

[0:00:00]

Subject: I myself would even want to write a book about the occurrences. These things are particular to the place, you know, about families and [unintelligible 00:15] and things like that.

Interviewer: Yes. Where were you born?

Subject: You're not going to ask me my name?

Interviewer: No, because we don't want to have that on the tape.

Subject: I was born in the neighborhood Barrazas...

[0:00:30]

Subject: ...in Carolina.

Interviewer: Barrazas in Carolina? Close to the Yunque.

Subject: Well, not so close, but it's close. You can see the Yunque mountain very well.

Interviewer: How many brothers or sisters do you have?

Subject: Well, I'm the oldest in my family of six brothers and sisters. I have three brothers and two sisters. I'm the oldest, like I said before.

Interviewer: And did you all grow up in that neighborhood?

[0:01:00]

Subject: Yes. We all grew up in the Barrazas neighborhood in Carolina.

Interviewer: You never lived in any other part of Puerto Rico?

Subject: Never. Never. Never.

Interviewer: What did your parents do to support themselves?

Subject: Well, we're from a very poor family. We made a lot of sacrifices to get an education. I should mention this. My father was 40-something when he married my mom...

[0:01:30]

Subject: ...who was 18. So a pretty big difference. As far back as I remember, my dad was a "caminero." This was a typical job in Puerto Rico before.

Interviewer: What is a "caminero?"

1979A English Translation

Subject: "Caminero" is a person who works on the edges of the roads cutting the grass and the bushes. So he was what was called a "caminero."

Interviewer: So he worked for the government then?

Subject: He worked for the municipal government, yes.

[0:02:00]

Interviewer: Municipal.

Subject: So my mom was a housewife. I mean she was a homemaker.

Interviewer: And was it a wood house or...?

Subject: The first house, from when they got married, so the house where I was born - because I was born in the house because before...

Interviewer: There wasn't...

Subject: ...people used a midwife.

Interviewer: So you were born with a midwife?

Subject: I'm not ashamed to say it. Yes, I was born with a midwife. I even remember her name and everything.

[0:02:30]

Subject: I always remember some occurrences from when I was young. Yes, she was the midwife for all of us who were born in my house, of my five siblings. Going back to the question...

Interviewer: If it was a wood house.

Subject: Oh, yes, it was a wood house. It was a very small wood house with zinc. I was born in November of 1931. I think there was a storm in '32. I think that San Ciprian.

[0:03:00]

Interviewer: Yes.

Subject: Or San Ciriaco. One of the two. And it was practically a new house. They left, crossed a ravine with me in their arms - I was a newborn - to go to my aunt's house. A very big house.

Interviewer: When the storm came?

Subject: Yes, when the storm came. The roof of that house was torn off. And all the people from the neighborhood were all in that house. When they went back to my little house, it was intact.

Interviewer: It was intact?

Subject: Nothing had happened.

Interviewer: And did they have animals and everything?

[0:03:30]

Subject: Definitely.

Interviewer: What kind of animals did they have?

Subject: Pigs, a cow, a young bull.

Interviewer: What did they plant? Did they have a home garden?

Subject: Uh-huh. My father was also what was called "un agregado" (an assistant).

Interviewer: Where?

Subject: At a farm that belonged to my uncle in law, who had farms with a lot of acres. So there were like three "agregados" there.

[0:04:00]

Interviewer: What was the arrangement?

Subject: This is very interesting. The arrangement was my dad planted what we called [unintelligible 04:08] of sweet potatoes, (taro), corn, beans. So the arrangement was that when he picked the products, they would divide them. If it was beans, well, they would pick all the beans. And they were seeded. And then they were divided. If they were sold, the money was divided. And if it was sweet potatoes...

[0:04:30]

Subject: This is really interesting. This brings back a lot of good memories. Well, they took the (felling) and divided it in half between the owner of the farm, who in this case was my uncle in law, and my dad. They put some stakes and divided the farm in two. This half for my dad. And this other half for my uncle, right? So my dad could only get sweet potatoes from his side. But sometimes, you know, he quietly took sweet potatoes from the other side too.

Interviewer: So he had to plant for the landowner.

Subject: Yes.

[0:05:00]

Interviewer: He was your uncle in law.

Subject: Yes. He was our uncle in law.

Interviewer: And did you all work planting sweet potatoes?

Subject: Well, not me. I didn't work. I was lazy. No, I was small, I would help to pick sweet potatoes. No, I almost didn't learn to milk a cow either.

Interviewer: And how did the midwives work? Do you remember? How did people hire midwives? You don't know?

Subject: Well, as far as I remember - what's your name?

[0:05:30]

Interviewer: Pucho.

Subject: Pucho, as far as I remember, my midwife - her name was named [unintelligible 05:39] - as far as I understand, they had to have a special permit from the municipality. Now, to get that special permit, I don't know what training they had to take. I never asked about that.

Interviewer: But what year was that when they had to get a permit?

Subject: I don't know. Because if I was born in '31, there were still midwives after that.

[0:06:00]

Subject: Because my siblings were all born with midwives. They don't exist anymore, I think.

Interviewer: They don't exist anymore, yes.

Subject: I know that they had to have training because they were very good. And I rarely heard that any of the mothers in the neighborhood died at childbirth or anything.

Interviewer: And did all of your brothers and sisters go to school?

Subject: Yes, all of us.

Interviewer: Up to what grade?

Subject: Well, we all went to high school, thank God.

[0:06:30]

1979A English Translation

Interviewer: And did you walk to the town, Carolina, to go to school?

Subject: Well, the first schools - we walked to the elementary school. It was two or three kilometers. Then the middle school, which was a second unit - at that time it was called a second unit - it was like one kilometer. And then when we went to the second year in high school, we went to Carolina, the town. It was seven kilometers.

[0:07:00]

Subject: And we had public transportation, which at that time cost 15 cents - 30 cents round trip. So we went to the town.

Interviewer: And was there an elementary school there for everyone?

Subject: Where? In the neighborhood?

Interviewer: I mean, did the children of the rich people also go to that school?

Subject: Which school are you talking about?

Interviewer: The one that you attended.

Subject: The elementary school? The one that we attended?

Interviewer: It was a public school, yes.

Subject: Well, yes. The children of the rich people too.

[0:07:30]

Interviewer: And were the classes in Spanish?

Subject: For sure. Everything in Spanish and we always had an English class. And precisely during that time, Pucho, I mean, there were a lot of classes in English. And the textbooks in the high school, I remember they were still - up to my year, and I graduated in '50 - by '49 they were changing them. The science, math, and biology textbooks...

[0:08:00]

Subject: ...were in English, even though the class was conducted in Spanish.

Interviewer: And the high school was also in Carolina?

Subject: The high school was in Carolina, yes.

Interviewer: And did you go to the university in Puerto Rico?

Subject: Yes, after.

1979A English Translation

Interviewer: In what campus?

Subject: In Rio Piedras, yes. In 1950, I went to the University of Puerto Rico. When I was in the second year while studying basic pedagogy...

[0:08:30]

Subject: ...they called me up from the Armed Forces. And I didn't want to ask for a deferment. So I wanted them to call me up. So that when I returned as a veteran, it would be easier to go to school. Because I had to make a lot of sacrifices to go to school. Like I told you, I was in the second year. I was already doing the internship in basic education. So they called me up from the Armed Forces. And I served two years in the marine infantry. I was in Korea for one year. And after two years, I came back. And in 1954...

[0:09:00]

Subject: ... I returned to the University of Puerto Rico. Instead of continuing with basic education, I changed to high school. And my degree was in English.

Interviewer: How long were you in the army?

Subject: Just two years.

Interviewer: And then when you returned you used the G.I. Bill to pay?

Subject: Yes, I used the G.I. Bill. I did all my studies. I used the G.I. Bill.

Interviewer: You finished high school?

Subject: Of course, yes. I graduated from the University of Puerto Rico in '58.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you went to the university in '50. How was the University in '50?

[0:09:30]

Interviewer: Were there a lot of student riots and all that?

Subject: No, none.

Interviewer: None? It was quiet?

Subject: Everything was quiet. A lot of social activities. I mean, beauty pageants were very popular, selecting Miss Puerto Rico. I was very active in those activities. And it was all competitions between schools in that aspect. And the intercollegiate (meetings) had another aspect, more (sportsmanlike). Very interesting. They were not so many fights...

[0:10:00]

Subject: ...or disturbances or anything.

Interviewer: But the nationalist riot was that year?

Subject: Now, you are reminding me about that. Precisely, I think it was in '50, right?

Interviewer: Yes, in '50.

Subject: Well, I was coming out of the cafeteria when we got the news about that riot. Yes. Yes. Yes. And at the same time in the United States, in Washington.

Interviewer: And what did people say? About what was happening in Washington.

Subject: I don't remember. There were not a lot of people...

[0:10:30]

Subject: ...speaking in favor of that or anything.

Interviewer: But did they talk about that?

Subject: Yes, they did talk, but I don't remember. I know that I don't remember. I don't remember very well. I mean, we just listened to the radio to keep up with the news about the shootings.

Interviewer: And what did people say about Albizu Campos? Did you ever see Albizu Campos speak?

Subject: I didn't see him. I don't remember if I ever heard him speak on the radio. I don't think so. I mean, I read about him in the newspaper.

[0:11:00]

Interviewer: And what do you remember about the depression in Puerto Rico? In the 30s - '31 and '32. The global depression that happened.

Subject: As you know, I was very young. I was born at the end of '31. I know that I remember, since I was born in a poor family - and I'm not embarrassed to say it - for me there was always a depression at that time. I knew that there was a depression because I heard my dad talking.

[0:11:30]

Interviewer: About the depression?

Subject: I mean, my dad talked a lot. I mean, my dad worked hard to get something to eat for us. Even though he planted things, but the other things that we had to buy, he did it through a lot of sacrifice.

Interviewer: And did he talk about the black market?

Subject: I heard talk about the black market. But I don't remember a lot. And I think that during those times in Puerto Rico, there was the "colmado PRACO." Have you heard about that?

Interviewer: No.

[0:12:00]

Subject: I don't remember the initials. I know it was a special shop where you bought things very cheaply. I don't know.

Interviewer: But who...?

Subject: It was the government.

Interviewer: The government?

Subject: The government, yes. "Colmado PRACO" - that's where the joke about the "praco" chickens came from.

Interviewer: And "la prera"? What was "la prera"?

Subject: Now "la prera" wasn't the same as the PRACO "La prera" was where they gave free food, I mean...

[0:12:30]

Subject: ...dry products to poor families. I know that my family got some. I remember that they gave flour, rice, white beans. All dry products.

Interviewer: Did people use it?

Subject: Yes. People used it. And lard, butter. I remember a cereal called Millo.

Interviewer: And what do you remember about the coalition?

Subject: Yes, I remember.

Interviewer: What was that?

Subject: You've read a lot, right?

[0:13:00]

Subject: Well, at that time, as you know, right? And you know that Puerto Ricans, we distinguish ourselves a lot in politics. We vote a lot in elections. You know that the percentage...

Interviewer: Eighty-five percent.

Subject: ...that votes in Puerto Rico is pretty high compared to the United States. I remember that in the countryside, politics, the meetings were important. The cars with their flags. I remember the parties we had. The socialist party with the red flag.

Interviewer: Santiago Iglesias.

Subject: Yes.

[0:13:30]

Subject: And I remember the leaders in my town, Carolina. I don't remember their names now. I can't remember. But the coalition was when they joined the liberal party, I think, with the republican party and the socialist party. And they formed the "mogolla" (bargain). They called it the "mogolla."

Interviewer: They called it the "mogolla?"

Subject: The "mogolla." Very good. They called the coalition the "mogolla."

Interviewer: Who was the American governor at that time?

Subject: Well, the one I remember was Tugwell.

[0:14:00]

Interviewer: That was in '41?

Subject: Yes. He's the one I remember.

Interviewer: Around that time Muñoz Marín came up, right?

Subject: Yes. I remember exactly, Pucho, at that time I was already in middle school, when we heard a lot of talk about Muñoz Marín. And he actually visited my school.

Interviewer: And what did people say about Muñoz Marín?

Subject: Well, people thought highly of him. I remember that he visited my school. And I think I was in ninth grade, or eighth.

[0:14:30]

Interviewer: What status did he favor at that time for Puerto Rico?

Subject: I don't remember. I don't remember. Yes, I don't remember what status - if he talked about independence or (statehood). I don't remember very well.

Interviewer: So he visited your school - Muñoz Marín?

Subject: He visited my school. And since I drew a lot, right? There were three of us at that school who stood out for our drawings of landscapes and things like that...

[0:15:00]

Subject: ...so they asked us for a drawing to show him, to then see how they could help us. But then we didn't hear anything more about it. And they didn't explore me or anything. So I stopped drawing.

Interviewer: Did you ever go to a meeting where Muñoz Marín spoke?

Subject: I did.

Interviewer: What did Muñoz Marín talk about? What did he say?

Subject: What did Muñoz Marín say? Well, at that time he had the slogan, "Bread, land, and liberty."

Interviewer: "Bread, land, and liberty?"

[0:15:30]

Subject: "Bread, land, and liberty." And the fight, I mean his main effort was against the Republican government at the time. I mean, against corruption, always cleaning up corruption.

Interviewer: That there was in the government?

Subject: Yes. And improve economic conditions in Puerto Rico, which was very poor at that time. And that was the main objective. I didn't hear a lot of talk about the status. I don't remember. I have to read it in the books.

[0:16:00]

Subject: But I think he was inclined toward independence a bit.

Interviewer: When did you decide to immigrate to Philadelphia? I mean, after graduating from the university?

Subject: Well, let me tell you, okay, the first time I came to the United States was when I joined the marine infantry on December 4, 1951. Okay?

[0:16:30]

1979A English Translation

Subject: I mean, I had a choice when I was recruited - mandatory service. I had a choice between the army or the marine infantry. I chose the marine infantry. Those of us who chose the marine infantry had to come to South Carolina. So that was the first time. So I was there and then from there I went to California for the second training. And then to Korea. Then I returned to Puerto Rico. Okay now.

[0:17:00]

Subject: Then I finished my studies at the university. In '58, when I graduated from the university, I came to Illinois for the first time on an adventure. It was an adventure.

Interviewer: You came to Illinois by yourself?

Subject: Yes, I came to Illinois by myself.

Interviewer: But did you want to work in Puerto Rico?

Subject: I started working in Caguas. Since classes over there start in August, I worked in Caguas for a month. But during that time, I had read in a magazine at the library...

[0:17:31]

Subject: ...at the university about an agency that got jobs for teachers, the Clinton teachers agency in Iowa. So I wrote to that agency and they sent me the (blanks). They sent me a lot of schools where I could apply for work.

Interviewer: To teach English?

Subject: To teach Spanish in the United States as a foreign language. So one of those schools - I chose Illinois - so they sent me job offers from a lot of places in Illinois. And I choose one that was in the countryside...

[0:18:00]

Subject: ... I mean, it was typically American. It was in the countryside and very far from Chicago. It's called Dakota.

Interviewer: But what magazine was this?

Subject: Educational magazine. I think it was the National Teachers Magazine or something like that.

Interviewer: And were there Puerto Ricans in this countryside in Illinois?

Subject: No, I was the only one. I met a few Mexicans. But the Puerto Ricans...

[0:18:30]

Subject: ...were in the large cities.

Interviewer: And how long were you there?

Subject: Okay. That was in '58. I was there for two years, until '60. I returned to Puerto Rico, right, with my wife. Then I went back to teach to Caguas.

Interviewer: And when did you get married? Because you mentioned a wife. Did you get married in Illinois?

Subject: No, I got married in Puerto Rico.

Interviewer: When? When you were in the army?

Subject: When I was finishing college.

[0:19:00]

Subject: Because I've gotten married twice. Okay.

Interviewer: So you left Illinois and went back to Puerto Rico.

Subject: I went back to Puerto Rico. I taught again in Caguas. So two years in Caguas, from '60 to '62, at the Gautier Benitez High School. Then I got the idea to go again - that's when I had the problem with the divorce - I got divorced.

[0:19:30]

Subject: I mean, so that I would forget about the whole problem with the divorce and all that, I asked again about teaching in Illinois. And I went back to Illinois. A more suburban place, I mean closer to Chicago. And I taught there for two years in a place called Lake Zurich in Illinois. That was north east of Chicago. By that time, which was from '62 to '64, I'd see more Puerto Ricans. And a lot of Mexicans in that area.

[0:20:00]

Subject: And I'd go to Chicago frequently to buy Puerto Rican products. But there were already a lot of Puerto Ricans. Because there were already a lot of Puerto Ricans in Waukegan, Illinois. That was in the same county where I was living.

Interviewer: And how long were you there this second time?

Subject: So the second time, I was there for two years. And then the next two years in Moline, Illinois, which is on the border with Iowa. They call them the Quad Cities. East Moline, Moline, Rock Island, and Davenport, Iowa.

[0:20:30]

Subject: I was there for two years. I went back to Puerto Rico in '66. And I taught for a year at the high school in Carolina, my town. And at the end of that year, I got the idea again of returning to the United States. And I packed up everything to come to New York searching for a better environment.

Interviewer: And when did you get married the second time?

Subject: I got married the second time in Illinois.

[0:21:00]

Interviewer: The second time.

Subject: And my wife was in New York. Well, she came from New York to Illinois and we got married in Illinois. It was in '63. The year that Kennedy died.

Interviewer: And what happened in Carolina this year? You decided one day to come to the United States?

Subject: At the end of that year, in the summer, my wife and I decided to come to the United States and stay over here. And I came to New York.

Interviewer: To New York?

Subject: Yes. I was in touch with a cousin of mine.

[0:21:30]

Interviewer: Oh, a cousin who lived in New York?

Subject: Yes. Well, yes. So I stayed at his place for a few days. And I looked for an apartment. I went immediately to the Board of Education looking for work over there in New York to (take) the exams. I didn't get a job as a teacher immediately. I had to wait six months. But I was lucky because three or four days later, I took the exam to be a case worker, right, in the Welfare Department.

Interviewer: What's a case worker?

Subject: The case worker works with the welfare department.

[0:22:00]

Subject: A job that deals with cases. They call it investigator.

Interviewer: Yes.

Subject: They just gave a very short training. And they gave what's called a walk-in test. Then the next day you started work. I worked six months. And after the six months, they

had called me from a school that was very close in Manhattan, George Washington High School. They called me to work there.

[0:22:30]

Subject: It was the second semester in that school year, in '68. And I left my job as a case worker and I went to the school. I was teaching there for three years. And during that time, I came to the Philadelphia area frequently. So to (Camden) to visit my sister-in-law, my wife's sister. And during one of those trips, they took us on a trip to Willingboro, New Jersey, to see the (Levitt) model houses.

[0:23:00]

Subject: And then we fell in love with a house that they were building. And the next day I put down a deposit.

Interviewer: And how long were you in New York?

Subject: Three years.

Interviewer: And then you went to Philadelphia?

Subject: I got a job in Philadelphia. But I bought a house in Willingboro, New Jersey. You know where Willingboro is, right?

Interviewer: But why did you buy a house there? Was it close to New York?

Subject: No, no, no. I wanted to come to this area.

Interviewer: Why did you want to come to this area?

[0:23:30]

Subject: Okay. I wanted to come to this area because I had a lot of friends here in Philadelphia.

Interviewer: Where? Family or...?

Subject: I mean, well, I think of them as family, especially my wife's sister in (Camden). So I met a lot of people, friends of mine in Philadelphia. For example, the Rodriguez family, Mrs. Ramonita Rodriguez, may she rest in peace. Her son, who works in Philadelphia. Rosita, who was in Philadelphia, and her husband.

Interviewer: But how did you meet them?

Subject: Many of them I knew from Puerto Rico, from before.

[0:24:00]

1979A English Translation

Interviewer: Oh, you knew them in Puerto Rico.

Subject: Yes. So those were the connections.

Interviewer: Were they in Carolina?

Subject: Well, Eliezer Rodriguez was a pastor in the church in Carolina, in the church in Barrazas.

Interviewer: Oh.

Subject: He's a minister too. Mrs. Ramonita's son. And I want to add that this Rodriguez family, Mr. Enrique and his wife Mrs. Ramonita, I think they were one of the first to come to Philadelphia. A lot of people from my town came with them.

Interviewer: Yes.

Subject: That they're connected through family, I mean, through marriage, right?

[0:24:30]

Subject: And other people came with them. I think of myself as part of that group.

Interviewer: When Eliezer Rodriguez came here, the elderly man, did a lot of people come?

Subject: Mr. Enrique, yes.

Interviewer: Mr. Enrique. Did a lot of people come?

Subject: Yes. Yes. Yes. I mean all the family of the wife of Eliezer Rodriguez, Mr. Enrique's son.

Interviewer: They came.

Subject: Yes. Yes. All of those people, who were all from my neighborhood. So there was also...

[0:25:00]

Subject: ... my wife's sister, who is related to the Rodriguez family too through marriage. So everyone is like one family. So I think that's the reason why I came to this area (of Delaware Valley). Because we already knew those people and we had family here.

Interviewer: And you got work with the...?

Subject: Yes. First, I bought the house.

Interviewer: Where?

Subject: Over there in Willingboro, New Jersey. So to stay there for the rest of my life, right?

[0:25:30]

Interviewer: And do you live there now?

Subject: Yes. So I came to Philadelphia to the Board of Education to ask for work. And I had the opportunity to start working here in January 1971, February 1971.

Interviewer: So it was more than six years?

Subject: Six years and change, yes, here.

Interviewer: But you knew Mr. Eliezer from Carolina?

Subject: Mr....

Interviewer: Enrique.

Subject: Well, Eliezer the son, who's my age. Yes.

Interviewer: And Mr. Enrique was the pastor.

[0:26:00]

Subject: Mr. Enrique was the minister, I mean, the minister in Philadelphia. He was also a minister in Cidra And so Elizer, the son, when he was a seminarian, he was a pastor in my church.

Interviewer: Which church?

Subject: The church in Barrazas, where I was born, my Baptist church. I didn't tell you about that before.

Interviewer: You're a Baptist?

Subject: Yes.

Interviewer: But are you very religious? Do you practice a lot or no...?

[0:26:30]

Subject: I can't say it like that. I'd rather say it another way. I'm a Baptist. So I was born in the Baptist church. So I consider myself a liberal Baptist.

Interviewer: Did other members of your family come to Philadelphia? Or were you the only one? Or to New York?

Subject: From my family...

1979A English Translation

Interviewer: Immediate.

Subject: From my family, not from my wife's side?

Interviewer: No, your brothers and sisters.

Subject: No. One of my brothers stayed in Illinois. And he hasn't returned to Puerto Rico. A younger brother.

[0:27:00]

Interviewer: All the others stayed in Puerto Rico? Your parents stayed in Puerto Rico?

Subject: So my dad died in '50 from a heart attack, when I was in my fourth year. My mom stayed in Puerto Rico. One of my two sisters, the one that follows me, she was in the United States because her husband is in the army. He retired last month after 22 years. And she's been in a lot of states. And now she lives in Burlington, New Jersey, close to Willingboro.

Interviewer: In that place, Willingboro...

[0:27:30]

Interviewer: ... do you have family members on your wife's side or on your side?

Subject: Now, yes. Since last April, my sister and her husband live here. They came from Oklahoma. They settled near Willingboro. That's Burlington, New Jersey, which is next to Willingboro. That's my sister.

Interviewer: And are there a lot of Puerto Ricans in Willingboro?

Subject: There are a lot of Puerto Ricans in Willingboro. There are a lot of Hispanics; not just Puerto Ricans. There are a lot of Hispanics of many nationalities.

Interviewer: Where you live, on your same street.

Subject: Yes. Well, not on the same street. No.

Interviewer: Not on the same street.

[0:28:00]

Subject: They're all spread out, like we say. There's not what you would call a neighborhood.

Interviewer: There's not a neighborhood?

Subject: In a suburb of New Jersey, no. You have to go to Camden or...

Interviewer: Or Philadelphia.

Subject: ...or to Philadelphia, or Vineland where you see typical communities, I mean, communities with a concentration. Not in Willingboro, since Willingboro is a suburban community. And even though it's an integrated community with people from all countries in the world, but there's not...

[0:28:30]

Subject: ... what you would call a core in just one place.

Interviewer: And do you like that city?

Subject: Yes, I like it.

Interviewer: You wouldn't want to move?

Subject: No, no. I think it's an ideal place to live. The schools are very good.

Interviewer: Have you traveled to Puerto Rico since '71?

Subject: Yes. I've traveled to Puerto Rico to visit and for wakes, for the wake for my grandmother when she died.

Interviewer: Do you plan to return to Puerto Rico one day to stay forever?

[0:29:00]

Subject: Well, sometimes I say I will. But it will be when I retire.

Interviewer: When you retire.

Subject: If the conditions are...

Interviewer: Acceptable.

Subject: Acceptable in terms of - I mean the cost of living is very expensive over there. I'd say that yes. But for now I'll go to visit my family members.

Interviewer: If you could go back to like '50 when you first decided to come to the United States...

[0:29:30]

Interviewer: ...or the times that you've decided to come to the United States.

Subject: Yes, I returned. I returned two times. You know.

Interviewer: But would you do it again? Would you have come to live in the United States again? That last time that you decided to come to New York. Would you do it?

1979A English Translation

Subject: Would I do it? Return to Puerto Rico?

Interviewer: No. Would you have left Puerto Rico that last time when you decided to come to New York?

Subject: I did it.

Interviewer: But did you regret it?

Subject: No, no, no. No, I didn't regret it. I didn't regret it.

[0:30:00]

Interviewer: How do you get from New Jersey to work? Do you have a car?

Subject: Yes, a car. It's like 18 miles.

Interviewer: Have you ever visited the "botanica"? The "botanicas" that are around here or in New Jersey.

Subject: I've gone inside but I haven't bought anything.

Interviewer: Do you know about any of these home remedies?

Subject: No, I remember when I was young, about the medicinal plants.

[0:30:30]

Interviewer: Like?

Subject: Yes, I can tell you some of the names.

Interviewer: And what purpose do they have?

Subject: Well, there's "guarapillo." Do you know what "guarapillo" is?

Interviewer: What do you use "guarapillo" for?

Subject: "Guarapillo" was a medicine for a cold. It was a tea.

Interviewer: There were a lot of teas.

Subject: Yes. Yes, the curía was a plant.

Interviewer: What did you use curía for?

Subject: The curía was a plant that had a good smell.

[0:30:59]

Subject: Like mint. Or basil. You boiled it in water and then you strained it. And you put sugar in it. That was a tea or a "guarapillo." That was like a medicinal tea. People thought of it as a "guarapillo." You put lemon in it. I also remember a plant called "altamisa." Or it still exists. They also made "guarapillos" with "altamisa." They also made "guarapillos" with the leaves, the flower of squash.

Interviewer: And were there spiritualists in Barrazas at that time?

[0:31:30]

Subject: Yes, I remember it from when I was a kid. But I grew up in the evangelical church. I mean, if I had grown up Catholic, maybe I'd have been in touch with it more or knew more about spiritualist and these things. Since the Catholics were the ones who went to spiritualists. I know that close to my house there was a spiritualist center. And when I was a kid, when I was 12, 13, 14, there was a house where people said that there were ghosts. And it was in the newspapers and everything that the cups of water and that...

[0:32:00]

Subject: ...flew through the air and all that. But I never went to one of those nights when the ghosts came out. But it was close to my house.

Interviewer: Yes.

Subject: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you know of any legends that were told in Barrazas? Your grandparents or your parents.

Subject: Legends.

Interviewer: Yes.

Subject: I have to think about it. And we'll have to record another day if I remember. Because right now I don't remember.

Interviewer: Because there's one that's called "The Frigate of the Dogs." Have you heard about that one? That there were three people, two buddies and a godson.

Subject: Was that in San Juan?

[0:32:30]

Interviewer: Well, people have told that one in different towns.

1979A English Translation

Subject: I don't remember. No. I don't remember. Everything I know about legends is what I've read. But I haven't heard it from someone's mouth. Someone who is older than me would remember more.

Interviewer: In your home, what language do you speak primarily? Spanish or English?

Subject: In my home now?

Interviewer: Yes.

Subject: Spanish, definitely.

Interviewer: Do you have children?

Subject: Yes, my youngest daughter...

[0:33:00]

Subject: ... who is 10 years old, she's going to turn 11, she was nine months old when she came to New York. Okay. She hasn't been to Puerto Rico. She was born in Puerto Rico, right? Nine months old. Okay. I use my daughter as an example for all those people who claim, oh, that my child doesn't speak Spanish. My child only speaks English. I use my daughter as an example because my daughter speaks Spanish. She's bilingual. People say, well, because you speak to her in Spanish.

[0:33:30]

Subject: That's precisely what I do. I only speak Spanish to her. I've only spoken to her in Spanish. My wife and I speak to her in Spanish. She's completely bilingual. She's number one in her class. And she hasn't had any problem since...

Interviewer: Are there Puerto Ricans in her school? Or is she the only one?

Subject: In her class, she's the only one. There may be one or two Puerto Ricans in the entire school in that section of Willingboro. Because there are 12 sections. We live in the Twin Hills section. In the Twin Hills section, there may be like three or four Puerto Rican families. And in her school, there may be like two or three Puerto Rican children.

[0:34:00]

Subject: In English, she is number one, in reading, spelling. And in math and social studies, she gets all A's and a few B's. And she speaks Spanish at home. She'll speak Spanish with you or with anyone else. She's completely bilingual.

1979A English Translation

Interviewer: This may be a sensitive question, but, in that neighborhood, do you think the Americans get along well with the Puerto Ricans? That there's not a certain prejudice?

[0:34:30]

Subject: I say yes.

Interviewer: Yes what?

Subject: Willingboro is ideal.

Interviewer: Yes.

Subject: Yes. I say so.

Interviewer: You get along?

Subject: Willingboro is known as an international community.

Interviewer: Yes?

Subject: There's no, "I got here first" or, "You got here first." Nothing. Because my house was new, right? And then other people started moving next to me? Filipinos live in front of me. People from Thailand. Black people.

[0:35:00]

Subject: People of Irish heritage. Jewish people. Greeks. Africans. All of Willingboro is like that. That's why every year we have what we call the international festival.

Interviewer: In Willingboro?

Subject: Yes. And this is to emphasize the different cultures and to share the cultures...

[0:35:30]

Subject: ...of the different people who live in Willingboro. And share the cultures with each other. And I know that Hispanics in Willingboro, I mean, we have a good reputation.

Interviewer: And the Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia, do you think they experience more discrimination?

Subject: Tell me the question again.

Interviewer: That if the Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia...

Subject: The ones here.

Interviewer: Yes. Do you think they experience any discrimination?

[0:36:00]

Subject: Well, people always say that there's discrimination. Well, it exists here. It's a larger city, where there's more racial discrimination in terms of housing. You know that it exist. Different sectors where Puerto Ricans can't live. And they burn the homes.

[0:36:30]

Subject: I'd tell you, Pucho, that I couldn't live in a place, in the Kensington or Fishtown area because they would burn my home. So imagine. How different it is compared to where I live, right?

Interviewer: What food do you prefer?

Subject: Hispanic, definitely, 100 percent.

Interviewer: And what music do you listen to?

[0:37:00]

Subject: Hispanic music. My music is moderate music, I mean, I prefer Hispanic music, right. But...

Interviewer: Which Hispanic?

Subject: I mean, indigenous Hispanic music. For example, folkloric music, Puerto Rican dance.

Interviewer: Do you have a collection of records?

Subject: Of course. I've bought a lot here from the Puerto Rican shop. Yes.

Interviewer: Do you play any instrument?

[0:37:30]

Subject: No, I don't play any. My daughter dances Puerto Rican dance. Yes. She has danced ballet since she was four or five years old and she also dances folkloric Puerto Rican dances. So just like she speaks Spanish well, she's very immersed in Puerto Rican culture. That's because of our home, right.

[0:38:00]

Subject: We don't deny the culture. Like other parents who deny their children of the background, I mean, where they come from, not us. We do the opposite. We make them feel proud of their culture. For example, my son who is turning 19, he's in the

Marine Corps. He's in Japan. He's in the marine infantry. He only studied one grade in Puerto Rico, third grade. He did all the rest here in the United States. And he identifies with everything that's Puerto Rican. He identifies with Puerto Rican music. And he uses...

[0:38:30]

Subject: ...a lot of Puerto Rican patches on his jacket, the Puerto Rican flag. He's very proud of his origins, of his country. This is very good.

Interviewer: Changing the topic a little bit.

Subject: Yes.

Interviewer: Have you ever been unemployed?

Subject: Since I graduated from college, I've never been unemployed. Thank God.

Interviewer: Do you belong to any union?

Subject: What kind of union? A work union or a civic or cultural organization?

Interviewer: No, a union of workers.

[0:39:00]

Subject: Well, the teachers union in Philadelphia, yes.

Interviewer: And have you participated in protests or strikes?

Subject: No, I haven't had the opportunity. No.

Interviewer: And what civic organizations do you belong to you here?

Subject: Well, here in Philadelphia, the association of bilingual teachers. Even though I don't belong to another one as an official member, but...

[0:39:30]

Subject: ... I participate and work in activities related to the council, Puerto Rican week, the Puerto Rican folkloric fest in November, sponsored by the bilingual teachers and the office where I work.

Interviewer: And in your opinion, these civic organizations and places, do they accomplish their purpose of helping Puerto Ricans in the city?

[0:40:00]

Subject: I'd say yes.

Interviewer: Specifically how are they working?

Subject: Well, in Philadelphia, as you know, for example, the Hispanic Organizations Council, right, they help all the newcomers here in Philadelphia...

[0:40:30]

Subject: ...look for work or give them training in some classes. Even though it's not possible to help everyone for various reasons. I don't know why. But the purpose of all the civic organizations is to help people in need. And where I live, well, we also have organizations to help the poorest people. And to refer them to the different government offices...

[0:41:00]

Subject: ... where they can get help.

Interviewer: Another question I wanted to ask. Do you know any married couples where there's a Puerto Rican and an American?

Subject: Yes, I know several.

Interviewer: And do they get along well?

Subject: As far as I know, yes. Yes, they get along very well, and they both assimilate well. Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: And how do they try to balance their lives so that, let's suppose that it's an American, they can get used to Puerto Rican food?

[0:41:30]

Subject: I think that in terms of food, they make both. For me food is international. Meat, potatoes, that's international. And rice with pigeon peas, well, everyone likes that. Actually, the pastor of the church that I go to in Mount Holly, New Jersey, an American pastor, (Santilli), with Italian heritage...

[0:42:00]

Subject: ...his wife is Puerto Rican.

Interviewer: Okay.

Subject: Yes, his wife is Puerto Rican from Ponce. And it's an American church. I think that we - her and us, I mean, my family, my wife and my children - are the only Puerto Ricans in that church. Although I also help here with the Hispanic church in

Philadelphia from time to time. But I'm over there because it's too far to come here to Philadelphia on Sundays. I'm getting a little bit lazy.

Interviewer: How long does it take to get from New Jersey to here?

Subject: Well, 40 minutes, more or less.

[0:42:30]

Interviewer: What was your experience when you were in the army? Were you with Puerto Ricans?

Subject: Well, like I told you before, I had to pick between the army and the Marine Corps. I chose the marine infantry. There were a lot of Puerto Ricans who were also in the marine infantry. When I started the training in South Carolina, I was with all the Puerto Ricans for a month. Then they scattered us out among Americans.

[0:43:00]

Subject: I mean, that first month was a special month to acclimate and adjust. And then we joined the Americans. Then we were divided. But we always saw other Puerto Ricans in California and when we were in Korea. But not like a Puerto Rican army, like the 65 infantry, no.

Interviewer: But you spent time together?

Subject: Yes, we spent time together. We always spoke in Spanish, even though sometimes they told us not to speak in Spanish.

Interviewer: Who told you?

Subject: The officers.

Interviewer: Yes. Why?

[0:43:30]

Subject: But at that time, I wasn't very informed. I mean, we had to obey. But we always spoke in Spanish. Because that was our language. I'd like to go back again.

Interviewer: Why did they tell you to not speak Spanish? Why was that?

Subject: Well, that still exists in the army. That would be a good thing to explore now. It still exists in the marine infantry. If you speak a language that people around you don't speak, they scold you.

[0:44:00]

Subject: And they tell you to speak English or else.

Interviewer: What aspirations do you have for your children?

Subject: Well, my aspirations are the best there could be; that they get to study and...

Interviewer: Do you want them to go to...

Subject: Yes, of course.

Interviewer: And what aspirations do you have for yourself in the near future? Do you plan to stay in Willingboro?

Subject: Well, my aspirations for the future...

[0:44:30]

Subject: ...are to keep working where I am and to continue helping the Hispanic community through my work and through my additional work with the community and cultural activities. And continue what I'm doing now. I mean, involved in civic and cultural issues. And to continue sharing our art and culture.

Interviewer: And what do you think about the political participation of the Puerto Rican community in the city of Philadelphia?

[0:45:00]

Interviewer: Or nationally? I mean, in other words, is the municipal government helping Puerto Ricans? What's the relationship between the two?

Subject: Well, I think that the municipal government, through various agencies, is helping, even if not completely, I mean, to get Hispanics to participate and especially register to vote.

[0:45:30]

Subject: And there have been a lot of campaigns here in Philadelphia...

Interviewer: So Puerto Ricans should vote?

Subject: Of course. I think we're improving in that aspect every year. Registration campaigns. In each Hispanic community, whether it's here or in New Jersey, wherever it is, I know that there are organizations that work in that aspect along with the municipal government or whatever to register new voters so that they will participate more and have more...

[0:46:00]

Subject: ... more power to ask for things to improve people's situation.

Interviewer: What do you see in Puerto Rico's future? Politically, socially.

Subject: Well, the future? How do I see it? What's going to happen? Or what I prefer?

Interviewer: First, what do you prefer?

[0:46:30]

Subject: Well, I don't like to talk a lot about politics. But I voted for statehood in the referendum in '67. So you know that I'm pro-statehood since I'm pro-American, since we have the benefits. As long as we preserve the culture and the language and so we can do that. But, on the other hand, and I'm not sinning by saying this...

[0:47:00]

Subject: ...and it's not a bad thing to say it, but it will be good if Puerto Rico, I mean Puerto Rico could be an independent country, but maintaining a friendly relationship with the United States.

Interviewer: You made a decision that you prefer statehood, but you thought something else. I mean, you told me, what do I prefer? Or what's going to happen?

Subject: What do I prefer? Statehood? What's going to happen?

[0:47:30]

Subject: So that's where I was. The way I see it, it's like in the future Puerto Rico...

[SILENCE BETWEEN 47:37 AND 48:07]

Interviewer: ...(unintelligible) independence do you think?

Subject: That's a distant idea that I have. It's not that I prefer it. But it could be the same or it could be statehood too. I don't know. I don't know. But if they seek independent the right way, maybe they achieve it. Because now we have certain things that...

[0:48:30]

Subject: ...we're acting as if we were an independent country in some aspects. For example, Puerto Rico sends Miss Puerto Rico to Miss Universe, right? Puerto Rico sends delegations to the Olympics. And that's like if it was an independent country. So we're acting independently in various things.

Interviewer: Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you would like to add to the story?

[0:49:00]

Subject: Let me see if I remember. You asked me about legends and all that, but that will have to be another day when I remember things.

Interviewer: Yes, if you remember, let me know.

Subject: Yes. Let me see if...

Interviewer: You don't have to remember anything. It's just if I haven't asked you something that you would like to add.

Subject: No, I don't remember anything. But another day we can talk about typical things from...

[0:49:30]

Subject: ...from a particular neighborhood, for example, when I was a kid, right? We can talk about what the atmosphere was like at that time and what typical characters I knew.

Interviewer: But tell me. What typical characters were there in the neighborhood?

Subject: No, actually my sister and I are planning to find out - I was speaking with Diego the other day about this - that we're trying to remember, right, that when we were kids there were certain characters, I mean, certain people we knew that were...

[0:50:00]

Subject: ...and actually they were all people of color. But these people, right, like saying Mr. Pedro, Mr. Juan, but instead of Mr., the nickname started with the syllable ma. So this was making us curious because my sister and I want to know what this was about. I'll give you an example. We counted and we knew like six people whose nicknames started with the syllable ma. For example, the man named "Agapito" was called "Magapo."

[0:50:30]

Subject: Why the ma? A man named Silvestre, who was the husband of my midwife, was called "Masilva" as a nickname. Ma. Always the ma at the beginning. A man called Alejandro was called "Malejandro." A man who I think was called Felix or Felipe was called "Mafele."

Interviewer: Were they all black?

Subject: They were all black Puerto Ricans, right.

[0:51:00]

Subject: I mean, people who were very much loved in the neighborhood. This “Mafele” was a healer actually.

Interviewer: A healer?

Subject: Yes, he was a healer.

Interviewer: What did he do?

Subject: Well, he fixed fingers. He fixed broken fingers. Many times he fixed my fingers.

Interviewer: But how did he do it?

Subject: Well, stretching your finger and pulling it this way and that. And putting stuff on you.

Interviewer: What did he put on you?

Subject: I don't remember.

Interviewer: No?

Subject: Things that he did.

[0:51:30]

Interviewer: At that time, was there tap water? Or did you go to the river to get water?

Subject: Now there's tap water in the countryside. We didn't have power or water from aqueduct. No. You had to get it from a well. And I'm not embarrassed to say it. This isn't embarrassing, this is so typical. It was such a clean life that we lived before. I had to get firewood in the forest.

Interviewer: That my parents experienced.

Subject: That you had to get firewood in the forest to be able to cook.

[0:52:00]

Subject: So that my mom could cook. I'm not embarrassed to say this. Like I told you before, I was born into a poor family. And everything has improved now. Everything has changed completely. Then power came and then the water.

Interviewer: You didn't have refrigerators?

Subject: No, we didn't have power.

Interviewer: And how did you keep the meat? Did you kill it from one day to the next?

Subject: Well, you're getting a lot of anecdotes from the past. Yes, this is good. This is what they did with the meat. When they killed a pig in the community where they sold the meat, they salted it. They put a lot of salt on it.

[0:52:30]

Subject: Then they hung it from a wall, I mean, from the ceiling. I know that it lasted for a while and it didn't go bad. Because they prepared it with salt or they spiced it, I think. And they hung it. In the countryside, they had equipment that hung from the ceiling that's called ("sereta"). And it's something typical. I'd like to have one now as a souvenir. It was a wheel made from straw. And they hung the meat there...

[0:53:00]

Subject: ...so the cats wouldn't eat it, they wouldn't climb to eat it. And I know that they salted it. And that's why it lasted.

Interviewer: And to get ice? Did they have ice?

Subject: Yes, they sold ice.

Interviewer: Who sold it?

Subject: A truck came up from the town, Carolina. And they sold blocks of ice. The ice helped preserve a lot of things.

Interviewer: What did the ice cost at that time?

Subject: Very cheap. I don't remember, but it was very cheap. I think they even gave it away.

[0:53:30]

Subject: It was that cheap.

Interviewer: And did you ever attend a "promise," a singing vigil or something like that?

Subject: Since I wasn't Catholic, and these "promises" and things like that and singing rosaries and the feasts of the cross and all that, I wasn't very involved.

Interviewer: Oh, that's Catholic.

Subject: I wasn't involved with that. I was in the evangelical church.

Interviewer: And what did the evangelical church celebrate?

Subject: Well, our wakes when people died, yes. Well, we also sung. Very typical too.

[0:54:00]

Subject: I also went to wakes where people prayed and sang and people did the nine nights. But I went to eat my cookie and cheese and black coffee. Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: And were there like neighborhood festivals?

Subject: Well, Pucho, we had to go to the town for celebrations, for the festivals for the patron saints. I just remember the festivals for the patron saints.

Interviewer: In the town?

Subject: And we had to go to the town to go to the movies.

[0:54:30]

Subject: From the time that I remember, it was 11 cents. Six cents and then 11 cents. I remember. I've always said, but people don't believe it, that my allowance was one cent a week to spend at school. What people think that I'm exaggerating.

Interviewer: And was there a theater in Carolina?

Subject: Yes, the Cereceda theater.

Interviewer: And what movies did they show?

Subject: Cowboys. And a series, that you had to go two or three Saturdays to see a series of movies. They showed one movie.

[0:55:00]

Subject: And then they showed the continuation of a series. (The Spider), the Lone Ranger, whatever.

Interviewer: And when did television come to Puerto Rico? Do you remember?

Subject: I remember, yes, I remember.

Interviewer: And what were the first programs?

Subject: At a cousin's house near my neighborhood. The first programs that I remember were news.

Interviewer: News?

Subject: That's what comes to mind. Then some typical artistic programs (unintelligible).

[0:55:30]

Subject: But what I remember that I'd see the most was the news.

Interviewer: Did you listen to the radio a lot then?

Subject: Yes. I also remember when they bought the first radio in my house.

Interviewer: First radio?

Subject: I remember that it was battery-powered. Of course, we didn't have power.

Interviewer: And what kind of lights did you have? Flashlights? Gas?

Subject: Kerosene.

Interviewer: Kerosene.

Subject: And lanterns.

Interviewer: And lanterns.

Subject: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: My dad talks to me about all this.

Subject: Did your dad also talk to you about when we had the blackouts...

[0:56:00]

Subject: ...during the World War II? During World War II, we often had to turn out the lights. We had to turn everything off because then you'd see the (spotlights) that you'd see. I was a kid and I'd get scared each time I saw these (spotlights), that you could be seen from San Juan, right, to illuminate the foreign airplanes that came. We had blackouts. We had to turn everything off.

Interviewer: You mentioned Governor Tugwell, did they get along well? (unintelligible).

[0:56:30]

Subject: Redford Guy Tugwell. Yes, we got along well with him. At that time there were not a lot of fights. There were not a lot of complaints or anything.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of the other American governors?

Subject: No. Through the books, yes, but I'd have to look at a book now. But I don't remember. I remember the first Puerto Rican governor, Jesus T. Piñero, who was actually from my town. And I want to say it here with pride because he was from my town. Jesus T. Piñero. He was the first governor appointed by President Truman, I think.

[0:57:00]

Subject: And then Muñoz Marin, who was the first elected governor.

Interviewer: What do you remember about the PAC party?

Subject: Yes.

Interviewer: The Party for Christian Action.

Subject: The Party for Christian Action. And since we're talking about religion - because this was sponsored by the Catholic Church - and since I was from the evangelical church, this caused a lot of unease between the Catholic religion and the evangelical. Now, thank God, the unease doesn't exist. We all get along.

[0:57:30]

Subject: And I want to add that before, when I was a kid, there was a lot of controversy between the Catholics and the evangelicals. But we always stuck with it.

Interviewer: And why was that party founded?

Subject: The PAC, the Party for Christian Action...

Interviewer: From 73 '74, 60's?.

Subject: I think it was founded to improve the conditions...

[0:58:00]

Subject: ...the social conditions in Puerto Rico. I don't know who the founders of that party were.

Interviewer: But then it wasn't a party about religious differences? Was it a party for Catholics?

Subject: Well, they had a yellow flag. And the yellow flag is the pope's. So at that time, I also remember, the Catholics insisted on teaching religion in schools. And we always opposed it. And then I remember...

[0:58:30]

Subject: ...that there was a very big meeting of evangelicals in the Sixto Escobar park in San Juan.

Interviewer: For what?

Subject: To protest so that they wouldn't approve the plan to teach religion in schools. Because since we were a minority, the Catholics would try to force the Catholic

religion on us. Because it happened that way. Because, I remember when I was in middle school, a priest would come and when we got out of school he would stop us...

[0:59:00]

Subject: ...to take us to a place at a sugar refinery to teach religion to us. And I went to one because I was young. But the others were older and they would get away and not go. I mean, they wouldn't let themselves get caught. But I only went to one. But I remember this now affectionately. But now we get along well, the Catholics and the evangelicals. But before, there was a lot of...

Interviewer: Discord?

Subject: Yes, discord. And we argued a lot. For example, with classmates who were Catholic or Evangelical...

[0:59:30]

Subject: ...there were a lot of disputes, like we said, a lot of arguments. That almost doesn't exist anymore.

Interviewer: Well, I want to thank you for the interview. I don't have any more questions now, unless you...

Subject: Well, another day...

Interviewer: Another day.

Subject: ...we can talk about stories and legends and anecdotes and a lot of things.

Interviewer: If you remember, let me know.

Subject: Yes, okay.

Interviewer: Okay.