



GLORIA ESTEFAN INTERVIEW
PORTIONS USED IN: *THE THREAD SEASON ONE*

Gloria Estefan, Singer
September 8, 2023
Interviewed by David Bender
Total Running Time: 1 hour, 32 minutes and 53 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Gloria Estefan
Singer

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Gloria Estefan

Singer

00:00:09:00

DAVID BENDER:

Good to go. Well, welcome. Please introduce yourself.

00:00:12:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:



I am Gloria María Milagrosa Fajardo García Montañó y Pérez de Estefan. That's the Cuban name. I am Gloria Estefan. I am a mother, a wife, a songwriter, a singer. I dabbled in acting as well. Perennial student, always.

00:00:36:00

DAVID BENDER:

I am so glad you said your full name, because I was going to try and I would have just completely mangled it. I'm going to simply call you Tutu.

00:00:47:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Please do, because that is my most recent identity, and my favorite, I'm going to say.

00:00:52:00

DAVID BENDER:

Tell me who calls you Tutu.

00:00:53:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

The only person that calls me Tutu is my grandson, Sasha, who is now at this moment, 11 years old. And the idea came from one of my fans from Hawaii, because Tutu is grandma in Hawaiian, and secretly, she wanted me to have him say my name first, because it's an easier thing to pronounce than *abuela* or grandma or anything. So it was actually the first word he said, but he didn't open his mouth. He would see me and go, "Mm-mm." And my son said, "That's



you. Hide behind the wall, and when you come out, he'd say, 'Mm-mm.'" And then it quickly went to Tutu after that.

00:01:32:00

DAVID BENDER:

Family is so important to you, and family is plainly such a huge part. When you identified yourself, you made that clear. You've been blessed with family, and you've also had many trials which have strengthened family, as I see it. So I want to go back in time a little bit, when you came to the United States at the age of two. Tell us about what you know of that and why it happened, and some of the backstory that goes to your parents and grandparents.

00:02:07:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

I came to Miami in May of 1960, was brought here, actually, by my mother. My father had come in advance. He was a police officer in Cuba. His father was a commander of the army. So when the revolution happened on that fateful New Year's Eve, he was actually part of the motorcade of the First Lady, because as a motorcycle policeman, that's what he did. My grandfather had gone to military school with Batista, as young men, so they were very close. And my grandfather was not very happy when Batista staged a coup, rather than continue to the election. But when the Castro forces came in, they jailed my grandfather and my father immediately. He had come home that night and told my mother, "We're in trouble, the President just left the country," and she asked him not to go back. And he said, "I have to go back. I'm a police officer. My duty is to the Cuban people, and I need to go back." And she told him,



“They're going to arrest you.” He goes, “It doesn't matter. If they arrest me, I have to go back.” And that's exactly what happened. His father and him were jailed for three months. I have faint memories of Cuba, but one memory I won't forget is going to visit him at the jail with my mother, and one of the three architects of the revolution, Camilo Cienfuegos—I didn't know who he was, but I found out later—was patrolling the halls of El Príncipe, where my father was jailed. I was thirsty so I started asking for water, and my mother was trying to shut me up, and Camilo Cienfuegos came over to her and he said, “I'll get her water.” And he pulled a metal cup off of a rusty nail on the wall, filled it from the sink, and brought it for me to drink. And my mother tried to stop me from drinking it. And he told her, “What? This water isn't good enough for you?” And he gave it to me, and I drank it and I got the biggest infection in my mouth, which is why I remember it. Because they would have to put this violet- something nasty, violet tasting for many weeks to heal that. But they eventually let my father go, because he was a very respected and loved police officer, and he had done no wrong. He told my mother that he needed to get us out of Cuba, because he knew what was coming. He had a very clear idea of who Castro was. And he left on the ferry to Key West to try to find a job and a place for us to live. And then my mother and I followed on a Pan-Am Airlines flight, which I still have the round trip ticket. And once we had been in Miami, a few months, my father told my mother that he was going to go somewhere, he couldn't tell her where, and that she was going to receive a check from the US government for \$150 a month. He gave her the phone number of a doctor in case she needed one for me, but he told her he couldn't tell her. So he was going into training for Bay of Pigs.

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DAVID BENDER:

This was something that was highly controversial, happened under President Kennedy's administration. Explain for people who won't know what he was being trained to do.

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GLORIA ESTEFAN:

President Kennedy and what we imagine was the CIA and several people in the government were supporting the men that had left Cuba in organizing a counter-coup to go back to Cuba and try to take power away from Fidel Castro. So they were trained, I believe part of them in Guatemala. There may have been other places as well. My father never spoke of it. I only found out of these things from his friends that had been with him in Bay of Pigs. They trained him in top of the line equipment, top grade U.S. equipment. The *Bahía de Cochinos* invasion happened on my father's 27th birthday, April 17th. The night before they left, he came back to my mother and I, and told them, "Again, I'm leaving. I can't tell you where. But in case something happens, please know that I have forces in position to take care of you and Glorita." So he disappeared, and the next we heard was my mother seeing on the news that there had been an invasion in Cuba. What happened was that even though they were trained in top of the line equipment, the equipment they were given to actually go there was all broken down and faulty. My father was the head of the tanks division and his turret was broken. They were expecting air power to follow and give them munitions, and at the last minute, I believe



it was Robert Kennedy that pulled the plug and told them all to come back. The aircraft carriers that took them there turned around and left them on the shore. Some of the men tried to swim back to the ship. They didn't make it. A lot of them died on that shore or were very injured by the Castro forces that were expecting them. I'm sure there was someone embedded in the Bay of Pigs organization and they were expecting them. Something went awry.

00:08:10:00

DAVID BENDER:

And we know from history that one of the problems was that both President Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, really had never signed off on it, and it was Dulles and the CIA who had said, "We're going to do this thing," which is why the thing was at cross-purposes, wasn't fully supported. And then, that allowed a lot of people to be left behind, as you say, and one of them was your father.

00:08:32:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Yes, my father was one of them. In fact, his captain was killed inside the tank, because I believe one of the things that they shot at them, he hit his head, and my father was with him for four days. He couldn't open the tank because the turret had been further injured. They went into hiding in the mountains, whoever had survived that initial attack. And one thing that my father did say to my mother that broke his heart, he said they were kids. They were young, young men that were coming at them in waves, over and over. They went into hiding in the mountains. And about a week later, my father was arrested by his own cousin, who told him, "Bebé-" Bebé was my dad's nickname because



he was the baby. And he said, "What are you doing there?" And my father said, "The same thing you're doing here, standing up for my country." I believe now, in retrospect, that the timing was very bad on this invasion. There was too much support for Castro within Cuba at the time, I think, for anything to have been successful. And the secret wish of all the men from Bay of Pigs was to return one day, but I'm getting ahead of myself a little. So my dad was jailed. We found out because my mother saw it on the news and when they released the names of who had been captured. That's where she found out. He spent 18 months, I believe, in the Cuban jail. I was on a plane recently and I watched Bridge of Spies, which I had never seen, and at the very end of the movie, it says that the subject of the film was the man that negotiated the exchange for Cuba in the United States, where political prisoners were exchanged, drugs and medicine, and one of those men was my father. So when I read that, I was so shocked. But he did come back, and they promised those men that if they learned English, that they could join the U.S. Army as officers. So my dad was always a military man. He had wanted to join the military in Cuba, and his father had torn up his application because he said he'd be accused of nepotism. And my father then became a police officer. But he joined the US Army as a Second Lieutenant. We were stationed in San Antonio, Texas, where my sister Becky was born. I was six years old. This was 1963, and my father had just shaken hands with President Kennedy right before his assassination, because he had had an event where he was thanking the Bay of Pigs survivors and the men that had been released.

00:11:44:00

DAVID BENDER:



This was in San Antonio.

00:14:31:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

It was in San Antonio because he went to San Antonio before Dallas. So my father actually shook hands with him, and he told him when he met him that day, "Mr. President, please don't forget about Cuba." And the men that had joined were secretly hoping that they could convince the American forces to go back to Cuba for a second attempt, better organized, and then from within the U.S. Army- I mean, it was an idealistic dream that never was to be. But in the meantime, all the while that my dad was in Cuba, in jail, my mother found tiny apartments next to the Orange Bowl in Miami—two strips of apartments facing each other—and moved in. All of women that she knew, that were also with their small children and their husbands jailed in Cuba. So it was kind of like a little commune of Cuban women supporting each other, helping each other. One car shared amongst all of them. I remember all of this. It was very clear. I remember my mother dragging me to prayer circles and churches and masses, praying for the men that had been taken prisoner. Before that, the men that they knew, didn't know what was going on and what was happening with them. And I knew that my father was in jail somehow. But I would pretend- She didn't know that I knew, so she would tell me that he was working on a farm. And then I didn't want to tell her anything because I thought she thought he was working on a farm. And this keeping each other, I guess, a little more sane, or not wanting to push the reality on each other, it was funny, but I knew. I knew, I could listen. I was- I knew everything that was going on. I was pretty precocious. And I could hear everything they



would say every night when they thought I was asleep, and they were talking in front of the apartments, and praying and hoping so. These early memories are very vivid to me. I remember Hurricane Dora came through, and the next day, I saw a little boy step into a puddle with an electric wire. And his mother grabbed him to try to pull him out, and then she got attached, and someone found a piece of wood and was able to pull them away. The little boy- I don't remember if he made it or not, but I remember seeing his body, like, black. It was charred. I don't know. It was some interesting memories I have from back then.

00:14:31:00

DAVID BENDER:

Gloria, I've read in fact, I've read that the welcome mat is not really out for Cubans in Miami. Trying to rent an apartment it with be no children, no pets, no Cubans. Is that right?

00:14:45:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

That is absolutely right. My mother first trying to find a place- We lived for a moment with my father's sister at her home. They had left Cuba as well. But then when my father left, they asked us to leave because there wasn't enough room in the house. So my mother started looking. And I remember those signs. No children, no pets, no Cubans. So when my mother found these little apartments that were brand new, and the man that rented it to us- I guess he took pity because it was women with no support system that had come to him. And my mother promised that in return for the first month's rent, they



would clean the place and keep it spotless and take care of it. And I guess he figured, “Okay, I have free maintenance.” And she talked herself into those apartments, and that’s why she brought all her friends that were in the same boat to those apartments. And eventually, even my aunt that we lived with at the beginning moved into that apartment building with all of us.

00:15:58:00

DAVID BENDER:

Before leaving Cuba, your mother had been a teacher in Cuba?

00:16:03:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

My mother had a PhD in education, which they ripped up the day we left, at the airport. Some absurd comment like, “You’re not taking your education with you,” which is absurd. You might not take the piece of paper, but your education is with you. She had established a kindergarten, along with two of her best friends that graduated with her, that also had PhDs. And it was a beautiful kindergarten, very elite, very lovely. And after Fidel came into power, one day, soldiers came into the kindergarten and told her to stand against the wall, that they wanted to talk to the children. They had their machine guns with them. And they told the children, “Who here wants ice cream?” And of course, all the hands went up. Oh, of course. And he goes, “Okay, close your eyes and ask Jesus for ice cream.” So all the kids, they do what they’re told and nothing happens. Then, he says—the head soldier, “You close your eyes and ask Papa Fidel for ice cream.” So they did. Doors opened, in came trays of ice cream, and my mom closed the kindergarten the



following day. She closed it down because she was not going to be a part of the indoctrination that was going to begin in Cuba, starting with the smallest of the children. And so, she did have an education when she came here. She spoke some English And eventually, she got a job in a school as a clerk helping in the office. She started going back to school nights to revalidate her teaching credentials and ended up being the union rep in her school. She was the Dade County public school teacher for over 30 years, loved and respected, and she loved teaching. That was her vocation. And her students still come up to me and tell me how thankful they are for my mom and how she was with them. My mother was so impactful to her students, and she would cut checks from her own account to make sure that the rooms- Because it was public school, they didn't have funding, but she wanted them to be beautiful. So she would decorate the rooms. She would buy kits for every student in her class that had toothpaste, toothbrush, and a comb. And every day after lunch, she would line them up and make them brush their teeth. And that is the main comment that I get from all of her students. They go, "Not only was she an amazing teacher, but she taught us discipline and she was always there for us in so many different ways, including making us brush our teeth, which we did not love." But she made it a habit for them. So she was very involved in her students' lives. She was always speaking to the parents, and a lot of these kids had a lot of issues at home. They were sometimes latchkey kids. And she was very involved in every aspect of her students' lives.

00:19:23:00

DAVID BENDER:

Is this Big Gloria, do I have this right?

00:19:25:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Big Gloria, yes. Her name was Caridad Gloria, but everybody called her Gloria. And my dad was the one that wanted to name me after my mom. She didn't want to. So they called me Gloria María to differentiate. Glorita.

00:19:40:00

DAVID BENDER:

You talked about your father's commitment. He became an officer. And here it is, it's the '60s, and instead of being sent back to Cuba, he's sent to Southeast Asia, sent to Vietnam. Can you talk about that, please?

00:19:58:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Absolutely. My father loved the military. He had two other brothers that sang and wrote music and poetry. His mother was a poet. But he was the consummate military man. He loved the life. And when he became an officer and we were taken to Fort Jackson- to first, in San Antonio, Fort Sam Houston, and then Fort Jackson in South Carolina- When the Vietnam War happened, he did not really have to go because he was the sole supporter of the family. And after what had happened in the Bay of Pigs, they were trying to be very careful with these men. So he did not have to go. But he told my mother, "I am not going to have to train my troops and abandon them at this very important moment. I need to fight for freedom wherever it needs to be fought, against communism, wherever it may be." So my mother understood that. What we



only found out a few years ago was that my father was actually in the Black Ops. Because he spoke Spanish, he was the one that was in the listening posts because Fidel Castro was training the Viet Cong in guerrilla warfare. He was very involved in the Vietnam War. They had offered to have me do this show *Where are you from?* and I told them they weren't going to get any information from Cuba. But they thought, "Well, your father was in the military so we can get other information." They couldn't find any information on my father. So my mom asked me if I had any connections to get my father's medals, because she had buried my dad with his medals. She thought that he earned them and that he should keep them. But then all of a sudden, she really wanted them. So I had played at *A Capitol Fourth* on a show, and I met a general that was a huge fan. So I asked him to do me a favor. And when he called me and said, "I need to go to Miami to give you these medals in person, and to your mother and to your sister. I need to talk to you about some things that you may not know." And when he came, he brought, mounted on a beautiful wooden frame, my father's medals, which were many more than we even imagined that he had. But since he had gotten sick, he never received them. And he gave us a file like this, and he said, "Your father, the reason you couldn't find any information about him was because he was in the Black Ops and his records were sealed." And he gave us my dad's records. And I go, "Okay, that explains a lot why he was so silent, why he never talked about anything. Why when my mother met him in Hawaii for ten days [inaudible], he arrived with a briefcase handcuffed to his hand. And she couldn't understand what was happening. He made up some excuse, but he was trying to help the U.S. government by using his translating skills and in the listening post.



00:23:21:00

DAVID BENDER:

One has to keep remembering at such a young age, 27 in Cuba, in his 30s when he gets to Vietnam, and then the ultimate sacrifice, he survives it but is exposed to Agent Orange, something that the government for a long time denied even using. But we now know from veterans that it had a long term impact. Can you talk about what happened to your father?

00:23:48:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

We know that my father was exposed to Agent Orange because there was a list, and he was stationed in Nha Trang and they had been exposed heavily to Agent Orange. Agent Orange was a defoliant that had been invented for other reasons, but was used in Vietnam because there was guerilla warfare and they wanted the leaves to fall off the trees and then be able to see where the Viet Cong were coming from. Unfortunately though, it spreads to everyone. You can't discern who you hit with a lethal gas. So a lot of the young men that were with him in the base, 18 years old, 19 years old, came back from Vietnam, and I know this because they were with him at the VA hospital eventually in Miami, when we couldn't take care of him at home anymore. He came back from Vietnam and my mother begged him to please not re-enlist. That she had sacrificed enough between Bay of Pigs and Vietnam, and the family, and he did it for my mom. He didn't re-enlist, but he wasn't happy. So he became a security guard. And we started noticing odd things in his behavior. He would stop at a green light, or instead of turning in a street,



turning into a parking lot and just stop there. And he attributed it to being very frustrated because he wasn't back in the Army, the first love of his life, and he asked my mother, "Please, I need to be back in the Army." And at this point, he was already a major. So he talked my mother into it and she said, "Okay, I will follow you wherever you go, but you need to get a check up first before you go." So when he went to the VA hospital and when they saw the symptoms he was experiencing, they did a spinal tap. And when he came back from the checkup, he was already struggling to walk. He went downhill very fast. They diagnosed it as MS, but he had symptoms that had absolutely nothing to do with MS. His eyes would rotate constantly in his skull. He lost the ability to speak immediately. He would laugh at everything, whether it was laugh-inducing or not. He would forget that he couldn't walk. So he would stand up and he would fall. And I had to learn ways- He was a very big man. He was 6'2, 200 and some pounds. And since we could only afford what- The government would send a nurse till three in the afternoon. So then when I came home from school, I had to care for him and my younger sister, and my mom would come home from work, give us dinner, and then go to the university. So I was boots on the ground with my dad, and I had to learn how to maneuver him and how to get him up, how to bathe him if he had an accident. aAnd I remember he used to cry a lot, and I would say, "Daddy, you know, it's okay. It's all good, don't worry." But it was rough. I was very young, I had a lot of responsibility, and you have to do what you have to do. It wasn't until I was almost 19 that his illness progressed to the point where he was no longer swallowing, we couldn't feed him, so we had to go to the VA hospital. But we would go every day to bathe him, to feed him, to feed other men that were there, because the nurses were completely overwhelmed with so many



of the vets in the hospital, so we would do what we could to help out. I met a lot of them there, and the day that I finally got married- When I started dating my husband, he was still at home. But when we got married on September 2nd of 1978, he was already in the hospital. And I went in my wedding gown with Emilio in his tux to see him, and it was the first time in a couple of years that he actually said my name. I think he was so overwhelmed with seeing me and he was able to say, "Glorita." Two years to the day I had my son, on September 2nd, my anniversary, and on November 16th, when my son was two months old, he finally passed away at the V.A. hospital.

00:28:31:00

DAVID BENDER:

He was only 47.

00:28:32:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Just 47 years old.

00:28:35:00

DAVID BENDER:

But he did get to see you married. He did get to know that you were going to be happy.

00:28:43:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:



Well, he heard about it and he looked very happy. I used to tell him all about it when I would visit him. I don't know how much of that got through. He would smile, but he couldn't speak. I don't know what he knew or what he understood. I don't know if he knew that I had joined the band in 1975. I would explain to him, but I'm not sure. I'm hoping that some of it did get through.

00:29:12:00

DAVID BENDER:

You described a moment that is indelible. He got to see you in your wedding gown.

00:29:17:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Yes.

00:29:18:00

DAVID BENDER:

Emilio in his tux.

00:29:20:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

He got to see me in a wedding gown, and I imagine it must have gotten through to him because he had a completely different reaction than every other day that I was there.



00:29:32:00

DAVID BENDER:

To hear this, it is so counterintuitive to the person that you bring to the world who has such joy and such love, that you share, but in so many of these instances, it seems like the pain has given you strength you didn't know you had. And you've also said something which—the older I get, the more I'm certain is true—is you live in every moment. Can you talk about that philosophy?

00:29:58:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

I sing since I talk. It came with me. It was my way of releasing my emotion. I would cry when I would sing, even as a very small child. I had a crush on this matinee star that was six years old. He was an older man. I was three or four. And his voice would envelop me when I would hear it. And my grandfather would save up money to take me to the movies to see Joselito, this young Spaniard that was an amazing singer. Music moved me. It was my escape. It was what allowed me to survive some of the toughest moments in my life. And at the age of eight, when we were stationed in Fort Jackson, one of my dad's troops was a young Cuban man that had been famous in Cuba with his entire family. They had a TV show. They sang. They had kind of like a variety show. And this young man was now one of my dad's troops. So he asked him if he would teach me guitar, and that was my first guitar teacher at the age of eight. So at the age of eight, I started being able to accompany myself on my guitar. I would lock myself in my room and just put the radio on, record the songs, and learn how to play them.

00:31:17:00

DAVID BENDER:

To be clear, you had not intended- You could sing from when you could speak, but you never thought at those early days you were going to perform.

00:31:26:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

I sing since I talk, but I never would have imagined doing what I do because I don't like to be the center of attention. It's not my nature. My mom was the diva of the family, and nobody could compete with my mama. And I didn't want to. I was in awe of her. She sang, she danced, she told jokes. She was the life of any room that she walked into. I was like my dad. Quiet, reserved, very sensitive, very thoughtful. I observed everything and everyone that was around me but I was content to observe, and my music was a very personal escape for me. It's not anything that I wanted to do for other people. However, I kind of got pushed into that position by my mom, who once at eight years old that I started playing guitar, would have me perform for the family or her friends or anybody that was in the house. I'd hear her go, "Glorita," or "Glori-mari." I go, oh, that's the "bring your guitar" name that she called me. And I would grab the guitar and stare at the floor, but pour myself into these songs that I didn't even know what I was singing about. But I thought they were beautiful and I would learn them. Songs from Raphael, Nat King Cole. Songs that spoke of emotions and feelings that I had no clue about. But somehow, musically, I understood them, and emotionally, I would transmit them. Perhaps because of all the pain in my voice, from all the things that I



was living and the responsibilities that I had, I poured it all into my music, but never, ever, did I imagine or want to become an artist, become a singer on a stage. To me, that was my mom. She had won a contest to be Shirley Temple's double when she was a kid in Cuba. They were going to fly her to Hollywood. She was going to dub the movies of Shirley Temple, Deanna Durbin, all the young actresses at the time. She was going to be a stand in and dubbed the songs and the words in Spanish. But only one parent could have the rights over the child, and there was no way my grandfather was letting my mother do that, so he kind of cut her career short.

00:33:58:00

DAVID BENDER:

So your mother could have been Shirley Temple and we would be having that conversation.

00:34:03:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

My mother could have been the Latin Shirley Temple. She would have absolutely killed it, being a diva and a star. That was her persona. She was a star, and in her school, when she was a teacher, she was always the one organizing everything, and making things fun, and creating music and shows for her students. She was full of life.

00:34:27:00

DAVID BENDER:



I don't suppose I can get a chorus of *The Good Ship Lollipop* from you, but yeah...

00:34:32:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

[Singing] On The Good Ship Lollipop / It's a sweet trip to a candy shop / Wherebon-bons play / On the sunny beach of Peppermint Bay. I remember. I love Shirley Temple. I loved her.

00:34:47:00

DAVID BENDER:

Glorita, thank you.

00:34:48:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

You're welcome.

00:34:48:00

DAVID BENDER:

Bringing out the Shirley Temple. Well, you went to school, you got a degree in psychology, you minored in French. Then you got this job you loved. You were a translator at the airport.

00:35:02:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:



Yes, an international receptionist. I was able to get that job because at the University of Miami, French was going to be my minor. So if you were studying languages, you could apply. You had to pass a test because it was still a county job, and I passed the test with flying colors and I was an interpreter for Spanish, English and French. I studied French all through high school, so even though I got this job before I started the UM- And I started college as a sophomore, because I went to an amazing prep school, that my mother made sure my sister and I had an incredible education. I went to Our Lady of Lourdes Academy here in Miami, and it was such a good school that I took a test called the CLEP, College Level Examination Program, and I got all 30 credits. So I saved myself a good amount of money at the University of Miami. I was on scholarship, had a national direct student loan to help me, but it really helped that I started in sophomore year. So I was able to graduate with a double major—psych and communications—and a French minor, a year early than I would have. But the summer before I got this job at the airport, it was an international receptionist. I already had these very hot polyester orange uniforms, and we were between customs and immigration, serving the translating needs of the immigration officers, and I had quite an interesting experience working there. I loved every minute of it. But I also had another job teaching community school guitar two nights a week, and I started a full load of classes. The IR job was six days a week. My shift was one in the afternoon to nine at night. The two nights I taught guitar was from 9.30 to 11.30, so I would literally go straight to the other job. And then I went to school from eight in the morning to noon, and would change in my car on the way to my job at the airport.



00:37:14:00

DAVID BENDER:

Into the orange uniform.

00:37:15:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Yes.

00:37:15:00

DAVID BENDER:

By the way, we now have a theme going: The Orange Bowl, the orange uniform... There's a through line here. But the thing that your mother put her foot down, the same way your grandfather did about your mother being Shirley Temple, was because of your fluency in language. Was there an effort to recruit you into the government?

00:37:39:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

There was. I had the graveyard shift on Sundays from one in the afternoon to nine at night. I was the only one in customs. And they had officers in there that were undercover that I had no clue about. But I had built quite the reputation in my work as somebody that was very efficient, very professional, but I was quiet, very private. So I was approached to see if I wanted to join the CIA. I was beside myself. I was so happy. I loved the idea of that. So when I came home and I told my mom, she went ballistic. She said, "How could you do this to me after everything I suffered with your dad?" And I go, "Okay,



Mom, okay.” But I would joke with her all the time, years later, and I go, “Well, Mum, you really don't know if I join, do you? Because I kind of have the perfect cover, don't I? I'm a pop star. I meet heads of state. I get into places that most people wouldn't be allowed in. I mean, you really don't know, do you?”

00:38:56:00

DAVID BENDER:

We're making some news now. Okay, folks. We now know we've blown her cover, and terribly sorry it's going to be a setback for our international espionage, but hey.

00:39:12:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

I would have been a good spy.

00:39:14:00

DAVID BENDER:

The interesting thing is you learned only much later about your father in Black Ops, doing work, being your father's daughter.

00:39:22:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Absolutely. Who knew? It's really incredible. But, you know, he was like me, maybe the private side of us, because I am—despite my job—a very, very private person. And who knows? I mean, you never know.



00:39:39:00

DAVID BENDER:

Well, you wound up being a public person because of your husband, Emilio, and by joining an all male band called the *Miami Latin Boys*, which really couldn't keep that name.

00:39:51:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Well, thank the Lord they couldn't keep the name. Yes. It's kind of funny because my mom, who did not want me to join the band, was kind of guilty of getting me in the position to join it. It was the summer that I had started working already, right before I started school. And when I graduated high school, one of my friends- We used to play for masses, the folk masses in school, and we had brother schools, because mine was an all-girl Catholic high school. One of the boys from that school was a friend that we would play guitar together, we both loved the Beatles. If we got together in anybody's house, we'd always inevitably end up doing sing along and all this. So he called me and goes, "Hey, I want to put together a band for one night for our parents that were coming back from a religious retreat and they were having a big party. I think it'd be really cool. I'd love you to sing." I go, "Oh, absolutely. I'm there." So I went to his house and I was sitting on the floor. He was playing the piano, we're running through what songs we were going to do, and there's a knock on the door. And he goes, "Oh, by the way, my father works with this guy at Bacardi Imports that has his own band, *Miami Latin Boys*, and he called them over so he can give us some pointers on how to do this



because I've never done it." I go, "Okay, cool." The door opens and I see a pair of bare legs and an accordion, and I go, "Okay." Great legs, by the way, because I notice them right away. And from my P.O.V., it looked like he was naked and only had a shirt on. So it was an impactful first impression. So he came in, he heard me sing. We told him what we were going to do, he gave us the pointers. He played his accordion for us and he left. That was in May. In mid-summer, one of my dad's army buddies' daughter who I grew up and would play with in South Carolina, in Fort Jackson, was getting married. So my mom asked me to go with her and I said, "Mom, I don't have a minute. I have to do all the reading to catch up for sophomore year. I have work. I can't-" She goes, "The guilt. Your dad can't be there because he's ill. We need to represent. Please, you got to come." All right. So I go, "Okay, Mami." But we were always late to everything because of my mother, so we didn't make it to the ceremony in church. We walk into a banquet hall in Hialeah with twinkle lights. It was magical, because I never went anywhere since I had to take care of my dad. And I see this guy in a tux with the band, playing *Do The Hustle* on the accordion. And I go, "Wait a minute, I know this guy. He looks very familiar." We ran into each other in a doorway and- on a break, when he was not playing, and he goes, "Hey, you're that girl that I met at my friend's-" I go, "Yeah, you're that guy that came and gave us some pointers." He goes, "I want you sitting with the band." I'm going, "Oh my God." And my mother overhears this, because she was listening in, the minute she saw me talking to a young man that she did not know, and she goes, "Yeah, sing for them!" Because she would always make me play my guitar and sing for them when I was a kid. So I say to him, "Well, I don't know what you know." I go, "I know a lot of old Cuban standards. Do you know those standards?" He goes, "Yes, yes," I go, "Do



you know *Sabor a Mí?*” He goes, “Yes, we play that.” I go, “Do you know [Spanish song name]?” He goes, “Yes, I know that too.” I go, “Okay, I know them too.” But I didn't even ask what key. I had no clue. So he goes, “Come on, sing a couple songs.” So I got up there, holding on to that mic, and I sing the songs, and it was- Everything fell into place so naturally. The keys were perfect somehow for me. I got a standing ovation. Of course, he didn't know that everybody there knew me, so he was doubly impressed. And when we finished, he said, “Hey, there's no girl singers in bands in Miami, and I think it'd be really cool if you could join the band.” And I said, “You know, it's not going to work. I've got two jobs and I'm going to school full time and my mom would kill me. I appreciate it, but I really can't.” And he tracked me down two weeks later. He called the people from the wedding, he got my number, he called the house—he was insistent. And he said, “Look, I work full time. We do this as a hobby. I think it'd be really fun for you and I think it'd be great for the band. I'm not going to ever make you choose over your responsibilities. You know, you can come in and out as you want.” And he goes, “Why don't you tell- You know, come over to the rehearsal and just see how it is?” So I went with my mom, my grandmother and my sister, to this tiny apartment on Flagler and 47th where he lived with his parents. The band took up the entire space. The people in the rest of the condos would throw a party whenever he had a rehearsal because they had no choice. So they were enjoying the music in the courtyard there, dancing, and I remember being up against the wall because there was no room. And I sang a song for the band. And when we left, he goes, “Look, if you want to do this, I'd love to have you.” I met his parents, and I told my mom, “Mom, I'm not going to quit school. I really want to do this. I really want to. I have nothing that I do that's fun.” And my grandmother



was the one that told me- because at first I was kind of listening to my mom, and my grandma said, “You know what? I told you years ago-” And she did, because my grandmother, who had her own business that she established in her house like a country club, would have me sing for the people that would go there, and I would say, “Oh, why do you make me do this? I'm not going to be a singer.” She would try to hook me up with a producer that went there, because it was men that had their kids, that little league in a field behind her, and she established kind of like a club where they would hang out, play dominoes. She would make them food. She made a lot of money. She was making about \$5,000 a weekend in the ‘60s. And I would tell her, “I can't. I'm not going to do this. I'm going to go to school.” And she goes, “Let me tell you something. This is a gift that you received. You're supposed to share it. And one day, it's going to land in your lap and I hope you recognize when that day comes. Because you're not going to look for it, it's going to find you.” And when she went with me to the rehearsal, after the rehearsal, she said to me, “You remember what I told you? You have to do what you want to do. Your mom has had her life. You need to make your own decisions.” And I told my mom—scared—but I told her, “Mom, I really want to do this. I'm not going to quit school, but I want to do this.” And we joined, and Emilio asked me if I'd ever written music, that he wanted to do an original album for the band so that we had original material, and I said, “Well, I've written parodies all my life. I've written poetry. I think I could do it.” So I wrote a song. We recorded it on that album. I wrote a couple. And we put it out in 1976, and one of the songs got on the radio. All of a sudden, we started getting a bigger following, and he realized when he was going to put out the record, that he couldn't call it *Miami Latin Boys* with a female front. So the idea came from the small local



label that signed us. We wanted to be called *Miami*, just Miami, but you can't incorporate a city name. So he said, "Why don't you call it Miami Sound Machine?" And Emilio goes, "Okay." I never really liked the name because we were super organic, and to me, it sounded like a production that didn't have humans involved, but it ended up being a very lucky name for us.

00:48:04:00

DAVID BENDER:

Gloria, you have to tell me—your mother went to school with Fidel Castro.

00:48:10:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Fidel Castro was at the university when my mom was at the university. Not in the same year, I believe, but she knew of him because he was very involved with the young lawyers... some association. And they used to joke and call him *bola de churre*, which means ball of dirt, because apparently he didn't bathe that often. But she said that he would walk around with *Mein Kampf* under his arm, and he would practice that bombastic oratory style of Mussolini in the mirror. If you compare them, they're very similar in their oratory style. So she already didn't like him even before he did what he did. When my father was in jail- My father says that in Cuba, in Bay of Pigs, he says that Castro would come into their cells at two, three in the morning, wake them up, and start asking them, "Why are you doing this? Where are your brothers?" Like, he was doing psychological warfare within the minds of these men that had come to fight against him. The ones that survived and weren't shot in the back of the head immediately by Che Guevara, they would



line them up without trials and they murdered- I don't know how many young, young men. And he was brilliant in his control of Cuba and in his megalomania. He was an intelligent guy.

00:49:44:00

DAVID BENDER:

But let me talk about you in terms of the influence you've had unintentionally. You're a private person, and yet, you've been one of the most public people any of us know, and you've not shied away from the responsibility that comes with that, the opportunity to help others and use that. That's plainly been a part of your purpose. One thing you did, you made the decision on your *Red Table* to talk about something that happened to you early on to help other young women-

00:50:14:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Yes.

00:50:14:00

DAVID BENDER:

-Who went through it. Can you talk about that?

00:50:17:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

You know, I never would have talked about this while my mother was alive, and that's the only reason that I hadn't brought it to light sooner. Because I



knew that when I did, it would help a lot of other young victims of sexual abuse. And as is the case in a lot of stories, it's a family member that is in a position of trust. When we came back from Fort Jackson and my dad went to Vietnam, I was already playing guitar, and my mother heard that one of my dad's cousins had a beautiful classical music school. So my dad was thrilled for me to go and study classical guitar, because they thought that it would be good for me to learn music along with my singing that I loved. But it turned out that this man was a predator of the worst kind, and he would tell me that if I were to tell my mother, that he knew that my dad was in Vietnam and she was alone, and that he would kill her. So it took a full year for me to bring up the courage to tell my mom what was happening with this man. I think I got even more fearful because I knew that he was getting to the point where he was going to do something irreversible to me, and I knew that I had to avoid that at all costs. I was nine years old and I lost a circle of hair from my head with anxiety. And every time I would try to find a way to get out of going, I would say that I was sick, or I would say that I really wanted to sing, that I didn't want to learn classical guitar, and my mom and dad would go, "Oh, but stick with it," because they just thought that it was me trying to get out of doing a more formal musical training. But then, you know, I couldn't anymore. And my mom called the police, and the police came and we made a report. But the policeman told my mother that if we took this to court- because remember what years we're talking about. This is the late '60s. There were no psychologists on hand for kids. We didn't know, this was a subject that wasn't talked about, people didn't even know about it. We didn't know to the extent that it was that we now know, that it can be as high as one in three children will be the victims of this kind of abuse. On the most careful level, it's one in



four, absolutely. But we know that there's a lot of children that don't say anything, and predators know how to get away with what they do. But the policeman told my mother that if it were his child, that he wouldn't put me on the stand because it was going to destroy our lives in ways that we could never imagine, and that unless you had a 100% proof like- And there were no videos at that time, there was nothing that I could film him with, or record him with. So my mom made the decision not to do it, and... I was a very strong little girl, so I didn't go through- I knew that the man was a sick individual. He couldn't convince me in any way like some do, that it's your fault, or that you deserve it somehow. But I knew that I had to get away from there. And it wasn't until *Red Table* that my mother had already passed, and we were doing an episode on sexual abuse that I knew that I couldn't sit through that episode without talking about what happened to me, because I would have felt like a fake. Like I wasn't going to sit there and bring these stories out of other women that had gone through this and not share that this had happened to me.

00:54:32:00

DAVID BENDER:

And your daughter and your niece were with you for this, so it was really- Your family was hearing it and supporting you in telling.

00:54:40:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Absolutely. And I had spoken to them. I mean, my kids knew about it from the time they were old enough to know. Obviously, I didn't go into detail. That



wasn't necessary. But I was very, very careful to give them the tools early on to be able to protect themselves or feel comfortable with telling me if anybody were to approach them. So it wasn't a secret in my family. My family knew. Every time I broached the subject with my mother, because I was curious about, had she told the man's wife, or had she- And she would break down and could not talk about it. So that's why I knew that if I went public with this, it was going to hurt my mother, and there was really no reason to do that to her. But I asked my daughter and my niece, I asked my son, "Do you think I should do this? Because it's going to change a lot of things, you know." And they said, "Absolutely, mami. You know, we're not going to tell you. You have to make that decision." And I honestly did not make that decision until the day of the show, to the point that when I said what I said, that I said, "And I know this because I was one of them," the production shut down. They thought I'd made a mistake. And everybody that was behind the cameras- and everything came out like- I wish they would have kept rolling, but they stopped because they thought that I had made a mistake. And I said, "No, I didn't make a mistake." And then I go, "Just please turn all the cameras back on." But it wasn't until that moment that I made the decision-

00:56:20:00

DAVID BENDER:

Tell me what kind of response you got from your fans.

00:56:23:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:



Oh my gosh. The response was immediate. Obviously, to the Facebook page that went along with the show, countless messages from people, from my fans that had gone through that and now felt, “Oh my gosh, this was so important to me because I felt so alone.” And my purpose was to show anybody that may be going through this, that you can go on and have a wonderful life and do the things you love, and you can't give the power to the predators to stop you from being who you can be and stop you from being the best person you could be or from doing what you want to do. Needless to say, do some people need therapy? Absolutely. They absolutely do. At the time, I didn't feel I did. I didn't actually do any therapy until my mother passed, that I was grieving so much that I needed help at that time. And I sought it. And I talked it over with the therapist, but I had made peace with everything that had happened, and it never really became an issue for me. I didn't look at myself any differently. I knew that this man was a sick individual.

Unfortunately, he got away with murder until the day he died. He was a very respected member of the community. And he even had the audacity when *Conga* came out and we had a huge hit, he wrote a letter to *The Miami Herald*, a Letter To The Editor, trashing our music because he was this classical musician. I don't know if it was his way of still trying to take control over me, saying like, “Hey, I'm watching what you do or say,” or whatever, but it wasn't him that made me decide not to speak about it. It was my mom, because I knew that she wasn't going to be able to handle it. She felt, I think, a lot of guilt about it for some reason. Or maybe she just couldn't deal. You know, she grew up in a generation that we couldn't even say the word “sex” in front of her. My mom was like- She was a novice to be a nun for six months, my mom. And we used to kid with her and go, “Well, let's see, I'm born and Becky's



born, so twice?" We used to get her all the time, but she would get very uncomfortable. So she was the reason that I had never come forward. And I knew that one day I would, and I knew that it would help other people, that it would make them feel less alone. And that's exactly- So many fans of mine told me their stories that they had never told anyone before.

00:59:13:00

DAVID BENDER:

And you used the word survivor, not victim.

00:59:17:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Absolutely. We're all survivors, victims of abuse, in any way. You survive the situation, you know, and you have to become strong, and you have to find ways to deal with what happened and realize that it's not because of you. You happen to be a statistic, that one in four, or probably one in three, for sure. And I wanted to also- which we did on the show- we brought experts— because I am no expert by any means, I studied psychology, but there are people that are experts in this—to give parents tools on how to identify, you know, things that happened, so you can perhaps see something happening with your child, how they respond. Sometimes you see a straight-A student that suddenly is struggling in school, or become very private, or- There's always a something that comes of it. In my instance, my hair fell out. I kept making excuses, not wanting to go there. So there are very, you know, strong clues that can tell you if your child is going through that. Also, to prevent. What you can do to help prevent that this happened to your child by arming



them with tools like, you know, speaking to them openly about it, telling them no one needs to touch you anywhere, you know, other than mommy or daddy. No one has any business. Don't believe people that tell you to keep secrets. You can always tell mommy or daddy anything that's happening to you. So there are ways that we can stop this from happening. And of course, putting those predators behind bars, because they would get away with it.

01:01:11:00

DAVID BENDER:

I have to ask you about someone that you could talk for 20 hours about, and that's your husband. When you decided to perform on weekends with what would become *Miami Sound Machine*, how much of this was what fell in your lap, which your grandmother said, "You'll know it when it happens to you," and how much of it was, "I really like him."

01:01:32:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Okay. When I joined *Miami Latin Boys*, Emilio had an older girlfriend. There was an attraction, and there was like- He always had a spark in his eye, but he's a flirt. Not in a sexual way, but he flirts with everyone. He's like- He loves life. He loves everything he does. He's so energetic. So he was very attractive to me that way. But I saw him as my boss. He seemed a lot older than he was, he was only four and a half years older than me. And I respected him very much, you know. When I first joined, he was my boss for a year. But there was such chemistry there that it was inevitable that this was going to happen, to the point where- I had decided that I wasn't going to get married. I wanted to



study, I wanted to travel abroad. I had been accepted both to the clinical psychology school in the University of Miami and to the Sorbonne in France. So by the time that I graduated, I realized that I preferred looking for a career in diplomacy or international law, and I wanted to go to France to do it. However, by that time, the chemistry between us had just taken us to that place, on July 4, 1976, where he told me it was his birthday—he was lying, his birthday is the 4th of March—so he could get a kiss on the cheek. And when I went to kiss him, he turned his face, and everything that had been building up just happened. And we were together from that moment on. I got married the day after I turned 21, because I knew that I wanted to be with this man the rest of my life. I think that to a degree, destiny had something to do with it. I joined the band because I really loved, more than the performances, the rehearsals. I thrived on having at my disposal, instruments to put together rhythms, to experiment with the vocabulary of our Latin music that he played and the American music that I grew up listening to. And I just loved the rehearsals, and the writing and the recording. It fulfilled me in ways you cannot imagine. So when we got together and we started working together with this, it just unfolded naturally. It was meant to be, it felt like. And he gave me the motivation and the security to write, and he would tell me- Of course you have to speak Emilio, because if you just listen to what he says without knowing who he is, you want to kill him. Like he would say to me, “You know, you can improve 95%,” when we were out on a date, and I go, “Really? What, 5% are you dating me for exactly?” Like, what the... But I knew what he meant. He goes, “No, no, was just sitting in the rehearsal, I see you so open when you sing the songs and when you're rehearsing. And then when you get on stage, I know that you can do it so much more.” Like in his own inimitable



way of saying things. He doesn't edit. It just goes from his brain to his mouth. He gave me the motivation to get up there and be more who I was, and relax and let the feeling of what I feel about music take over my performance. And then it became more and more natural, and he pushed me more and more out front, little by little, so that I could be comfortable. And he just was amazing. And we were a great team. We're very different. We're polar opposite on the astrology—he's Pisces, I'm a Virgo—but we're on the same page about business, “family comes first,” even politics. We rarely had disagreements about anything, which makes for a great marriage, I got to say. And we were our own cheerleaders. We were excited about what we were doing. It's been an amazing experience, and we just had our 45th anniversary and it feels like yesterday, and three lifetimes ago at the same time. It's hard to describe because it's been this whirlwind, but I knew from the day that he kissed me on that July 4th, 1976, and I told him, “You lied.” He goes, “No, I didn't lie. I am born on the 4th.”

01:06:15:00

DAVID BENDER:

He got it wrong. It was America's birthday.

01:06:17:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

He's got a loophole.

01:06:19:00

DAVID BENDER:



It was actually America's birthday.

01:06:21:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

True.

01:06:21:00

DAVID BENDER:

And the fireworks went off.

01:06:23:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Oh, the fireworks, inside and outside. There were fireworks going off all over the city, and we were on the third floor of this building that looked like a ship—the Miss Florida ship—and we could see the fireworks from all over the city. It couldn't have been scripted any better. If you were putting it in a movie, they wouldn't believe it. And that's how it's been every step of the way, quite honestly. It's been a wonderful, wonderful experience with Emilio.

01:06:51:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

What you described in this relationship that found you, and you found it, has an amazing parallel. Half a life ago, half a lifetime—you said it feels like many lives—you found yourself in the situation your father was in. You had a terrible accident, and you had to be taken care of by someone who loved you. Can you explain what that is and what happened?

01:07:18:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Yeah, it was March 20th, 1990, which was Emilio's niece's birthday. She's someone who we adore. And we were traveling from New York City to Syracuse. We were at a concert. Now, we had just been in Washington, D.C. We had met President Bush Senior. He had spent a very long time with us in the White House, speaking to my son. He was wonderful. We had performed in Washington, and I had one day off between the shows. So I was looking forward to going to Syracuse, just chilling out and relaxing. But we got an invitation for a very important dinner in New York City that Sony was giving to an executive that was leaving, and only three artists had been invited, Julio Iglesias, Judy Collins and me. So Emilio, being the consummate manager, comes to me and says, "This is something we really should do. You know, nobody got invited. It's a big deal that they've included you." And I'm thinking, "Oh my God, I don't want to do this. I really don't want to do this." But I did understand his point. So I acquiesced and we went to New York City. He said, "If you want, I'll get a limo to take us to Syracuse, instead of the tour bus, because it will be faster." And I told him, "No, I feel safer on the tour bus." So we left that morning. We stopped at a fast food place for my son for breakfast. I ate a meal that would sit in my stomach for two weeks, and I thought, "Let me take a nap." I was on the front of the tour bus, on the couch. My son was in the back with his tutor doing homework. My husband was on the phone with his brother. He was telling him that we were on the cover of *The Miami Herald* that day, holding this Crystal Globe representing 5 million in sales for one of our albums, and the caption was, "Gloria and Emilio



Estefan have the world in their hands.” And right when he reads that line to him, we get rear ended on the tour bus. We had stopped because it was a seven mile pileup. It was a freak snowstorm in the Poconos. So when we stopped, I opened my eyes thinking, “We’re here.” And that’s when it felt like an explosion. First thing that went through my mind was, “Did somebody put a bomb on the bus? Did they not like that we went to the President?” Like all these things that run through a Cuban immigrant’s mind when anything political comes up. And then the next thing I realize is I’m on the floor of the bus. All hell has broken loose. There were all these bottles of champagne that we would store there because I didn’t drink on tour and people would give them to us constantly—there was broken glass everywhere, and my husband is standing over me, covered in blood. It was like a surreal thing. And I say to him, “The baby.” Because of course, my son was eight years old at the time. And I hear, “I’ll go find him.” Because I knew he was in the back, and I knew something had happened, horrendous, back there. My son, thankfully, had gotten up to go get a box of candy that one of my fans had given him in Hershey, Pennsylvania, in his bunk, or he would have been crushed, because his tutor was left this close to the door and the rest of the bus was smashed in. He was in the middle compartment where the bunks are. And I hear my husband screaming, and I’m praying, “Oh my God, please, I don’t care what happens to me, let him be okay.” And then I heard him. “Dad!” He had been under everything that had come out of all the bunks—because you stash your stuff in there—had landed on top of him, broken his clavicle. Emilio brought him out and sat him next to me, and he grabbed my hand and he kept saying, “Mommy, get up. Mommy, get up.” And I go, “Listen.” I knew he could go into shock, so I really had to hold it together. And I knew that I’d broken my back. I



couldn't move. But I also knew that I hadn't severed the cord because the pain was excruciating, and because of what I'd been through with my dad, I had good knowledge of the spine and how it works. So I knew that if I was in so much pain, I hadn't severed the cord, but I couldn't walk, I couldn't move. And I told my husband- I go, "I broke my back." And he's going, "No, maybe you dislocated..." Bottom line, it took an hour and a half for the ambulance to get there. There was an angel in a car behind us that I wish I could thank, but I never found out her name. She was a nurse that showed up at the door and said, "Is anybody hurt?" And I go, "I think I broke my back." And she saw me, grabbing my leg and lifting it, because that's the only thing that would alleviate the pain for a moment. And she said, "Okay, you cannot move." She sat behind me. She used her hands as a brace, and she said, "No matter how much it hurts, you can't move." It took an hour and a half. The paramedics came. They took me out the front of the bus, which the glass had been torn away and it was snowing inside, which we now know actually helped me, because you put spinal cord injuries on ice immediately and nature put me on ice. So for the hour and a half that I was there, something happened to me that was the best thing that could have happened to me. I was freezing. They transported me to Scranton. They saw in the X-rays or the CAT scan that- They think it was that I folded backwards over the little booth, the table that was on the other side, because the width of the two vertebrae were pushed in and exploded, and my spinal cord was resting on a sliver of bone. But it hadn't severed it. It had damaged it. So they kept me on that board with the neck brace until the following day. I was transported to New York Hospital for joint diseases, because they couldn't do that operation. They'd never done it in that hospital. They had no neurological recovery unit. Tommy Mottola, God



bless him, he was the head of Sony at the time, found me the top guy, Dr. Michael Neuwirth, who had written a textbook on these brand new rods that they were using. CD rods. And he flew to Scranton to come with me in the helicopter. He said, "We can't put you in a brace. We need to operate or else you're not going to have a chance of recuperating your ability to walk or anything. You need an operation. I will secure you. I will go with you." Because they were afraid that the movement on the helicopter that would transport me would finish severing the cord. He said, "You have no choice. You really need to trust me that this is what you have to do." And of course I did. And we did. He operated on me. There were millions of people praying for me and I could feel those prayers. I mean, I went to Catholic school, we prayed a lot, but it wasn't until I felt that energy. I was like, plugged in, to the wall, like, energized. And my family would come in and they'd start crying and I'd go, "I'm going to be okay," and they'd think I was delusional.

01:15:04:00

DAVID BENDER:

And this is long before the Internet. So you're feeling this, you're not reading it-

01:15:09:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Oh, no, no, absolutely.

01:15:10:00

DAVID BENDER:



You're just feeling the power of this. To be clear, you only later found out what had happened behind you. It was... What had hit you? What was it?

01:15:22:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

We were hit by a fully loaded truck that was carrying nuts, which I thought was kind of funny. And I did tell my surgeon, "Hey, you think you can maybe slip a couple extra vertebrae in there and make me taller? Or maybe stuff me with rice and beans like the *lechon*?" I never lose my humor in anything. Humor has gotten me through the toughest moments of my life. But yeah, the man had fallen asleep at the wheel. They're supposed to sleep a certain number of hours and log it in. He hadn't logged in anything. It was snowing and it was downhill, and he was going 75 miles an hour. So we got hit by the only thing bigger than us on the road. And it pushed us into a flatbed truck that had steel cable that was wound. And when it hit, the cable unwound and sliced the front off of the bus, like if it had been a bread bus- a loaf of bread, which in turn helped me, because it was snowing in the bus and I was put on ice. It was incredible. All these little things. We almost went over an embankment, it was only one more foot. And that angel that came in and held my head, walked through that side of the bus and came in, and not thinking of herself and just sat there with me until the ambulance came and was able to get to me.

01:16:53:00

DAVID BENDER:

And everyone survived.

01:16:55:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Everyone survived. Thankfully, Emilio just had broke a couple of ribs. He had a lot of blood because he had sliced one of the veins near his hand. My son broke his clavicle. We found out when he was 21 that he had fractured his spine as well, but the fracture was lengthwise on the actual vertebrae. I freaked out because that boy played hockey. He did all these crazy things that could have permanently injured him. And we would check him for scoliosis. He said he had pain or whatever. They never thought to X-ray him because he was walking around. When we took him, finally- I got him to get an MRI when he was 21. Dr. Barth Green called me. He goes, "Your son had broken his back in that accident." They would have put him in a cast for a long, long time, and it healed on its own.

01:17:50:00

DAVID BENDER:

It was like, dozen years later.

01:17:51:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Yes. My assistant was there. She hurt her neck, she was in her bunk. And the tutor, despite the fact that she was right where the thing crushed the back of the bus, she was okay. She didn't have any injuries. Bear, who we called our driver, who we loved and adored, and God rest his soul, he passed away from COVID during the COVID epidemic. He drove the top pop stars of the era. But



we were like family to him, he used to call me Little Darlin'. And the reason he gets saved is because when he feels the impact, he reached out to grab my husband to try to stop him from flying because he was standing there, and because he moved slightly, he didn't get crushed on the part that got crushed. But he was wedged behind the steering wheel and they had to cut him out of it. And my husband flew out of his sneakers. He had no shoes. That's how strong the impact was. But Bear was able to grab onto something on him and he didn't fly through the bus. He would have hit his head somewhere. It was just all these crazy happenstance.

01:19:11:00

DAVID BENDER:

So the amazing thing to me is that suddenly here you are, that globe your husband's talking about, you're on top of the world metaphorically, but then you wake up in a hospital bed, and it's a year long recovery. You've got- I think these are titanium rods, right?

01:19:31:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Yes, I'm titanium reinforced. My band started calling me RoboPop as a nickname. I'm lucky because had they put the Harrington Rods in, which up to that moment is what they used, I would have lost a lot more mobility because they don't bend. The titanium ones, while they're putting them in—they can bend them to the curvature of the bottom of your spine a little bit, and they're lightweight, it was the cutting edge technology right at that time.



01:20:02:00

DAVID BENDER:

Emilio wound up doing for you what you did for your father.

01:20:06:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Emilio was beside himself. He went great. In a two month span, he used to have a little- When we met with the President, in the picture, you see a little white circle of hair on his beard. Two months later, he'd gone white. He didn't know what to do. He was feeling like, "How could this happen?" At this moment in our lives, we're literally at the top of our careers. The best moment. Sold out world tour. And then he sees me having to start over. He didn't leave my side for three months. And this man has ADD, he doesn't stop. In the hospital, when they told him that I'd broken my back, he fainted. Then he tried to get him to go visit me and he fainted again. So he grabbed a wheelchair from somewhere and went to see me in the wheelchair. Before I left, he got in the shower with me at the end of the two weeks, and I still had all my stitches and he almost fainted in there. But he didn't want me to have to have a nurse bathe me. When we came back home, he wouldn't leave my side. He wouldn't sleep. He was up every 45 minutes because I didn't want to take the painkiller. First of all, because it makes me feel very sick. And second, because I wanted to know how far I could push my body when I was doing anything. And at the beginning, I could really do nothing. I would wake up every 45 minutes in pain, and the only thing that would help was moving to a degree, and I couldn't do it on my own. So he would get me up. We'd walk to



the door of the bedroom or a little bit down the hall, but him holding me because I couldn't do it on my own. I spent three weeks in the water, in the pool, because I was weightless, and I would float with a floating vest and just try to push my arms and legs closer. Then at about the three month mark, I would spend 6 hours a day between the pool, the rehab facility that I went to, really trying just to lift my leg one inch off the floor. I had a full gym in my house, but I couldn't even get on the exercise bicycle to try to move my feet at the three month mark. He comes to me and he says—because he's very wise and knows that music was always very healing—he says, “Look, I was going to go through the toll today and I put my hand in my pocket to get a quarter, and I found this piece of paper that-” On the day that we went from Scranton to New York, he was in one helicopter with my son, and I was in the medevac helicopter with my doctor. It was a gray day. It was clouds everywhere. He said, “One little ray of light kept hitting me in the eyes, and I asked the pilot for a pen and a scrap- I took a scrap of paper and I wrote these words. And I want you to come to the studio with me because I think we could make a song from this.” And when I look at it, I go, “Why are they in English?” ‘Cause of all the things that he would write... And I read, “Coming out of the Dark.” And he says, “I called Jon Secada. He's there waiting.” And for me, I went for him because he hadn't left my side for three months. And he knew that if I focused on something other than my recovery, that at least I could realize that I could still do what I loved in some way. So I went to the studio with him—I still had to wear a brace whenever I went anywhere—and I sat in the room and when him and Jon sang me the melody, [singing] *Coming out of the Dark*, it was like if something poured through me, you know. There are songs that I've crafted, and there are songs that I've channeled, I believe, from some other place. And



all I could think about at that moment was so many millions of people that sent me their good thoughts, their wishes, their prayers. People were going to synagogues, to their temples, to their churches, every religion you could imagine... I was at the peak of my fame and it was worldwide. And all of these people—unconditionally and not expecting anything in return—were sending me love that I felt in the hospital and channeled inward. I would meditate and try to imagine all this energy reconnecting things in my spine. And I used visualization that wasn't even a thing back then. I guess somehow I had it in me from somewhere. And that song is a big thank you to those people, that I felt them, that there's lines in it- I know the love that saved me, you're sharing with me, because it's something that felt so powerful. And Emilio got me back on that horse. And from that moment, I would go to the studio and I started writing again, and we wrote that album *Into the Light*. And three months after that, when he comes to me and says, "Dick Clark called and he wants you to perform on the American Music Awards," which was going to be the following January, this was September, and I'm going, "Babe, look at me, like... I was just able to put on my underwear by myself a month ago, that I could swing the underwear down low enough and raise my foot high enough to catch it. But in January, like, how do you think...?" He goes, "Look, it's months from now. You're doing well. You know, you're recuperating." So then he told Dick Clark that if he wanted me to go, he was going to have to show up in person. And Dick Clark flew to Miami. Talk about pressure. I adored Dick Clark. And he said, "I want you to do it. Please tell me you'll try. If something happens and you're not up for it when the time comes, then I'll understand. But I know you can do it." And then it became like, "Oh my gosh. Well, it's definitely a goal." And by the time I realized, three months



after that, that I was getting my body back- But at that point, I was already working out 6 to 7 hours a day in whatever I could. Then I made it a goal to be back on stage, and I was back on stage, first at the American Music Awards in January of 1991, and then my first show was in Miami in the Miami Arena on March 1st, 1991, 20 days shy of a year of my accident, and that they put me together in New York on March 22nd, my mother's birthday. So I said, "This is going to be my goal." And the point was not to just be back on stage, but I would question like, why would I get all this fame when I really- That wasn't the point of making music. And when this accident happened, I remember thinking, maybe this is the reason. Maybe I was meant to go through this in a very public way, because I can inspire people that are going through their own hardships in their life. And that gave so much purpose to my fame. It gave me a reason to get my butt back on that stage, and just to show people that, yes, you could go through terrible things, but it depends on how you deal with it and what you do with the cards that you're dealt, and that we have power in and a lot of control over our lives in ways that we give up for no reason. And I remember that- I mean, it was very competitive, and when we had moved into that house- Because we had moved into that house literally right before that tour started, and we would race each other up the steps and I would always win at the end. And when we got there, the day that we came back from New York, you know, he was helping me up these three steps that had no rail, and I looked at the stairway, and I was going to get in an elevator that I put in the house because I felt that I was going to need it someday for something more than suitcases and things—I've always listened aloud to my intuition—and I looked at him and he goes, "Well, this time



you're going to win for sure." And he lost it. But then I beat him again, a year later.

01:29:08:00

DAVID BENDER:
Lin-Manuel Miranda.

01:29:09:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:
Oh, yes.

01:29:09:00

DAVID BENDER:
What can you say about him that...

01:29:11:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:
Lin-Manuel is an incredible talent. He thinks out of the box. He's a guy that has always promoted his culture, and it's very important for him to- Like what he did with that amazing- *In the Heights*, that broke records, came from off-Broadway to Broadway. His father works closely with him. So they're very much a tight family situation. And we are incredibly proud of him as a Latino. What he did with Hamilton. Broke Broadway records. Broke records, all kinds of records everywhere. And he's just so innovative and creative. And I had the pleasure of working with him on a movie called *Vivo*. And I remember he sends me- My schedule was swamped, and I really didn't know how I was



going to be able to work in doing this role and singing the songs. And so I had kind of said, “Look, I really can't do this.” And then he sent me the demo of the main song that I was going to sing, and I thought to myself, “Oh my God, I have to do this. This is just something I have to do.” And then I fell in love with my character, Marta. It was a joy to work with Alex Lacamoire, which is his partner musically. I just admire them so much, and I was happy to be able to hand them a very special award at the Kennedy Center Honors when I was hosting, and they got a special award, a groundbreaking award, because he made history. He's an incredible guy. And always, *presente*—like one of the songs in *Vivo*—when the hurricane happened in Puerto Rico, he was there, and we went and were a part of trying to help in whatever ways we could as well. So he's just one of those people that is a wonderful, wonderful part of our Latino family, and I feel honored to know him.

01:31:18:00

DAVID BENDER:

Music heals, music brings joy, and you know it because you've channelled it. What music brings you joy?

01:31:27:00

GLORIA ESTEFAN:

Oh my gosh. There is so much music that brings me joy, but if I reach back, Nat King Cole. Every time I listen to Nat King Cole, I get transported to my youth, to all this promise in front of me, to a very nostalgic time, to this beautiful, beautiful... Like a flower blossoming is what Nat King Cole makes me feel. The Beatles. Excitement, energy, what fueled my young life. I still



remember when I first got introduced to the British Invasion, and it was Gerry and the Pacemakers with *Ferry Cross The Mersey*. That I pull up to a laundromat with my mom and the smell of the laundry came at me, and this comes on the radio and I made her leave me in the car. And to this day, when I hear that, I smell a laundromat. Why? Because it's a *bolero*. The Brits were all about Latin music, so it was my two worlds colliding. But Carol King, Stevie Wonder, Elton John... I can't choose one. There's too many. All the music that has shaped my life has brought me joy. Music has never brought me anything but joy.

END TC: 01:32:53:00