

1980A English Translation

0:00:19.7

Interviewer: When was it that you came to Philadelphia?

Interviewee: 1948

Interviewer: And how did one get to this city?

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How did one get the planes and all that?

Interviewee: Back then, four engine planes didn't exist.

Interviewer: They didn't exist?

Interviewee: The route from San Juan to New York did not exist.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Interviewee: What existed were the two engine ones.

Interviewer: And how long...?

Interviewee: So, I came in a two engine one, through the Martin Bello agency, in Arecibo. So, we took a plane at 4:00 p.m. in San Juan.

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And at 10 p.m. we landed in Miami. It was a flight with layovers, you know.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: So, we were in Miami until 10 o'clock the next day. We took the plane and arrived in New York at 6:00 p.m.

Interviewer: Was the plane large or small?

Interviewee: Two engines.

Interviewer: Two engines? And how many fit it in?

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Interviewee: There were many passengers, but that thing in the air went up and down, "Boom, boom, boom." It bounced up and down and the people were screaming, you know? I remember as though it were right now, you know. My hair stands on edge every time I remember. Not now, because now...

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Interviewer: And what kind of food did they serve on the planes?

Interviewee: None. They didn't serve food. Nothing.

Interviewer: Not even a piece of gum, or anything?

Interviewee: No, food is served now. After Pan American and Eastern started flying, you know.

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Interviewer: What were some of the first jobs you got in this city?

Interviewee: The first job that I had in the city was – because I knew good English. It was a very big restaurant in Reading, Pennsylvania.

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[Unintelligible] They asked me what nationality I was and I said I was Puerto Rican. When I said I was Puerto Rican, they looked at each other and thought, "This guy doesn't know any English." So, then they said, "Can you talk English?" And I said, "A little bit." Then, I started speaking English with them and they were amazed. Then the owner came and he said, "I have work for you." And I was living day to day.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: For sure.

Interviewer: What were work conditions like in Puerto Rico?

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Interviewee: Around that time in Puerto Rico, what one made – in Puerto Rico I made 3 pesos a day.

Interviewer: Doing what?

Interviewee: Chopping sugar cane.

Interviewer: Yes? And where was sugar cane chopped during that time?

Interviewee: I worked at the Central Cambalache in Arecibo. When I arrived here, I worked eight or ten hours. I earned seven pesos. I earned little. I earned 35 pesos a week in the restaurants.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

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Interviewee: But 35 pesos was better than the three pesos I earned in Puerto Rico chopping sugar cane, you know. Either way it was a better deal, you know.

Interviewer: I see.

Interviewee: So, I worked and worked there. I would send money to my wife and children.

Interviewer: Did you come on your own?

Interviewee: On my own. So, I worked and worked there until 1953, when I brought my wife and children here to this country.

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Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Interviewee: Like that. I didn't work in the restaurants any longer. I had to find another job where I could make more money. I had to support my wife and children. I had an apartment now, so I needed more money.

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I went to work at a nursery. Where they plant trees and they take them out with shovels to sell them. It's a business. Of trees. So, I was there for 11 years. After 11 years, I wasn't making enough. I wanted my children to get an education, you know.

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Interviewer: Did they get an education?

Interviewee: Yes. But I wanted them to get an education, so, I tried to find a job here at this university.

Interviewer: Oh. In what year?

Interviewee: 1965.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Interviewee: They were in high school, you know. So, I came here to Temple University. I called to ask for work and they said yes, that they had a job for me. And I started right away.

Interviewer: That's good.

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Interviewee: That year, one of my daughters graduated.

Interviewer: From high school?

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Interviewee: From high school. So, I called here and they gave her a scholarship.

Interviewer: Mmm.

Interviewee: You know? Because I was working here. She got her degree here. Then another one got a degree here and then another. And so on until all of them did. That's what I was looking for, you know. At this point, what the hell; they've all gotten degrees. Now what? If it's my turn to leave I leave at any moment, you know?

0:06:00.6

Interviewer: With regards to education, do you remember the different schools you went to in Puerto Rico? What was school like?

Interviewee: Look, I remember, the school I went to in Puerto Rico, it was Jose Gautier Benitez.

Interviewer: In Rio Piedra?

Interviewee: No, no. Secondary school [unintelligible] Hatillo. In Hatillo, Puerto Rico. It was a secondary school.

Interviewer: Mmm

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Interviewee: They gave me half an hour in Spanish. Half an hour in English. One hour of wood working. One hour of agriculture. Half an hour of arithmetic – math, you know. Half an hour or geography. Half an hour of civil government. And half an hour of hygiene.

Interviewer: Personal, yes.

Interviewee: Hygiene. Yes. We studied hygiene.

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We studied civil government. The laws. Those things were studied back then. Nowadays they don't teach any of that, so an eighth grade of back then is equivalent to a second year of university these days, you know.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: An eighth grade of back then, because you had to know in order to pass to the next grade, you know. Hard work. Like the ones I attended, you know. I never missed school. Never. Never.

Interviewer: Did you come from a large family or a small one?

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Interviewee: No, my family in Hatillo was not large. We were a poor family.

Interviewer: Yes?

Interviewee: Yes. We were poor.

Interviewer: Did you live in a cement house or a wood house?

Interviewee: I had a house -- The house I had in Puerto Rico was made out of (brick and wood), but that's because I made it with what I made here. I would send it to my wife, so we made the house, you know. But in Puerto Rico, my father's, was made of (brick and wood), as well. My father had a good house.

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Interviewer: Mm-hm. In Hatillo?

Interviewee: In Hatillo, yes. In the Hatillo neighborhoods. So, here, we were making it. My children were able to get their education. I have two homes. We have money, too. You know, we have enough. We're not so bad. You know, we're both old, but we've got enough to live on, you know. But I spent my life working hard.

Interviewer: So, you...

Interviewee: I worked hard, you know.

Interviewer: How many children did you have?

Interviewee: Seven.

Interviewer: Seven?

0:08:30.1

And all of them...?

Interviewee: All of them. I raised all of them. All of them.

Interviewer: And they went to college?

Interviewee: Yes, all of them. Almost all of them. All to college. Yes.

Interviewer: Do you remember the first stores that there were here?

Interviewee: The first Hispanic store that was here was Martini. It was Martini that was on 7th and Fairmont.

Interviewer: And what kind of products did they sell?

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Interviewee: They sold malanga, yautia, batata, bacalao, kipper, and bacon and all things from Puerto Rico. They sold all sorts of things there.

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Interviewer: And fruit?

Interviewee: And fruit. So, then, right there between 6th and 7th on Fairmont, there was a theatre that they called Ruby. It's no longer there, but back then it was. And we used to go to Ruby Theatre to watch movies in Spanish. It was good.

Interviewer: How much did it cost to watch the movies?

Interviewee: They were inexpensive. Fifty cents.

Interviewer: Half a peso.

Interviewee: Half a peso. That's nothing. For half a peso you could watch three movies there. Mexican ones.

0:09:29.2

Back then Puerto Rico didn't have...

Interviewer: Do remember what were the first radio shows here?

Interviewee: Yes, of course.

Interviewer: Who were some of the first radio announcers?

Interviewee: There was one here that they called Charlie Sierra. He was a radio announcer from around here. There was – Do you remember Hector Ramos? Ramos Antonini's brother. Hector Ramos is brothers with Ramos Antonini, and so he had some businesses and he had a radio show that was good. The guy was doing well. But then one good old morning he picked up the children and left for Puerto Rico. He scammed everybody brother. He took 4,000 pesos that didn't belong to him and took to Puerto Rico and we're still waiting for him. He never showed up again.

Interviewer:

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Interviewer: Yes? What was that he promised?

Interviewee: Well, I'm not sure what he promised, but I know that he was in charge of collecting the monies, took them every day to the program, and would broadcast the

businesses of Hispanics, and all that. But one day he picked up and left like a pirate and they were left high and dry waiting for him. Oh, my God. This is part of history, you know.

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We're still waiting for him. I remember as though it were today.

Interviewer: Yes?

Interviewee: Yes. My wife and I had a restaurant. We would give him 4 pesos a week for him to announce our little business.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: And he would announce the business. But the next day was Tuesday and we were waiting on Hector Ramos' show and he didn't show up. How was he going to appear if the guy was already in Puerto Rico enjoying the 4,000 pesos he'd taken? What a guy.

Interviewer: Yes. Do you remember the name of the restaurant that you had? And where it was.

Interviewee: Yes. Victoria Restaurant. Fairmont Avenue.

Interviewer: Oh.

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Interviewee: Fairmont Avenue. Yes. We had a small restaurant there. I was doing well there, you know. Yes, I was.

Interviewer: Have you by chance ever visited an herbalist shop?

Interviewee: An herbalist shop? No, I don't like those herbalist shops. I don't believe in that. I don't believe in that foolishness.

Interviewer: There are people who people in spiritism.

Interviewee: No, I don't believe in that foolishness. That's foolishness. That's foolishness of people who lived in the past, you know. For sure.

Interviewer: Do you believe in home remedies and do you believe in...

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Interviewee: In things related to spiritism?

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: I don't believe in that nor do I want to know anything about that, either, you know. I've never

Interviewer: In Puerto Rico there was a kind of special alcoholate with plants that people would put on. Do you remember of those medicinal plants?

Interviewee: Alcoholate. Alcoholate Superior 70, wasn't it?

Interviewer: Yes. They would put some plants in it.

Interviewee: They still do. But they would put malagueta in it.

Interviewer: Oh. Was that it?

Interviewee: Well, most likely.

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But look, two years ago I went to Puerto Rico and I was in Adjuntas to visit a friend of mine who had lived here in Philadelphia. He went to there and I went to see him there in Adjuntas. And so, between Adjuntas and Utuado, that is all mountains, you know, but you can see the malagueta trees on the hills. It's so beautiful, you know. And the smell reaches the highway. So, I asked the driver, "What is that smell?" And he said, "Look up." So, I looked up and you could see the trunks of the malagueta. They're so big and beautiful and the smell was enchanting.

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Oh boy! That smell was one of the good ones, you know. That was two years ago and that malagueta estate is still there. There are large malagueta estates.

Interviewer: Mmm. Yes. Do you remember the first apartments you lived in in this city? Where did the Latino community live during that time?

Interviewee: Back then, here you could get a room for as little as 3 pesos.

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Back then, you know.

Interviewer: Per week?

Interviewee: For the week. There were rooms for three pesos here.

Interviewer: What year?

Interviewee: 1947. During '50 you could still find them. In '53 you could still find them.

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Interviewer: Were there Latinos here in '47?

Interviewee: Yes, there were. In Reading, and here, as well.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: And in Chicago, yes. I was also in Chicago.

Interviewer: Yes? How long were you there?

Interviewee: I was only there for seven months. I didn't like it there.

Interviewer: And in Reading?

Interviewee: In (Reading) I was there for four year.

Interviewer: Yes?

Interviewee: Reading was good. Yes.

Interviewer: Did you work there?

Interviewee: Yes, I worked there.

Interviewer: Around what year, more or less?

Interviewee: I started to work there in 1948, until '52.

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Interviewer: Yes?

Interviewee: I worked there for four years.

Interviewer: Did you ever live in the Spring Garden Community?

Interviewee: No. No. I never lived in any communities. I have always liked to live on my own, you know.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: Work and pay my rent. Nowadays I rent my properties.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: I have two houses nowadays and I rent them. Back then I had no money, you know, so I worked in Reading...

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...I paid five pesos for a little room.

Interviewer: Yes?

Interviewee: Yes. Five pesos.

Interviewer: With furniture and everything?

Interviewee: Yes, furnished. With good furniture. I worked at Crystal Restaurant and I worked there and I also ate my meals there.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: For sure. I had a guitar and I would pass the time with my guitar in the afternoon and in the morning.

Interviewer: Speaking of guitars and holidays and all that, what holidays do you observe of all the days: Christmas, Columbus Day, the Discovery of Puerto Rico,

0:14:30.1

There are many holidays.

Interviewee: Yes. There are many holidays, but I remember a lot of things from Puerto Rico, but the one I remember the most is the Lares uprising.

Interviewer: Yes? Tell us about that.

Interviewee: The Lares uprising. When we speak about the history of Puerto Rico, you know, the history of Puerto Rico, you remember those intelligent men, like Pedro Arvizu Campo. Even though he was a Nationalist, he was a very smart man, you know.

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He was a man who knew seven languages and he distinguished himself because of his personality in the entire world and everywhere he went.

Interviewer: What is it that happened during the Lares uprising, because there are a lot of people who don't know.

Interviewee: During the Lares uprising – let me explain. It was during the Lares uprising, in (1998), Puerto Rico wanted to become independent because the Spaniards wanted to torture the Puerto Ricans, you understand, torture them, kill them. So, the people rose up.

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The first town that rose up was Lares. They gave the cry for independence and that is why it's called the Lares uprising.

Interviewer: Oh.

Interviewee: You see. So, since there weren't any guns or revolvers or rifles, they used rocks and sticks. A lot of people died, you know. A lot of Puerto Ricans died. So then, Muñoz Marin, Muñoz Rivera, came from a yacht directly to Washington to request help for Puerto Rico. He told the North American people to go help Puerto Rico. So, the Americans arrived in San Juan, but they didn't want to enter through San Juan because they'd have to destroy the city;

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...bomb it, because the Spaniards had fortified very well, you know, behind El Morro. So, they went around the island, going south, and they entered through Guanica. So, the Puerto Ricans were waiting for them with machetes and things, just waiting for them to arrive to join them. So the Puerto Ricans they would tell them as soon as they entered, with their hands they went like this, and as soon as the American arrived, they united with them. They locked arms and they went in front. And they kept walking forward, you know.

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Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: For sure.

Interviewer: Do you remember Jayuya?

Interviewee: During the Jayuya Revolt I was here in this country.

Interviewer: Oh.

Interviewee: Yes, I was here, but I heard about it, you know.

Interviewer: What was it that happened during the Blair House incident, when the men seeking independence were in Washington and there were some shots.

Interviewee: No, but the shots were Torresola and Collazo.

Interviewer: Collazo, yes.

Interviewee: Collazo and Torresola.

Interviewer: Do you remember...?

Interviewee: They wanted independence for Puerto Rico, right?

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Collazo was – [unintelligible] was shot with one shot. Torresola was shot and killed on the stairs.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: And Collazo was injured. For sure, he was injured. So then, they killed three or four guards, of the guards that were there. Yes.

Interviewer: Yes. Do you remember the people's reaction? How did they...?

Interviewee: No, I wasn't in Puerto Rico when that happened. I was here already.

Interviewer: Yes. How did you stay in touch with what was happening on the island?

Interviewee: Back then I was in Reading, but in the Reading newspaper in English they published that and I would look for it and since I knew English I would read it, you know.

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I would read what was happening in Puerto Rico.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: So, I would tell the others what was going on. I was the one who told them that the revolution was happening in Puerto Rico.

Interviewer: The newspaper, El Diario, when was it that it started?

Interviewee: Oh, the newspaper El Diario wasn't started that long ago. El Diario was started about eight or ten years ago, something like that. Before that there weren't any newspapers.

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Interviewer: No?

Interviewee: No. They might have had it in New York, but here in Philadelphia they didn't, you know.

Interviewer: And radio? When did Latino radio begin in this city?

Interviewee: Latino Radio, when I came in '56 that program already existed. Back then Hector Ramos' program was already starting, and since then, for sure, the one who stole the 4,000 pesos, you know? There was Hector Ramos, you know? [unintelligible] things were going well, you know.

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Interviewer: What kind of program did they have? Just music or soap operas or...

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Interviewee: Records. Good records. Straight from Puerto Rico and New York, and everything, and so, they charged each business two pesos, three pesos, four pesos. The department stores, the restaurants, whichever. The man was doing well, you know. He was earning quite a bit of money. But one good morning he left for Puerto Rico [unintelligible] the program and we're still waiting for him.

Interviewer: Regarding music, which is your favorite music, of all the music that there is?

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Interviewee: I like music with cuatro and guitar. The cuatro and guitar.

Interviewer: And who are the artists that you recognize through the times?

Interviewee: Well, I know Johnny Albino from San Juan. He was good. Placid (Arcobello), I mean Placid Acevedo from the Marciano Quartet. And there was the Mayer Quartet, also, they played and sang, as well. And I also remember the Vegabaja Trio.

Interviewer: Yes?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Vegabajeño?

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Interviewee: The Vegabajeño Trio was good also, you know. And Steve Flores de Aguadilla was good also. Yes. I remember those people.

Interviewer: Where was it that the night clubs were in this city?

Interviewee: The night clubs have always been on the east side. By Lehigh avenue. By the 5th and 4th. Around there. The 5th and 4th, around there. Not around here. It's time to work.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah?

Interviewee: Yes, they're telling me.

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Interviewer: What was that about there not being shoes in Puerto Rico?

Interviewee: In Puerto Rico when I went to school, the children would go barefoot because people didn't have money for food, much less for shoes.

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Interviewer: Yes?

Interviewee: For sure. People were poor. Very poor. That was around 1919, '20.

Interviewer: In what year were you born, more or less?

Interviewee: I was born in 1917.

Interviewer: Seventeen?

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Interviewee: Seventeen, yes. I'm sixty, you know.

Interviewer: And your father, where did he work?

Interviewee: My father? He was a farmer.

Interviewer: Yes?

Interviewee: He was also a laborer, he worked with sugar cane. He would plant and harvest sugar cane. He would go to the coffee estates. To bring us food, you know. And then he got old and couldn't work anymore. Then I had to support him.

Interviewer: Oh.

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Interviewee: [Unintelligible]

Interviewer: How far did you get in school?

Interviewee: At school? I finished my second year of high school. I studied in Puerto Rico. The second year of that school is equivalent to a university program.

Interviewer: Yes?

Interviewee: For sure. Here, the people studying nowadays, I can beat those people in American history and civil government. They don't know what I know. I ask Americans, they don't know. Look, Americans, I ask them – I tell them to tell me Abraham Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg...

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Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg, and they don't know. And I'm Puerto Rican and I studied it in fourth grade and I still remember, you know. Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg. You know? For sure. We truly studied. I learned that in fourth grade in American History.

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Interviewer: Yes. You know. Do you remember the first bars that there were in this city?

Interviewee: No, about bars?

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Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: No. No. I don't like that. I never drink, beer or anything. I'm not a drinker. I didn't pursue that, so I don't know.

Interviewer: Were there clubs here where Latin artists came to play and dance, and all that?

Interviewee: Yes, there were.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of them?

Interviewee: They would come to The Met. Yes. So, Met was something important to play there. They would come to the theatres. At the Ruby Theatre and also the Puerto Rico Theatre.

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Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: The San Juan Theatre that doesn't exist anymore.

Interviewer: Where is the San Juan Theatre?

Interviewee: It doesn't exist anymore. It was in Germantown.

Interviewer: Oh, yes?

Interviewee: The Puerto Rico Theatre was on 6th and [unintelligible].

Interviewer: You were in the army, right?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Which war?

Interviewee: The second.

Interviewer: Yes?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: How was Puerto Rico's reaction to the Second World War?

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Interviewee: Oh boy! Look, when I enlisted in 1939, during the first mandatory draft everyone in Puerto Rico was very happy. Things were so bad, everyone wanted to be in the army, you know. It was like it was Christmas, as though it were a party. And I remember, and they would take me to the army, man I volunteered to work at the base. I enlisted; I went to the base.

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Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: I went to the base. But we never left Puerto Rico.

Interviewer: And what about the Korean War?

Interviewee: No, I don't know. During the Korean War I was working in Reading.

Interviewer: Yes?

Interviewee: Yes. Allegheny

Interviewer: Yes, Allegheny. So that's how things were?

Interviewee: Yes. Here, I'm going to tell you, this was the place, in all of the United States, this is one of the most peaceful places.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: Here people have always lived well, you know. People always find work and the means to...

Interviewer: You've never suffered any discrimination, have you?

Interviewee: No. Never. I knew English, so I was always with Americans, you know.

Interviewer: Oh.

Interviewee: I knew very good English. I spoke better than most Americans. For sure. I knew good English.

0:24:28.9

Mm-hm. I was an interpreter for four years on the Base of Punta Borinquen in Puerto Rico.