

# Interview with Hugo Jule-Quintanilla

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[00:00:08] **Quang:** Excuse me [long pause—setting up]. How are you?

[00:00:14] **Hugo:** Doing good. How 'bout you?

[00:00:16] **Quang:** I'm okay [pause]. I'm not an interviewer person. So...

[00:00:23] **Hugo:** That's all right. We're just having a conversation, right?

[00:00:25] **Quang:** Yep.

[00:00:26] **Hugo:** Cool. I like conversations.

[00:00:29] **Quang:** Okay. For recording purposes, I will be stating my name. And I'll kindly ask you to do the same. My name is Quang, and I'll be your interviewer for today.

[00:00:39] **Hugo:** Okay. My name is Hugo Jule-Quintanilla.

[00:00:42] **Quang:** Thank you very much. How about we start—can you tell me a bit about yourself?

[00:00:48] **Hugo:** Sure. I am 44 years old. I was born and raised in El Salvador,

America Centrale. And currently I am a project engineer with the New York Power Authority. [00:01:00]

[00:01:01] **Quang:** Okay. Ummm [long pause]. How'd you come to Kingston?

[00:01:12] **Hugo:** Oh, Kingston. Well actually—taking a step back—I came to New York in 1999 to go to college. I went through Alfred State College for mechanical engineering and then to Ulster County around 2002. So I've been around here for a good twenty years now. To Kingston specifically, it was 2013 when I started working for RUPCO, which is an affordable housing corporation.

I started doing community outreach for energy efficiency and clean energy technologies on through a subcontract with the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (or NYSERDA). And from there, I pretty much stayed working in the Kingston area. So [00:02:00] yeah, 2019, 2020, and officially moved to Kingston just before the pandemic and 2020.

[00:02:10] **Quang:** When you came here, what were your first impressions of this area?

[00:02:15] **Hugo:** Well - so again - coming into Ulster County, I fell in love with the mountains. I didn't even know that the name was the Catskills, so I thought it was intriguing. I really enjoy the change in the seasons. So that was my initial appreciation for the area.

And then Kingston and other villages in the Hudson Valley... I really enjoy them because they are so rich in architecture and some of them have been able to preserve a lot of the old buildings. You know a lot of the roads—some of the roads here in Kingston you can still see the brick—and that's something that I found very, very interesting, but there is also the influence of [00:03:00] technology and accessibility to being right by the Thruway, basically between Albany and New York City. So I thought that it was out very good location to be.

[00:03:10] **Quang:** I see. Was there anyone who helped you a lot when you first get to Kingston? Work or anyone who just helped you with a social and.... Your friends basically?

[00:03:25] **Hugo:** Yeah. So when I first moved to Kingston—or to Ulster County actually—I was married before and I have a daughter. She's eleven years old. So my daughter's grandparents were the initial support system.

I also have family in the east coast and west coast. So remotely, they provided me with guidance, basic things to do. How to get a driver's license and whatnot. And then some of my first jobs were just outside Woodstock, where I lived for many years. So through some of my first employers, I basically started [00:04:00] to understand what it's like to live in Ulster County—especially as an immigrant—to understand what is the process to get set up for your utility bills. What do you need to register a car?

So at first it was really family and friends. And throughout my own work, I started to learn that there's a lot of other support systems provided by the community—such as the city of Kingston or Ulster County themselves. They have a lot of resources. Some of these resources are free and there are also services provided by non-for-profits.

A lot of them in the area, they're happy to provide you information about any kind of legal transaction that you may need—banking, how to support other members of your family. So little by little, I started to understand the different support systems and there's a lot of good ones here.

[00:04:52] **Quang:** I see. That's really interesting.

You mentioned that you moved [00:05:00] from New York to umm...

[00:05:04] **Hugo:** El Salvador

[00:05:05] **Quang:** El Salvador to New York?

[00:05:06] **Hugo:** Yep.

[00:05:07] **Quang:** Okay. So you've been in the U.S. for quite some time before you moved to Ulster County?

[00:05:13] **Hugo:** Yeah. I basically moved to New York in 1999 to go to college - that was Alfred State from 1999 to about 2002. And then to Ulster County. I've been here since about 2000. But officially in Kingston since 2020.

[00:05:34] **Quang:** Is there anything that you find challenging?

[00:05:38] **Hugo:** One more time?

[00:05:39] **Quang:** Anything you find challenging living in Kingston?

[00:05:42] **Hugo:** Not so much anymore. I think at the beginning—and this was you know two decades ago—it was difficult. I think something that I like to see more... I'm a cyclist. I like riding my bike.

I still [00:06:00] find the challenge in that the culture to support cyclists. It's still not that good. There are a lot of people doing a lot of great work to support cycling. The new Broadway has an exclusive bike lane. But outside of that, I still feel that it's not really safe to ride my bike on most of the roads.

So I do think that there still needs to be a systemic shift in behavior by drivers. And that's not just for Kingston. That's I think throughout New York state and all of the United States.

[00:06:33] **Quang:** Certainly. Some parts of Kingston isn't necessarily pedestrian friendly—the Hudson Mall area especially. I made the mistake of going there on foot. And I have to leap out of it. [Laugh. Pause.]

Are there any culture traditions or celebrations that you continued to practice?

[00:06:57] **Hugo:** Yes, I think mostly—mainly [00:07:00] food. Growing up in El Salvador - eating pupusas, the tamales, and other dishes are some of my favorite things. I think we're pretty lucky that right here in Kingston, there are two or three pupuserias. There are different establishments for Latino foods.

So that makes me happy. That's perhaps the most important thing that I do—continue to practice and respect food.

[00:07:31] **Quang:** Certainly. Have you made any new friends coming to Kingston? Any family friends?

[00:07:40] **Hugo:** I have made a lot of friends. A lot of things came out of wor—related networking and others was just me going out and riding my bike, meeting new people, me becoming involved in different environmental groups,

such as the Kingston Climate Action Committee or the Ulster County [00:08:00] Climate Action Committee also. Becoming more involved in different events, such as the National Drive Electric week—that has been sponsored by Ulster County since 2016. And just different involvement. If I go to a food place and I haven't met somebody—I say hi. So I start to make new friends that way.

[00:08:20] **Quang:** Do you think that's a good way to—for people who come to Kingston either as immigrants or just new people unfamiliar with the area—is that a welcoming experience for most people? Or you have to go out of your way to make the connection?

[00:08:37] **Hugo:** I think it's a fairly welcoming experience. I think there are a couple of reasons. One a lot of people understand that New York is—it's diverse. So people can be naturally friendly. The other one I think is just really good business. If you are friendly to people, they're going to feel comfortable with whatever it is that you do, and they're going to come in and support you.

And that's how you can also establish, [00:09:00] good networking relationships.

[00:09:02] **Quang:** Does your daughter go to school in Kingston or nearby?

[00:09:07] **Hugo:** She does not go to school in Kingston. She actually goes to school at Oneora school district because she is spending the majority of her time with her mom. So she's with me part-time.

[00:09:23] **Quang:** Okay. Do you have a favorite story about your experience that you want to share? Being an immigrant?

[00:09:28] **Hugo:** Oooooohhh... Stories, stories, story time! [Quang laughs.] There are a couple and you know—today is April 24th. And I believe that Kingston Classic Race just happened earlier this morning. I was not able to attend, but I do recall might have been my first or second Kingston Classic TenK back in 2012 or 13—I figured I really needed to take advantage of every possible trick in the book.

So I got to the front of the race. [00:10:00] [Quang laughs.]. I'm a slow runner.

And back then the Ulster County Executive was a gentleman by the name of Mike Hein. And I knew of him—I might have met him through some networking event. But I was up at the beginning of the race with a bunch of people. And then I looked next to me and there he was—a publicly elected official, just ready to run.

And—again to the point of being friendly and feeling comfortable talking to people—I just said to him, “Excuse me, are you Mike Hein? The County executive?” He said “Yep.” “Great—nice to see that you come out and just join everybody and get in on the race.”

And we might have had some brief conversations about some local politics—because it's part of what we do. So that was a cool thing to have seen and done.

[00:10:53] **Quang:** That's fascinating.

[00:10:55] **Hugo:** Cool.

[00:10:53] **Quang:** Yeah. Umm... [00:11:00] [Pause] Is there anything that you think could be better—that Kingston could do better?

[00:11:07] **Hugo:** Oh yes. Yes. There's definitely a room for improvement. I think one of the biggest issues that I've seen—especially because of the pandemic—it's gentrification. There has basically—and this, you can argue, applies to the entire capitalistic system that our country and many others operate under—but there was basically no protection for low income people to even have a chance to purchase some of the homes that either double in price—or more—throughout the pandemic. So I think there are some efforts towards creating affordable housing. But I think that's something that there should have been some kind of law either at the city level or at the county level or state level—because it created this situation where those with the most money were the only ones who were able to [00:12:00] buy homes in difficult times.

So I think we're still dealing with the aftermath from that. Affordable housing is definitely a problem still.

[00:12:09] **Quang:** I see. Yeah, it's certainly something that any place could improve on—it's not just Kingston.

[00:12:18] **Hugo:** Correct.

[00:12:19] **Quang:** Is there anything else you want to share?

[00:12:23] **Hugo:** Mmm, yes. It definitely pays off to get to know people. Yesterday I had the privilege—just this amazing opportunity—to speak at the opening of the new Sojourner Truth State Park just right near... A few blocks from here.

And it was pretty special because some of the work that I've done—I was actually a freelance writer La Voz with Mariel Fiori. And this invitation came from her to connect with the organizers of this event. And I basically had the opportunity [00:13:00] to speak alongside elected officials about the benefits that I see in open spaces, nature, parks, and trails, more specifically about mental and physical benefits of being out in nature.

To me, it felt great to know that people know you and that they value your opinion and that they invite you to be part of something really special.

So I hope that people—no matter where they come from—that they can feel empowered to just reach out. Whatever it is that you're coming from—feel free to talk to us. We're here to help.

[00:13:36] **Quang:** Okay. That's great. Thank you so much for being part of the interview.

[00:13:41] **Hugo:** Sure. My pleasure. Nice video as well.

End: 13:42