”, and everyone would move over there carrying their stuff… “now from here to there”, and there people would move again. My mom got a hold of a lot of big stones: she bought them or took them out wherever there were some. And at least the first floor and the basement of this house are made of those stones.

I remember that we would arrive here and we could see as far as the Mexico Hotel because it was all dark here. It was all dark. We lit ourselves with the moon when there was a full moon or with the fireflies when there were fireflies. Everyone used candles for light too. It was rare to buy battery-powered lamps because they were expensive, and well, you either ate or bought batteries, right? Everyone lit up with oil lamps too. Here you could find a lot of that oil, it was used a lot also for cooking with little stoves.

As time went by and people started to sort of align the streets and level the neighbourhood roads, the donkeys entered. Some people brought water on their donkeys to sell from home to home, which carried oil cans filled with water and wrapped in plastic so in case any liquid spilt it would remain inside the plastic. And the cans were tied with strips that people took from old tires, made of hard black plastic so that the cans were sealed. And poor donkeys, yes, poor donkeys, because they did suffer from carrying all that too. The donkeymen would sell water, and some people also came to sell wooden boards. Everyone had their cardboard house, and everyone used those boards to roof.

And well, as time went by, those streets became more urbanised. Although let me tell you that when it rained, this became the biggest muddy quagmire in the world. Because this neighbourhood is the largest in Latin America. I believe Santo Domingo is the largest in Latin America as a neighbourhood, not as a district, because, for example, Nezahualcoyotl here in the city is bigger but there are several neighbourhoods there. So I think that Santo Domingo here is the largest neighbourhood in Latin America.

Over time there were more and more streets here, although made of dirt and not yet flattened. By then, water tanker trucks were already coming in. There was a large water storage tank between the secondary school and elementary school nearby, and the trucks filled that for us. All the people you can imagine would gather there and fill their little buckets.

Before that tank, we had the trucks stopping on each street to fill smaller water drums. We had a system to organise that. Maybe our truck stop had the colour white, so all the drums at this stop were painted white, and each one had a number. And people would pay five or ten pesos per drum. A water truck was hired to come and fill all the drums. And there was a list of who had paid or not, that indicated to whom water would be given using their drum number.

A: And who organised that?

S: My mom was one of the first to organise that. And after that other streets followed and there were many stops throughout the neighbourhood. They came to fill up to seventy or eighty water drums.

A: And were all the drums from the same street or how did people know where to go?

S: Yes, all the water drums were from the same street. So there was one stop per street. Maybe people would know the stop was going to be outside someone's home, and everyone formed a line outside there. And when the truck arrived, this was a huge gathering. Because the truck would have leaks. Then all the kids and women would get all clever and put their buckets under where there were those leaks from the trucks. So that water would fall there and not be wasted.

A: And besides that, the truck filled the drums…

S: Yes, the drivers were told, "to this one yes, or to this one no." And when people were not given water, it was because they had not paid. Even though their water drum was there, it didn't fill up because they didn't pay.

After that, we began to open streets for inserting water pipelines and drainage. They used old mattresses were used, without guards or fabrics, without any padding for the drums of the mattresses. They were used to open and form lines in the ground to put the pipelines. People from the government or the water system used dynamite to do that because the volcanic rock sometimes was not porous. When there was porous rock, the wedge and hammer were perfectly inserted and that opened beautifully. But when the rock was poreless, it is a very hard stone. Then a little hole was made in it, but it was necessary to put dynamite in it. So they would put the dynamite and the mattress with big stones that the women put on top of the mattress so that when the dynamite exploded the pieces of rock would not fly out. And so it was, they opened up the ground, they put some dirt the pipe was lying there, like a bed of soil. They set the water pipes on the ground and connected them little by little. The same thing happened when they did the drainage. It was the same.

These are my experiences, roughly remembered. I say roughly because I did experience it, but not like all children. I lived a very different childhood with my mother. Why? Because when my mother came to live here, she put me in a boarding school nearby because I was a girl, the only girl. And she had to go out to work and back then, people thought that girls were in more danger. But that's not true because everyone is in danger, and boys are also in danger. But anyway.

Our situation here later was that, for us to bathe, my mother would put a plastic tub and bathe the three of us with a bucket. And that water would never waste, you know. We would maybe use it to water the plants or clean something dirty, or wash clothes. Or keep that water for the toilet.

Although everyone had a latrine, no one had a proper toilet really. Everyone had to dig out a latrine near a crack between rocks and cover it up, maybe even with a little curtain so that water wouldn't fall on you when it rained... and well that's how it was for us.

I tell you my mom was always one step ahead. Because of her, we reused that water for the bath, or to water the plants. However, almost no one had plants in their house here at first because nothing would grow, it was too hot and dry around this neighbourhood. There were only a lot of pepper trees and native plants that we probably could still find on Aztecas street right now. Passing the metro station near this side of the neighbourhood, I don't know if you have noticed that there is a fenced area.

A: Yes

S: Well, all those plants out there are native to this neighbourhood. And there were a lot of those plants. There were also seasons when those pepper trees were full of "whippers".

A: What do you mean whippers?

S: Whippers, butterfly larvae, so you understand me. And those caterpillars were hairy and black, and if they touched you they would sting and give you pimples that made you look like a dog with scabs.

A: Oooh, a burner worm, that's how I know them [laughs].

S: Ah well, those. And also the measurer worm, a little yellow and black worm that did nothing to you and everyone played with them. We caught the fireflies in small jars or bags and we just played. We had a very different childhood from everyone else, very different. There was a lot of empathy, there was a lot of fraternity.

A: You said that people came from many different places. Was there still that empathy and unity even so?

S: Yes, yes. And here the women became strong-willed and gutsy. With a lot of boldness. Suddenly you heard -bang, bang, bang!-, the gunshots. In the case of my mother, we had our little room where we lived. But I think that to want to intimidate her, one day, well, she was closing the door and some good for nothing reaches with his hand to try and open it. And my mom had a pellet gun, a rifle, but who would know that it was not a real rifle, right? So my mom puts that out and told whoever that was, “come on, get in.” And she was always shameless. So she told him “get in, but ask God to get you out”. And just as he put his hand in, he took it out. And well, many seeing her alone and a single mother... And she was not ugly, my mother was blonde and had beautiful eyes. So you know many people would be after her, and the other women would always get jealous and my mom had fights with more than one of them.

A: Or what you were saying about the washing stones in the street, where women would fight for a spot.

S: Yes sir, the sticks of the water holders would fly there. Because you did take your clothes, but where did you carry them? In grocery bags tied to the water holder. So that you could bring your clothes back clean, although maybe still wet.

I also remember that on many occasions my mother took us to the public baths of Pacifico street and Huipulco. And my mom would give an extra tip to the washroom attendant so they would let her take a bag of clothes in. And well, we would go out of there all clean and my mother would come out with her clothes all washed. See how I tell you that my mom was one step ahead because nobody did that.

A: And you say that she had a lot of leadership when the water tanks came in to fill the water drums. Did she talk to people and ask for their payments?

S: Yes, and if they had to do protests and marches they would do them. They even took the kids. Very dirty and smelly, as you can imagine... well, don't imagine, because it wouldn't be pleasant at all. But they were all the same, it was even. In other words, you could see the need, the fraternity, and the fact of struggling together for something. And they even took the trucks by force sometimes. One got on the driver's side and the other on the passenger side, and another next to the driver if he did not have a passenger. And they took the trucks, yes, but they paid for them.

A: Well, as you told me, the women were always there.

S: Yes, and the water trucks continue to arrive. And the drivers tell me they remember coming here to leave the water to the women on this street years ago. And yes, it was like that for many years. We have been carrying this water situation forever. It feels like forever, for a lifetime. And whoever had a built cistern would benefit, right? And my mom had her cistern. And even so, my mom paid and called for water trucks. Trucks that, at that time, cost us 800 pesos, and later they went up to 1,400 or 1,500 depending on the time of the year, when it was drier. And well, based on that need, when my mother died and when we could no longer be paying 1,500 or 1,200 or so, on one occasion, we spoke on the phone and called channel 6. And they came to interview me. And then I told my neighbours, "Channel 6 is coming." And some of them were in a group that was protesting a building.

A: In Aztecas street

S: That's right. Some people from there came too. Some leaders from there came to do that interview with me. And it was as a result of that interview that we made the Committee. Because, at the time, we were not five people, sir. We were around 80 people at the time the group was formed.

A: And how were all those people summoned?

S: I spread the word. And the women to whom I spoke, spread the word too, and so the message went passing along. And we continue to spread the word because today the Committee is made up of more than 270 people, or 270 families, which is not the same.

A: And when was the interview?

S: About two years ago.

A: And at that time you did not get enough water?

S: The water would just not arrive, and we were in great need because it was impossible to pay for a truck of 1,200 or 1,400 pesos every eight days or every five days to come here. Not even what you earn in the week is enough for that.

A: So the lack of water started at the same time, two years ago, or did you already have some time with that issue as you said?

S: Well, it's been around forever. Of course, the areas of the neighbourhood that are less elevated from the ground do not complain, they will never say anything because they always have water, and they do not need as much pressure in the system for the water to go up.

But the thing is that there was also a mafia because people were closing the valves, or are still closing valves, for political reasons. Especially when it's the...

A: The dry season?

S: No, when it is that time that you have to vote for a candidate.

A: Ah, whenever there are elections.

S: Yes, the candidate who holds the mayoral office will have his henchmen, that's what we could call them. And they manage everything for political use, they say “if in that community people did vote for me or if they follow me, give them water” They don't say it in public, but it was evident, and it still is. We currently have a 'tandeo' system (intermittent supply), but we are seeing that the tandeo no longer works. Right now, central Santo Domingo gets water from Wednesday at noon until Monday at noon. And from Monday to Wednesday water flows to Santo Domingo south in the pipes. But for example, we're missing water today for.... for how many days sister? [She asks her sister, that is in the other room and that has been listening to her all this time. I did not notice because she cannot be seen from where I am sitting, until now]

Sister: Four days

S: Four days without water now. Today is Thursday and we are supposed to be getting some water on the pipes. Nonetheless, water is not coming.

A: So the problem has continued.

S: Yes, and the Water Defense Committee has helped us because whoever is on the Committee gets on a list and we call water trucks for their homes. For this, we already have to have obtained a number in the SUAC, a citizen support system from the government. They give us a number in that system when we report that we need a water truck sent to ur homes and we share it in the Committee group. We write the address, name, telephone number and the SUAC number. Previously it was eight o'clock in the morning when you could enter that information. And currently it is it, from ten to eleven, sister?

Sister: From nine to ten [answers a voice from the other room]

S: From nine to ten in the morning. And yes, they are very respectful in the Committee that this is the time to enter the number. And all that information we have is sent to the head of the municipality water system. This man organizes his trucks so that they distribute first to those of the Committee. It's a pity and a sadness because it shouldn't be like that, when water is a human right.

[Sandra pulls out her cell phone to show me a WhatsApp group]

S: Look, Water Committee. And see, people are requesting their water, look. Look [refers to a WhatsApp chat message] this message here is us.

A: [reading the written message] “Request for a truck”. So in there, people would write when they need water.

S: Yes, and there is someone that makes a list. Let's see, let's see right now how many trucks have been ordered. [Searching on the mobile phone]

A: [looking at the phone] Ah, that's the list. Eight trucks right now.

S: Yes

A: So this is something that the Committee has also achieved, that they send you the trucks.

S: Yes, and we have had to go to hold sit-ins and protests, and we have had to go to meet with all the people who have been in charge. Because many people have been in the local administration during these last few years. And if they don't want to respond to us and do their job, we go and protest outside their offices, with megaphones, speakers, banners and pot-banging and so on.

A: To make some noise.

S: Yes, because they do have to listen to us. And it shouldn't be like that. Because I repeat, water is a human right. And they are not supplying us with that human right to which we are entitled. Because even though the water does not come to us, the water bills continue to arrive.

A: Do they still charge you for the service?

S: Sure.

A: So you tell me that it all started with this interview. And it was you and other people who called channel 6.

S: Yes, we had been having this problem for years. And it was my husband who told me: “hey, why don't we make the call”. We had nothing to lose. So it was my husband and me.

And well, we currently have our representatives. In the Committee, there are very capable people with a lot of knowledge. They are very prepared people too. It's not just "any neighbour's son", although... well, they could actually be any neighbour's son or any neighbour, and I include myself in that. Yes, because, more than anything, the need for water has united us. The need to live, like any other people.

A: And you say that when you prepared for the interview, you spread the word and knocked on your neighbours' doors?

S: Yes, to go and tell them “neighbours, they have arrived, they are coming”. It was late in the afternoon that day, it got dark and they came to interview us with a camera and light and so on. And the people yelling “we want water, we want water”. And some were understanding like good people, but others were already angry and we had to try to calm them down and explain that those who came from outside only came to do their job and it was not their fault. And they had to be protected because of the people misbehaving...

Because you see, currently there aren't many of those people who came to invade the neighbourhood in the founding years. There are already more new people who came to rent. Who come from their communities because of the guerrillas, because of narco violence, because of economic need, and the lack of water, because there are no opportunities of any kind where they come from.

A: And the people who arrive then don't get involved as before?

S: They don't get involved as much anymore as before.

A: And do you think this Committee is an opportunity for people to get involved?

S: Yes

A: And how was that experience after the interview? How did you decide to form the group and continue doing activities?

S: We had meetings every eight days here on the corner of this street. And we said: "We are going to go to this place, or this protest or march”, and we asked, “who is going to accompany us? we need this many people”. And people would say "I'm in" And once we were there, we would ask “who is going to enter to speak with the government people, who is going to be our representative?”. And then you had to sign up and support those who were standing up for us and continue to do so.

A: Did you already know some of the people in this group then?

S: My nearby neighbours yes, but the people who came from Aztecas street no. For a long time, I would pass by and see the camp they had there. But I did not know them. We did know that their protest was for water because there was a water spring there. But I did not get involved. There was no empathy. There was a lot of that attitude of letting every one to care for themselves.

But now we know that water spring comes from the forests and rivers up in the mountains and that the neighbourhood is on top of an aquifer. If you go to the park and look out over the football training fields, you can see a little lagoon there. So we are all above an aquifer, Santo Domingo and neighbourhoods like Candelaria and Los Reyes, like Ruiz Cortines, Santa Ursula and Ajusco. I remember that I had friends, as a young lady when I left the boarding school, and well, I visited my friends, and in the Los Reyes and La Candelaria neighbourhoods, everyone had wells. Not like the water well from the government or like the classic image that we may have, no, no. They were like holes in the ground covered with steel sheets and wood so that the kids would not fall into the water. Many had a well in that less elevated area, so you can understand me. And they did not raise their voices much and to this date, they continue to not raise their voices due to lack of water. We do have more problems in central Santo Domingo.

A: Because it is on higher ground?

S: Not only that. The thing is that if the government puts water on the pipes for us from the well, let's assume, from nearby the University, there is not enough to reach all the way here.

A: And speaking of the group. How has that experience of participating in the Committee been for you? What is the most valuable thing that you rescue from this group?

S: First, the admiration for myself because I never thought I was capable of being in a situation like this. I always thought: "no, who is going to listen to me all alone, who is going to listen to Sandra alone? Or to listen to so-and-so? No one".

And that's how it always was. You went to Huayamilpas, you went to the mayor's office to get a SUAC number there in Carranza street, do you know where?

A: Yes

S: Ok, so you go and give your number and ask the bureaucrats there: [Sandra introduces dialogue and makes different voices to represent the people she interacts with in these offices]

-"Here is my number, when will the truck come by my house?"

-“Hmm, you still have to wait a lot"- the people in the office would tell you

-"Can you tell me roughly when?"

-"Today we are Monday, s maybe on Saturday... not my problem"

And I don't know what to call those people, but I would come back on Saturday and they would say:

- "No, guess what, your number has already passed. You need a new number"

And you had to swallow your rage, your frustration and hopelessness because they treated you and continue to treat you bad.

-"Hey, I need water to wash"

-“Come take a bath here”

-"How am I going to come here to bathe if it is a place for workers, for men?"

Not they tell you to go and bathe there, right? But before they didn't even say anything like that.

A: What did they tell you?

S: They told me “Do whatever you want. I don't care, there's nothing you can change. What do you want me to do? The person in charge gives us his list of people so that they can be assigned the water.”

And well, we continue to have problems with water. Because the people in charge of water are not empathetic. They take advantage of the needs of the people when the people are the ones who put them there.

A: And you tell me that water is a human right

S: It should be a human right. Because written on a piece of paper, in a matter of rights, it is. But who respects it?

And I know that it is not just Santo Domingo with this problem, I know that this is like that in many other municipalities, other states, and other… continents, because they are continents. And that this will get bigger, and that this will keep happening, and maybe as time goes on, it will keep getting worse. Yes, because we are already many people. And because people are very wasteful of everything. They do not value things as they should. I remember that we used a plastic bag, and you recycled it over and over until the little bag broke. And the same with paper. We had no toilet paper, everyone used newspaper or magazine paper.

A: Or the same water, I imagine you had to take great care of it.

S: Yes, here whenever we shower, while the water that you are going to use is warming up, you put a bucket below. And if we are doing laundry, maybe you throw away the soap water but you separate the rinse water so that in that rinse water you can put a load of clothes again.

A: Water is very precious to you then…

S: Yes, you can't waste it. I remember that we washed the dishes when we were little in two buckets, one where there was soap and the other where we rinsed. And that water was always reused.

And currently, when we don't have water we do the same. Fortunately, we have a cistern. And whenever we have about twenty centimetres left, when the pump can no longer pull the water, then we take out that little water with buckets and use it for the most essential needs, which are washing our hands, perhaps washing a few dishes if possible. If not we use disposable styrofoam plates and eat in those. And your dishes can stay there dirty, but the toilet can't stay dirty. So it's the same, bathe our grandchildren with a bucket and with a little bottle, and set aside water for the toilet.

A: And do you think the Committee has helped address this issue? You told me that it is not the same when you face this alone as when you are accompanied.

S: Yes, for example, a group from the Committee may enter an office to talk to whoever they have to talk to, but other people stay outside the offices waiting for them and supporting them. And nowadays, our group representatives are well known both in the water system's office and in the municipality. And I will always be grateful to them because I am no longer as active in the group. After all, I went to work again, as I told you. But instead, they know and have the confidence that I will always be behind them. Not side by side, because it is no longer my role, and the achievements and merits are theirs. Because people don't usually accept to take on problems or work just like that. Maybe you do it because it is also your need, but it's very comfortable to just distance yourself and have someone else do things for you. They put their money for transport fees, they give their time, words and wisdom so that other people listen to them. We support them, yes, but not as much as we should sometimes.

Many people on the Committee, many, ask for a truck and send their number and address, but how many times do they show up at the meetings? It is very comfortable… And there is no empathy there. But hey, we do this work for them and for all of us who need water.

A: Do you think contact between neighbours in this group is valuable? Has being part of this defence of water brought this aspect of getting to know people more?

S: People know me. Many times I don't even know who someone is, but they would greet me on the street. I'm really bad with names or sometimes with recognizing people by their faces. I do know my nearby neighbours around me, especially the older women, the women that are my contemporaries, I do know them, and maybe one or more of their children.

But there aren't many of them anymore. Of those seasoned ladies and strong warriors, and leaders, that existed, not many remain. There is very little of them left, very little. I'm glad because most of these ladies already have their big houses built around here, and they didn't take no for an answer, they never did. If they had to go to remove rocks or do any type of work, they were all there. Working to get a market, schools, roads, the avenues. They were all there. And the one who want to go was even forced to. And it was better for you to move when they wanted because they would even hit you.

It was the same with the small milk shops. My dad worked at the university, and he got us the first plates to make our milk cards. The women would put their bags in a rope to set aside their places. And there was always the abusive one who tied two in one, and if other women caught her, they would even hit her. CONASUPO was a blessing here because it helped to raise all the children, including me. The milk and bread, which CONASUPO sold at the time, were wonderful.

A: And now what do you expect for the future of the Committee and the defence of water?

S: If I'm honest, I want to leave an example, and I want a life lesson to remain for my children, my grandchildren, and my neighbours. What is that life lesson? To achieve your goals, you have to fight for them. No matter how old you are.

We have colleagues who are no longer here. And I say "we have" because one continues to remember the neighbours with great affection. Maybe because of a pandemic, or the many pandemics, the many problems that have bothered us for many years. Maybe because of that sometimes those neighbours who also supported us are no longer with us, but maybe their daughters or perhaps grandchildren are still there.

I want this to be a life lesson. Just like the one that my mother left me, that it is good to achieve your goals, that is the same lesson that I want to leave behind.

A: Do you think joining together as neighbours can give an advantage in achieving those goals?

S: Unity makes you strong. Both in the family and life. When you show up, at a job, on the subway, or on the bus, and you say to everyone: "good morning" or "good afternoon", everyone answers: "good afternoon". And if you get off and say "good morning", everyone answers too. Those values no longer exist. And it is very difficult for someone to come and greet you, or even for grandchildren or children to arrive and say hello to visitors. A greeting does not make you less of a person. On the contrary.

A: And do you think that despite all the time and effort in this, the defence of water is worth the trouble?

S: Yes. Together we have been in the middle of heavy rains, and a lot of heat. We have been thirsty, tired, and sometimes walking a lot. And here we are. If I have to do it again, I do it gladly. I do not even doubt it: I would do it with pleasure.

A: Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience in this group?

S: It made me grow as a person, as a grandmother. In the sense that I made myself known and made myself present here in my community. I referred to the fact that other people have even interviewed me. So what do I mean? Wherever you are, give your best as a person, no matter how old you are. If you can do good, do it. You always have either something to learn or something to teach. As a person and human being, give your best, wherever you are, at home or work. And if you are seeing a situation that should not be happening, you must raise your voice and say what is wrong. I have many experiences and I have never been silent.

A: Well, I thank you very much for your time and for sharing your story with me sharing all of this with me.

S: No, on the contrary, all this gratifies me and affirms my values. Because at first, I didn't think I was capable or important. I felt that I could do nothing. But if you don't raise your voice, then no one will listen to you. And that applies to all aspects of life. If you do not speak your mind, then no one will know. You have to speak up to be heard and understood. And you can expect the same from other people.

A: Sure, and as you tell me, the group has grown and the number of people multiplied.

S: Yes, Tita, Beni, everyone comes.

And at the beginning I thought it was just me, how do you like that! But I saw my neighbours and well, recognised that we all have the same needs. I saw my neighbours, and I saw that this happened to them too, and noticed that we all had the same problem and it was not just me. Between all of us, we realised this, and said to one another: “I want the same as you”. But the important thing is that this necessity becomes a shared struggle. From the individuality of each one, we were little by little uniting and agreeing to be as one. My neighbours would tell me: “I don't have water”, but that wouldn't give way to a collective struggle before this. So it was good to finally join for this. And we had to get used to each other.

Look [checks the WhatsApp group] we are currently 211 people. And in the group, we keep in touch. If someone needs anything, they let it be known through the group, and we are constantly checking it. And if I have to give an opinion and contribute something I say it. If not, I stay silent. Because I think this Committee and the representatives are doing everything perfectly, from my point of view they are wonderful, just look at the fact that the water well is already there. And we had to raise our voices with those unsatisfied with the well. Yes, that was a lot of work.

A: Yes, I have been told that you had to overcome many obstacles for that.

S: Yes, and I get upset and quarrel about the things that interest me. And this struggle for the well was something that interested me infinitely because it was not just for me. And if I am seeing that these people are not right and some of them are getting crazy, sorry, but I am going to make you shut up and listen to me more than anything. And people on the Committee haven't let me sometimes, because Waldo stops me and tells me not to say anything when I'm very angry. But I am like that. And some poeple say to me “you are a lot like your mom”. Well, why not if she's my mom? Many people tell me "it's that you are very foolish". And yes I am very foolish but do not think you know me that well. Everyone would appear to be a fool, but things are not what they seem. Life is always teaching you stuff. We are getting old, yes, but we are getting wiser.

A: How does having or not having water now make you feel?

S: When there is water, well, I feel complete. My heart feels full, and I feel alive. We need water for everything. Every day you need water. For the dishes, for the restroom, for everything.

And also when there are diseases. Imagine having a sick person at home and not having water to have them clean. That is very sad and frustrating. It is exhausting. I realized these things especially when we have had someone with a serious illness because, without water, you cannot care for them well. So having water makes you feel better. When there is water I even feel good, with more energy, because we already have that covered.

And well, this is my experience. Roughly, this is my experience. These are my roots. My roots and my life.

A: Again, thank you very much for sharing it with me.