

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Transcript 5

BL: Thanks so much for taking the time for me to interview you. I really would like to know about your experience of this midlife time of your life.

05: Are we talking about the menopause?

BL: Yes.

05: I have not had a lot of symptoms and I know that a lot of women my age complain about heat, hot flushes and I know, I love the heat and I have not experienced any sort of heat, hot flushes yet.

BL: When you say you know many women who complain about hot flushes, can you elaborate on that?

05: My sister, my sister she is extremely, sometimes she gets to a period where she is extremely angry and she is very ... hot. And, uh, and ... my immediate family and friends, I know and co-workers around my age, who tell me they have to open the window at night and sleep (laughing).

BL: So that's how you know about the symptoms?

05: That's correct and also my, uh, yearly physical. My doctor asked me if I don't have any symptoms and he wanted to know that maybe he could put me on the pill that they give out ... uh ... uh ost, ost ...

BL: Estrogen?

05: Ja, ja ... which I refuse because there is a lot of cancer in my family and they say it is best not to.

BL: Did you read that or did somebody tell you about it?

05: Both. I read, I've forgotten the name of the book, but it said that if you were to have cancer in you it would accelerate the process if it was active, something like that, right?

BL: So you don't feel the need for HRT?

05: No, because I'm old-fashioned because my mom and my sister, not my sister, my grandmother ... they don't take that because my grandmother lived to be 93 years and she didn't believe in that stuff and I'm kinda grandma's girl (laughing) so I don't want.

BL: So for you it would be a cultural or traditional thing.

05: Definitely, yes

BL: Tell me about the cultural things. Have they impacted the way in which you deal with health issues?

05 (excited): Yes, yes ... huh, I live in the States many, many years. Almost forty years but I still stay with the old ways: eat small portions, work a lot, cook everything from scratch, and I don't take any medications unless I really have to. So that's what I do ... I don't take hormones.

BL: You don't feel the need to?

05: No, no...(very reflective and thoughtful here)

BL: So you are saying that you don't have any physical symptoms?

05: No, none ... not that I have noticed. Maybe, I love being hot, I love being hot. I was born and raised in the Tropics ... so ...

BL: Are you aware of any changes? You said that sometimes your sister "gets wild".

05: Yes, yes I can feel that sometimes I really get irritable but uh ... not to the point where I feel the need to go on medication for it. But I say I know that my sister does, she is wild ... she lives in Panama.

BL: Does that make a difference?

05: I don't know, I don't know. But uh, I have heard from people that they get very irritable like. I could have killed my husband last week". But ... er ... no I don't think (long pause).

BL: Some of the women I have interviewed have mentioned sleep changes.

05: It's difficult to pinpoint that because I always get up in the middle of the night because I have a weak bladder and I always get up in the middle of the night to urinate. Um, yeah, I usually get up at night too.

BL: How many times per night would that be?

05: Depends, oh at least two or three times, but now I cut my water intake two or three hours before I go to bed ... especially when it is cold!

BL: And things like skin changes and hair changes?

05: No, no skin ... Nothing. The only thing that I have experienced and it is funny, is about four years ago I had shingles and, you know, I said "What is this?" and the doctor explained to me what it was,

and I said "At my age?" And he said, yes. At the time I went to see him because I was in constant pain and it was already healing and he told me that, uhm, people that they have chicken pox will have sometimes in their lives, shingles; sometimes they don't, but I do.

He said, "You are grown up and it is not uncommon" and he told me that it could happen again because I still have the virus. It's still dormant and if I get very nervous it could happen again.

BL: And were you very nervous at that time of your life?

05: Yes, I think so. I think so. I don't know what it was, but it was very scary, very painful. I took Advil. The doctor told me he could have given me a shot. It's fine now, fine now.

BL: A number of the other women I have spoken with have mentioned the emotional and social changes that have taken place, like their children start leaving home. Have you found that adjustment, how have you experienced that?

05: Yeah, my kids are all gone. It's been very hard! (quite emphatic)

BL: Hard, in what way?

05: It's very hard. It's cultural again, because where I live, we stay in the same area; we don't live away. I was the exception, you know. We always live with my family, my grandma and my cousins so ... there my daughter moves to Phoenix and I am a grandmother and I only see the baby sometimes. That is so hard; that is so difficult! I feel that she should be closer. So it has been very hard.

BL: So has that made your grandma role difficult?

05: Oh yes, you see, every summer I would go to my grandma and spend summers with her. So coming to the States, I leave all my family behind and now when I have my own family, they leave too. So it has been so hard. When I left home I was 23 years old and so I have all those ... ethnic ways, you want to call it. So it's been a hard adjustment because I feel like I lost my family over there. Not lost them, but cannot see them as often because of the distance and now that I have my family and my daughter ... they are not going to have them either and so it's like ... Yes, it's been hard!

BL: How many children do you have?

05: Two.

BL: And they both live out of state?

05: Only one, my daughter. She lives in Phoenix and she has a 23 month-old child.

BL: And your other child?

05: He is the oldest and is a son. My son lives in Boise and he has been with us for the last 8 months and he is about to move out, but I really enjoy having him home (laughing).

BL: Do you still have parents?

05: My mom. But she lives in Panama, She has never been to Boise but she came to Wyoming when we lived there. She doesn't like it here because it is too cold ... too cold. My husband's parents are deceased ... they died.

BL: So when your son goes, you really will have an empty nest?

05: Again ... again. But my husband and I have a great relationship, great relationship.

BL: Tell me about that.

05: In this marriage, ... he is not the father of my children. This is my second marriage. He is not the father of my kids. We have been married for almost eight years now but he has never had any kids and we have a very good relationship. He is my best friend. Oh, he is my best friend! We get along very well. We like the same things. Very respectful in our marriage.

BL: Is he also Hispanic?

05: No, he is American.

BL: So, he doesn't have the cultural things that you have been talking about?

05: Yes and no, because his parents were Italian. They came from Italy, so it's a lot the same. And that's why I think we get along so well because it's all about family.

BL: So family is important for you?

05: Yes, very, the most important thing, the most important thing.

BL: You mentioned that you are doing some studying, a college degree. How have you managed that now with all your roles: a mother, a wife and a student? That's quite a difficult role.

05: It is and what has happened right now is that I take one class per semester. For a long time when I received my Associate of Arts degree I was working fulltime and, um, I had the kids were still at home and it was very hard and the kids were still at home and there were the demands of the kids and

school at that time. So I stopped. I was in Wyoming then and I thought I had to get my priorities straight and I can't do it and so I got my AD and then I came back to school three years to finish the baccalaureate degree. I didn't have the energy then and it wasn't worth it, and that ...

BL: Was that because you still had the kids at home?

05: Yeah ... the kids at home, I was living in Wyoming and all they have is community college and so I would have had to travel. Once I was done with that, I would have had to drive to Laramie some 45 miles away and there was no way I could do that. I was working then. I was a waitress and I was single. It was that period of time, before I met my husband.

BL: You mentioned that you were married before. He was the father of your children?

05: That's correct. I only had kids with him.

BL: How long have you been divorced then?

05: I have been divorced for ... ah ... a long time ... ten years or more. I met my first husband, the father of the children in Panama. That's how I came to the United States, he's American (laughing). It was just something that just happened. I never in my wildest dreams would have dreamt that I would have spent my adult life in a different country because when I met my husband my English, I didn't speak that much English. So when I came to America then it was a culture shock, a language shock ... no family here. It was very hard, very hard (quite reflective).

BL: Do you think that some of the cultural things have helped you with the changes as you have gotten older?

05: Yes, oh yes ...

BL: In what way?

05: I think that they have made me stronger. I think, probably, where we come from, we were very poor, so I always appreciate everything.

BL: That makes a difference?

05: Oh yeah, because I am always content with what I have. Um, if I have dinner and the dinner consists of a bowl of rice and meat or tuna, whatever it is, I am grateful that I got that. So you see, uh ... (looking for the right word I think).

BL: Even after all these years?

05: Oh yeah. I always try to remember what it's like not to have and I am always grateful for everything. If it's raining outside, I remember we need the water for the trees, for the grass, the birds. I always find the positive. I always try to be grateful, mmm.

BL: That makes a difference. Is that cultural or attitude?

05: Probably you are right, attitude. My grandma was that way so ...

BL: You talk a lot about your grandma. She obviously was a strong influence in your life.

05:(Her face positively lit up at this question.) Oh yes, yes, very.

BL: Do you see that being your role as a grandma?

05: Yes, yes. I love being a grandmother! Even on the website for our job we have our picture and you had to give your biography and so I put in there, My name is ... I am very short, and I am a proud grandmother of Abigail ... (lots of giggling). I had to put it there ... I want the whole world to know!

I think what is so funny sometimes ... because I think, because my daughter is white because of her dad but my daughter's fiancée is blonde and blue eyes and my daughter is white (pointing to her own skin), but the baby, she is also very fair skinned but her eyes are black, very black and her hair is black ...

BL: Very Hispanic?

05: Exactly, exactly! She has all the Spanish features and that makes me so happy ... so happy.

BL: That makes you feel good?

05: I feel that, you know, what my grandma started is continued in her, you know, yeah ...

BL: Some of the other women I have interviewed have spoken quite a lot about change in sexual activity. Have you noticed any differences as you have reached midlife, obviously it is a little different for you because of your quite recent second marriage?

05: No, I uh ... when I had my hysterectomy ... I really ... that was a long time ago, but the first year was hard. Every time I saw someone with a baby, it was yeah, um, hard but there was freedom not to have to worry about falling pregnant. I haven't had what you call ... um ... dryness? I haven't had that problem. Yes, my sexual desire is diminished, but that's because of my age too. I probably would rather go to Phoenix for two weeks and leave my husband because I could see my granddaughter! My priorities have shifted. I don't know that it's a comfort to know that he is there or, yeah ... but, I don't have as much desire sexually.

BL: Do you think that is because it's a physical thing or just a change in priority for you?

O5: I think it's just a change in priority, because to me I think not having the kids at home so much instead of ... I think the sexual is something that is going to be better and not diminish ... I don't know. You don't have to worry about the kids, you don't have to worry about getting pregnant, you have your job, you don't have any concerns, so ... more relaxed.

BL: As you get older do you have any concerns about death?

O5: I am more concerned about my mortality yes, definitely, yeah.

BL: In what way?

O5: In the way that time is getting by ... um ... how do you say? I am aware that other people in their fifties and sixties come out with diseases and so, then, that is why I go for my check-ups to try to be preventive medicine and, yeah, I think about it, but not in a fearful way. It's just that I want to see my granddaughter but I just feel that if it is my time, then, um, there's not much you can do about it and then ... I just have to live life to the fullest and that's when I am aware that I am getting older. So, yeah, I am well aware of my mortality.

BL: Have there been spiritual changes in your life?

O5: No, I was born and bred Catholic and even though I don't go to church, I pray every night. I pray with my rosary and, then, but I have faith, when things go wrong, when something happens that is frustrating me, that I cannot deal with it, I go straight to a higher power and I put it in God's hand and it always works. Because I feel that I can't do anything about it, so I try to ask God to help me.

BL: Do you find that as you have got older, you do that more?

05: I've always been close to God, but yes, yes, especially when my grandmother died. I do it more so. Now besides always asking God for things, I ask my grandmother.

BL: You obviously had a good relationship with your grandmother?

05: Yes, I did. We were very close and so I said to grandma, "I can't be everywhere, so you had better help me" (laughing). You know, I think it's beautiful to believe in something because it's not like, you know, how do you say, I don't know if I believe in that, it's okay. I say well, it's okay to believe. It's okay if you don't, what have you got to lose? What if it's true and you don't?

BL: And your husband, does he have any beliefs?

05: He's Catholic also. He's not as, you know, doesn't believe as much as I do, I suppose.

BL: I see from the questionnaire that you don't take any sort of supplements or dietary things?

05: No. The only thing is Synthroid, for my thyroid.

BL: How long have you been taking it?

05: A long time now. It's imbalanced, sometimes it's too high, sometimes too low. Right now it is really out of whack.

BL: How do you know that?

05: Well, three months ago when I did my blood test, I was taking a 100mg and he said I wasn't getting enough and then he increased to 150 and he lowered it to 125 and then when I went back about two weeks ago, he said it was still too high and lowered it to 100, which is lower than what I have had.

BL: Were you feeling different?

05: Yes I do. My muscles get very tired when I am like that, I know, I can feel it and my legs ache and I get very tired.

BL: Have you found as you have gotten older that you get tired easier?

05: Oh yeah, oh yeah, that's the only thing I miss about being younger! I hate being tired! When I go home at night, when I have finished dinner, well then I am finished whereas before I could just go until ... four or five hours' sleep and that's okay. And I know that's because I am getting older.

BL: And you accept that?

05: Oh yeah, I want to be older with dignity. I don't want to be having plastic surgeries or putting on an outfit that doesn't suit me or like to dress like a twenty-year-old and look ridiculous. No, no, no. I don't ever want to do that, I want to be comfortable.

BL: Do you think that is part of being content?

05: Yes, I think so. I try to be happy about whatever I cannot change. It hurts sometimes, certain things ... like my mom, right now she is very sick and she's almost 80 and she has high blood pressure and they can't operate and six weeks ago she had a stroke and she lost her sight. And just two years ago she had surgery in her eyes and now she can't see. It just hurts.

BL: It hurts to see her like that or hurts because you think you might get like that as you age?

O5: It hurts to see her and then the distance. I wish I could be there to help more, but I help with money for medical care. When I spoke with her last week, she was crying and she wants to see me once more, but it costs a lot ... um, finally I just asked to take her. I have seen so many people who have had strokes and they can continue but she, uh, she can't (sad).

BL: You mentioned having money to send home. Do you think that it helps at this stage of your life to have extra money?

O5: Yes. You see, I have always sent money even when it was hard. I just cut down in some ways since I came to the States. So I have always been able to. You know, we never have enough money, never have enough money but I just don't spend as much now. I don't need new clothes all the time and so I just save and send money. It makes me happier. She is; it's quite pricey for medications.

BL: So you take your role as a daughter quite seriously?

O5: Oh yes, yeah. She had it very hard as she was growing up and I just wish I would have had more ways to make her life better, that we could see each other more, but it is so expensive to fly back home. A lot of times ... I want to go, but you can't do both. You can send the money or be back there. It's hard. My dad is dead. But my mom ... I do what I can.

BL: Do you have cultural dietary things?

O5: I wish I could get the kind of food we like back home. You can't get here. I eat lots of salads, I don't like gravies ... I don't eat bread, but I like chocolate. I don't like to ... they cook everything with fat here.

BL: Except salsa?

05: Yes, but not so much because the salsa is different to Panama. It's Mexican.

I eat a lot of beans and rice and salads, and very simple breakfast. Small portions.

BL: So you eat small portions, watch your diet, do regular exercise, take no supplements at all.

05: I take a calcium pill and that is because last year my daughter had me do a bone density and it said I was losing a little and I don't eat dairy that much so he said I must take calcium. Yeah, I don't take it often ... I hear different stories about calcium so I don't know?

BL: Have you read about osteoporosis?

05: Yes I have ... how they get brittle, so I have been careful. I try to drink milk. I read that if you put one of those calcium pills into vinegar and it dissolves, it isn't good because the stomach is acidic and so it won't help

BL: So really you have found in midlife that there haven't been too many changes except that your role has changed with your mother?

05: I am just trying to find happiness in all I have because it doesn't have to be bad to go against nature. That makes you feel good. Every morning when I wake up and do what I have to do, I have water in the birdbath and I make sure that it is full of water and that makes me very happy and they are always there and I always have to be in contact with nature, to be that is so good.

BL: Have you always done that?

05: Perhaps it because, as I say, back home we lived in the city, but grandma she lived in the country and that is where I liked to be. I enjoyed that ... with the cows and horses.

BL: Is that why you enjoy Idaho?

O5: You know, if it was my choice, I would live in a place that was warm all year round. My husband's family is here ... it's okay. Just the winter ... ugh ... but I have trained myself. You know, when it's cloudy ... that's one thing I forgot to tell you, when it's cloudy, I suffer from sadness. So I got me a lamp ... a fluorescent that you sit in front of for thirty minutes.

BL: Does that help?

O5: Oh yeah. It might be psychological or something ... I think that they have done a study on it ... No sun, I don't like no sun. What I tell myself to do, when we moved here three years ago, was to say, "We need the snow, we need the rain for the animals" and train my brain. It was like ... it helps. I was really in bad shape when I first got here.

BL: So you have battled with depression?

O5: Yes, but I have never let it beat me. I have learnt to keep busy, not to sleep or lay down. When I first got here, I missed my family so much, my husband was desperate. It took me many years to help that.

BL: What do you do? You spoke about depression with the gray skies in winter. You said that you bought a lamp and it helped. Is there anything else that you do?

O5: Yeah, I would be in tears for no reason, but I have always been on the edge of depression ever since I am here.

BL: Did they give you anything for it?

05: Yes, the doctor gave me Paxil. That really helped, he said that it was not addictive or anything and he would give it seasonally ... then it went away in summer. I keep telling myself that we need the snow and rain. It's amazing what the mind can do for you. I did yoga and the instructor taught me to "kiss the ground" and then get up ... that really helped.

BL: You don't have Paxil currently, just the lamp?

05: Yes, yes ... I only use the lamp. The weather here was a big issue for me. You see, in Panama it rains. We get over 200 inches, but it rains and the sun comes out and it's cool. Here it is cold ... but I like Boise for the summers, they are gorgeous. So now, my granddaughter is coming and that is wonderful.

BL: So you feel that life is good for you?

05: I think so; I know so. I think that when you are young, your hormones are everywhere. You worry about guys, but now even though I am very aware of my mortality, I know that things are going to happen no matter what, there is no sense in rushing into anything, I know. I am calm.

BL: Anything you would like to ask me?

05: Yeah. Were you born and raised in Africa?

At this point, the interview was terminated and we chatted socially.

Footnote:

Her accent is quite heavy and at times, I battled to follow what she was saying. Her non-verbal language was open and helpful. She used her face expressively.

