



Voices of Our Region
Patricia Imbarlina

The way we start is by you giving your name, where you live or where you're from. I know you mentioned New York so I don't know if you're from New York-

Well it's a long story.

OK. And a little bit about your family.

My name is Patricia Imbarlina. I was born in South America in a small country called Uruguay. It's below Brazil. And when I was about three years old, we moved to Pittsburgh and we lived in different towns. I grew up in Verona, Penn Hills, Plum, all my life. When I finished from high school, I was 18. I moved to Rochester, New York because they have a college called Rochester Institute of Technology that offered all the programs: Interpreting, note taking, different majors. I went there for a bachelor's in Interior Designing. That was the major. The minor was Social Work, and I had some computing experience with graphic design. After I graduated, I couldn't find a job; and at the same time, I had a baby. And he ended up having a disability called mild autism, and we would travel back and forth, Pittsburgh and Rochester. At the time, my mother was dying. She was a nurse. And that changed my life, because I didn't want to do drafting anymore. I didn't want to do interior decorating. To me, health was a big issue. And when I went back to Rochester after my mother passed away, then I went to school for massage therapy; and I took 1,000 hours. That was the highest. Because each state massage therapy program can be 500 hours, can be 700, but New York is one of the two states that have the highest hours. After I finished massage school, I stayed there to work with a chiropractor for a while, but then I had to get my license. I was an apprentice. This state license was unfair because people with disabilities...they go by the book. When we take the exams, some of them have nothing to do with books. I took it three times and I lost over \$1,000. I wanted to speak with Albany, New York with the Office of the Professions to explain to them. They didn't care. They said everybody has the same problem. That was hard for me because to defend the group of disabilities was not going to work. It's going to be a long battle. I have a friend from school. She has a learning disability. She's a wonderful massage therapist. We used to work on each other. She can get her license. So I did the research, and not all the states have the same state board requirements. Some states go with national certification. Some states have their own state board. Pennsylvania, now there's going to be some changes, but we don't have to have a license to work here but there are going to be changes for massage therapists who were in the grandfather clause. They can get their license eventually. They're working on it. And from working in New York and Pennsylvania is different. The counties are different but I enjoy working here. I get to work my own business. I get to do my own hours. Nobody

tells me what to do and it's very peaceful. It's easier for me to see my son because of the joint custody between me and the father. This job has freedom.

Where is his father, in Pittsburgh?

In Rochester, New York.

Oh, in Rochester.

So I see him every month for a week. I go up, pick him up, and come here, spend time. He's been here, too, you can ask him. During the summer he's here July and August. I'm not complaining, so he gets to see both parents.

How old is he?

He's going to be eight in July. Good boy.

Were you born with a hearing loss?

Nobody has an answer because my family assumed I was born with hearing; but when we moved to Pittsburgh, I was turning three. I wasn't talking. So they took me to the hospital for a test, and they said it was a highly profound hearing loss. And when I was four years old, I started pre-school in downtown and then they moved me to different schools where they had tutoring, interpreters and like a special education teacher--main streaming. They'll have a class of deaf kids but then they go to regular classrooms with interpreters. But moving from school to school was stressful for me because I was living in Verona. I had to go to downtown for school. Then living in Penn Hills, I had to go to another school in Edgewood. When we were living in Plum, I had to go to school in North Versailles. That was really stressful. I had to get up like two hours before the bus came and it then it took me about two hours to get home. That's not a normal life for me. So college was different. One place. You had everything there.

Which one?

In college. RIT. Mainstreamed to high school was hard for me but when I went to college in Rochester they had everything in one place. I don't know about today, if each school district has their own program on that?

They don't.

They still don't? Too bad.

You know, what happens is most people who are deaf or hard of hearing go to Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf or DePaul. DePaul is an oral school and Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf is a sign school.

Two different schools.

Right. So where did you learn to speak and to sign?

Well, in the beginning, I took speech therapy. Then I learned to sign English right because of the grammar. So that kept the routine from four years old to high school every year. I didn't learn ASL until I went to college and I got to meet different people. Some people come from deaf schools. Some come from mainstream. WPSD I met them through like a basketball tournament. DePaul I met them through a deaf program. So it's like two different worlds. Then my family is Italian but we have Spanish, we have different cultures coming together, speaking different languages. So I'm in a world where everything is different. I live with that.

So do you know Spanish?

I can read Spanish but I can't speak Spanish.

OK.

A little bit. I need speech for that. I learned English, but for Spanish, I would need years of speech.

Right. So your parents, when they came to Pittsburgh, did they already speak English?

No. They were from Italy. When they moved to South America when they were little, the language from Italian to Spanish is not that different. They are very similar. When we moved to Pittsburgh, they had to read the books. They had to speak. The neighbors helped them to speak. My mother was going to school for nursing. She learned English there. They have like a book, English to Spanish and Spanish to English. And I remember they had to read and speak. They have an accent. But to do sign language, they didn't have time. So that's why they wanted me to speak so they don't have to move their hands. Ironically, my younger brother and sister, they learned to sign. My older brother, he's older than me, he used to play well with his hands. I'd be home with them. Now my sister's an interpreter for Washington, D.C. She's doing great.

So nobody else has a hearing loss?

No.

Just you?

Right.

OK, OK.

Exactly why, I don't know. They think I was born with hearing and gradually lost it. I didn't show any symptoms of sickness or anything.

Your son is fine with his hearing?

Yes. But he has mild autism. That was a new thing because none of my family has that. So my medical history, the way I look at it, everyone has something different. Like cancer in my relatives. Some people die young, in their 40s. Some people die in their 50s. A baby can live long, maybe until 80. But health is the biggest issue. But for disabilities, only...

What's been the biggest struggle for you?

Working for somebody was the biggest struggle. In the past I was working different jobs. Some I would stay a long time, some temporary. But it was hard for me to go and work for a company and not have respect. For example, I have to educate them about how to lip read. If you were looking for me, you need to go find me. Don't be throwing me a piece of paper. Give me my respect. But some of these jobs were good for me, but financially, no, because I went to college. You know things change. There were no jobs doing drafting or interior designing. I wanted to work with hands but I wanted to be paid big money to have a better life. So I figured if I would do massage therapy, that would be the best. Even though I hold a bachelor's degree, I could get for any job. I wouldn't have to go back to school. Most of the jobs that pay good money would be the ones where you have to use the phone. They would not accept me using a TTY or the...phone. And people, some know about the relay but some don't. So they don't want complications, and sometimes they pick on me because somebody else is not doing their job. Like the person that cleans up the space at the job. My boss or somebody else would say, "Well, you need to clean that up" because somebody else is not doing their job. They know people with disabilities work hard. So doing my business is better for me. Because I know it's right. That's one. And most of the people are very nice. I couldn't ask for more.

How does that work at the Newman Center? Do you rent space from them?

I sublease. There's a person who leases the office but then a person has other therapists under them. So I do Saturdays. Somebody else does Tuesdays. Somebody else does Wednesdays, Thursdays. It depends, and it's affordable because more people who lease and sublease reduces the monthly rent payment. Other massage therapists with their own space, have to pay like \$1,000 or more a month. That eat up everything. And I have to

take continuing education. That costs me money, too, because with the American Massage Therapy Association, that's where professional members pay for the proof. And they have everything including continuing education, proof that they went to massage school, proof that they are professionals not just a massage therapist who does less than professional jobs. Well, to keep up with that, I have to take continuing education every year. That's expensive. Supplies are expensive. It takes a lot to buy everything but I wouldn't pay so much money for a lease. I need to eat. And gas.

Right. So but you work more than just Saturday, right?

That's going to change because next month...in the past, my office has been on the second floor. There's a stair that goes up. There is no elevator but the center is accessible on the first floor only, so I've spoken with the therapist to see if I could share the office on the first floor. I have a client, she cannot go upstairs, and if they don't do it then somebody will be saying, "Well, we're the ADA" and have to solve the problem before it happens. Finally, there's an office I can move to next month. I'll be doing Fridays and some Saturdays, which is good. In the past, it would be just Saturdays. If I wanted to do more days of the week, I have to pay more for the lease.

Oh. Oh.

Because of the lighting, electricity, the air conditioning, the heat, water.

Oh, yeah.

But for about two days a week next month, and the following six months that's good because I have a good deal for the lease. These people are reasonable. I'm thankful.

But you also go into people's homes?

For regular clients. New clients have to meet me in my office. I need to know who they are. I'm not going to a house...I'm tough with that. I've had emails from people I've never met before asking, "Can you come to my home and do a massage?" "No, you have to come to my office and then we'll go from there." Most of the time, clients will meet me and there's some of them who will want home appointments. It depends on their homes, if they're comfortable. Some of them just go to my office.

Who's had the biggest influence in your life?

My mother. My mother is the boss of the family; and because she was a nurse for so long, she lectures about how you eat, how you sleep, your health, and everything else. She was disciplined. My father is, too, but my mother is the boss. She watches everything you do, makes sure you know what you're doing. And you know, I have two brothers and my sister. It's like a big family but every one of us go through some stages and she'll be

there. She tells you what she thinks. "This is going to work. This is not going to work." Like a mentor. But after she passed away... she was about 54 years old, always amazed with that because she never drank, she never smoked...and she died so early. Some people in my family have bad habits, but they're still alive today. So when she passed away, I thought about becoming a nurse; but then I didn't like it because when she was a nurse, she would be working so many double shifts and when she was off, she'd be out there shopping, doing errands, everything. I never see her. I didn't want that for my kid or my future. Massage therapy gives me flexibility. When she's been gone, I think about what she'd be like if she was still alive. But there is nobody else. My father can't take her place. I'll have...unfortunately.

What do you think your biggest accomplishment has been?

Connecting with communities here. When I came back home last summer, that was June 2007, I had to start my life all over again. I've been in New York for 15 years and everything had changed. Some things have stayed the same; but people come and go, so I started out looking for old friends who might have been still here. So from that point, it took me a long time to find these people, find the communities, find my OVR, to find this place. I worked my business six months before I got my first client. Six months was a long time and after six months, things started to pick up. So to me, the biggest accomplishment is not giving up. Keep going. Advertising is ongoing but it felt good, starting from scratch, to how far you have gotten. The things that happened. It's about believing.

So your family is still here in Pittsburgh?

Yes.

OK. So you had somebody to connect with immediately when you came back.

Right.

Your family. What else do we ask? I forget the...We have the same questions we ask everybody.

Working Order.

What's the connection with Working Order? What did they do for you?

Oh, a whole lot of ideas. They have been a...

Ah huh.

Every lady in this building is amazing because this lady would tell me like a business plan what I need to do. That organizes everything. And then there is another lady. She gives me a world of thought like she pulls me out of the thinking box--thinking in a circle. She tells me "These are the groups out there you can meet." I'm thinking to myself "I'm going to be dead trying to meet everybody." But know what I mean? It's...to go out there to meet people. And I have another lady here who helps me with the numbers. And this support system here is kind of balanced because everyone's different. But they made a difference. They tell me, you know, these are the things you can do but it's up to you. So I just take them and do it. There's a difference between thinking and doing it.

Right.

I've gone to meetings. I was at five different organizations, two different deaf communities. One is here. It's called PAD, Pittsburgh Association for the Deaf. The other one is in New Castle. It's called I Care House.

Oh, yeah. I Care House. She called me to come up there and do some interviews.

Who?

I don't remember and I never called her back.

Was her name Sharon Irwin?

Yes, that's right.

She's deaf.

I don't know. I didn't get a phone call, I got a letter.

A letter?

Yeah.

She has been searching for this name for...

No, no, no, no that's a different one.

Sharon Irwin, I know who she is. I'm not sure if she's going to be there that long but I met Alice. Ruby would know. Alice is like her boss. She's a professor at the Slippery Rock University. But she also helped establish I Care House. You know Ruby when she got those to, um, the event on May 31st (???)?

That's...they wanted...

You weren't there? You should have been there!

That's what they wanted me to do. Come there. And we have been so busy with these interviews that we're never in the office. So I didn't get reminded.

Well you can always check with Ruby, she'll tell you.

OK. OK.

So two organizations. They know each other but it's just a matter of location. One's in Pittsburgh, New Castle. Now that wasn't there years before. In the old time...that was not there. And the group in Pittsburgh was kind of small but now it's getting bigger and they know each other. They do basically the same events. The other organization, there's a woman who monitors my business and I meet with them to exchange calls and to talk and we talk about the Union Project, the church up on Negley. I have connections with them but not personally, but I've been there several times for events. And I meet people there. So meeting people out there makes a difference. One comes to see you for massage, word of mouth. So I have a long list of people. Because for massage therapy, every person would go, once or twice a year because they're so busy. The schedule is constantly filled up. It's hard to find people who have time for massage. So meeting out there, I get to make new friends. I have old friends. And it makes a difference to be out there and have all that support.

Right. Right. I...so the Newman Center is working for you now but do you have, what do you see for the future?

In the future, I hope to add more days. Usually clients will not ask for Mondays, Tuesdays or Wednesdays. They would ask for Thursday, Friday or Saturday. So I'm looking to expand that a little, because next month for six months for this year, the lease will be for Fridays and some Saturdays so that's an increase of days opening. I want to become a teacher some day, not right away. I need to have work experience, because then, when I teach I know what I'm talking about. I would stay with the Newman Center because parking is convenient for customers. It's accessible...first floor. And the leases are reasonable. The people who work there, they're very nice. There's so much you can do there. You can advertise on flyers, coupons, on the wall. I don't get to see that in other places. I'm hoping some day to expand the business. And not give up.

Do you live nearby there?

No, I live in New Kensington. Near Plum. Living near there I don't mind the pike if there's a (???) somewhere. I love the pike.

Yeah, yeah, right. It's expensive to live up there.

It is?

I think so.

I'll have to do the research.

In the Highlands?

Highland Park.

Well if you buy, yeah, but you can rent. Renting is really cheap there.

Really cheap?

You get a lot of space for what you get. When you look at the comparing prices, you get a lot more in Highland Park. Yeah, I like Highland Park.

I've been talking with people and they tell me you have to be careful where you chose to live and I'm like what do you mean? Taxes. You know? Where you live. They believe that Monroeville is affordable. I'm not sure about that.

The City of Pittsburgh, forget about it.

Oh, yeah. I know. You're right. Whew.

The personal income tax is higher than any other place. I have a friend who works with me. She lived in the city for a long time. They bought a house out in Ross Township. She felt like she got a pay raise because the personal tax in Ross Township was 1%. In the city it's 3.5.

Wow.

She said it was like getting all this money in her paycheck because she didn't have to pay the City.

Well, no wonder. The city's in good hands. Compared to...I've seen horrible cities out there. I drive a lot, all my life. Pittsburgh city is in real good hands. But other cities, I know that they have so much work to do. I'm talking about like the outside...and people do construction for example. Here construction, if they have to fix something, out there, they're quick. In Rochester, New York, for example, it would have taken years. It's very different and the pay to have these people to get the work done. Wow, taxes, I like taxes.

So tell me one more thing about your son. What's his name?

Jaime. It's Spanish for James. But it's pronounced "Hi May".

J-A-I-M-E?

There you go.

Does he understand about your hearing aids?

He...half and half. He knows I'm wearing hearing aids. He knows I can speak in sign. What he doesn't understand is I can't wear them 24/7. They hurt my ears, the ear molds. They're made in plastic but the same with wearing the glasses. For me to communicate with him, here's the thing, he's learning how to do grammar. He's learning how to speak English. And he has therapy: speech, physical, occupational, social work, and psychology. Because he has emotions that he could express them, and he has challenges using his hands. That's his disability. He's not able to do things we can do like open the door, turning the cap off the bottle. I can understand that, but mine is different. It's hard for him to understand. But I take them out, you have to sign. He knows some sign language, but he doesn't understand that for written grammar and signing are not the same. So I'm trying not to confuse him. Now he's trying to speak Spanish, Italian and English. He's going too fast. So if I take him out, he flips because he was talking to me. I didn't hear him. He thinks I'm ignoring him and he blows up. He did a public blow-up in McDonalds. I just stood there and let him steam it off and I said, "Listen, I had to take them out. They hurt, I can't hear you. You have to move your hands." So after a while he got it. But it takes some time for him to get it. Because to him mommy can talk, she can hear. The second time I took him out, you know what he said? "Put them back on?" "Honey, they hurt. I cannot put them back on." So, it takes a matter of time and patience. He'll get it someday, but not now.

Does his father speak Spanish?

No. English. His mother, meaning my son's grandmother, she speaks Spanish. My father speaks both. So whatever he hears, he picks them up.

Good. I think that's good.

I think he likes to talk sometimes. Sometimes he likes computers. PBS Kids. He likes to play the games on the computer. He's very easy to work with. When it comes to his emotions, he cannot express them. Sometimes he just blows up. He screams. I'm used to that, but the public doesn't get it. They look at me like "What is wrong with your son?"

I know. Sometimes when I see that happening to parents, I want to say, "We've all been through that."

Oh, yeah. Good! At the park, like Idlewild Park, it's hard. I have to pick him up. He needed assistance like to go on the water slide and the lifeguards don't know anything. This happened last summer. I had to go pick him up because he would go on the water slide. The mat got stuck which was difficult because so much water on the platform. I told him, "Pick it up, pick it up." He didn't know how. I had to go get him, pick up the mat and walk. Well, the lifeguard said, "You're not supposed to do that." I said, "Well, exactly." I told her he has a disability and so do I and I have to help him. I wanted to give her a little sock but I couldn't because she was young, very young. And I went to the manager. He doesn't understand what happened. Nobody understood what happened. It's hard for me. And when I went home I told my sister what happened. Oh, my, she's very aggressive. She called the management and told them what happened. So the head, the directing department said it shouldn't have happened because they had training for disabilities.

Oh, wow.

And she was going to get a meeting. I don't know if he did or not, but she said he would call a meeting. They're supposed to help, they're not supposed to sit there and tell them what to do.

Right.

But the girl had the nerve to tell me that he needed to do it himself. You see why I wanted to give her a little sock? That was so insulting. You don't talk to me like that. I have the magazine, *Time* magazine, two of them at home. Three million children a year... have his condition. There are different phases of autism. Why? I don't know. But we have to work with them. When they get older, they are going to be not the minority but maybe the majority. That's one of the reasons why I'm doing this business. When it expands, my son has a job. I want to have that door open for him. Why should he have to go through what I went through? I hate people like, I hate to have to print. I hate to have to put taxes on the check. Maybe he can do them... it's all computer work.

Yeah. Yeah. Right.

I can just relax and we'll both make money.

That's right.

Sound good?

A good idea.

Education out there's hard.

Was this...where was this water slide park?

Idlewild.

Idlewild? Is it in Kennywood Park?

Like a sister.

It's just water, right?

No, Idlewild has both rides and water.

They have like Kennywood, plus water slides. The name of it is Splash something.

Right. But the same company owns Sand Castle.

We went to Sand Castle the week after because this...he was not having a good time there and they have a playground in the water. Like two feet deep and he had a great time out there. I like Sand Castle.

I've never been there but my children have.

It's fun.

Makes me nervous because I wouldn't be able to go in after them. You know, I'm afraid. So I let them go with somebody else so I don't have to see.

Well, I need help next because when he's out there...the big slides that go down like this. He's like "Mommy I want to go up them." And I'm like, "Are you sure you know what you're doing because I don't want to look." You know he likes taking risks. But how do we adjust when you can only put one person on a side. They should make it bigger...accessibility for two. Because for his condition, you have to show him this is what you do. Do you understand? Yes. OK. You can't just verbally tell him. So that's something new that's coming in, that I'm seeing that people aren't seeing right now.. I'm trying to tell them you need to make this bigger and accessible. People say, "Well, he doesn't look disabled." He doesn't have to look disabled...inside. He is autistic. If we were with him for a long time, we can tell. He repeats things or puts things in order...like the Lego's. He puts them in order. You can tell. These kids don't do that. If you just met him once, you'd say, "Oh, he looks normal." Well, you think. I'm just trying to some day...if we get one person...can't change. One person's voice is not enough. If we have a disability organization with lots of people, maybe that would make a difference.

Is there somebody that's the head of PAD?

For the deaf organization? There are many staff people.

I mean is there a president?

There is.

Who is it? Do you know?

I haven't met the president. I knew a few people because I grew up with them.

OK.

But I haven't been in that building yet.

OK. Athena, do you have any questions? Tony?

The statistic that was brought up the other day for a child being successful is really determined on the mother. In the sense of the mother's education and the mother pushing and demanding all the rights for the child.

Who said that?

Uh, what was her name? He child, that we interviewed yesterday...Tina Calabro.

Is she a teacher?

She was a teacher but she has a son with cerebral palsy, so she's mostly home. But now, she writes and does public relations.

Excellent. I'd like to meet her some day. You going to have a party?

Yes, we are. On November 20th. She'll be there.

I want to go!

She lives very near you, in Highland Park.

Small world.

I'll tell her about you and tell her to go over to Newman on a Friday. You're there on a Friday?

Next month.

Next month.

This month will be Saturdays, half days. I have my business cards and you can give this to her.

Yeah. Yeah.

Before I forget. How many do you need, just one or two?

You know what, give me two because I'm thinking of someone else I want to give this to. There's a deaf group that meets in our building and they are...a psychiatrist chairs this group. She's not deaf but she knows sign and I'm thinking she might want to know about this to have a resource in the community, for the deaf community to come and have somebody they can talk to and communicate with.

OK. So I want her to have this too.