

[0:00:30]

Interviewer: Mr. Armando, I'd like for you to tell me what year you were born in and where in Puerto Rico you were born.

Armando: Well, I was born in the town of San German.

Interviewer: San German.

Armando: In the neighborhood Sabana Eneas, it was called. On foot it was like half an hour from where I was born, to San German. I was born on December 28, 1904.

[0:01:00]

Armando: Next December I'll be 73 years old. I'm about four or five months away from 73. And if it weren't for my illness, I'd be working. Because work is fun for me.

Interviewer: And I was going to ask you, did you live with your parents in Puerto Rico? In San German?

Armando: In San German, yes.

Interviewer: And how large was your family? How many people were in your family?

Armando: Oh, it was large.

[0:01:30]

Armando: It was large, because there were like seven of us.

Interviewer: Seven siblings?

Armando: Uh-huh. Three girls; and boys, it was Alejandro, Alfonso, Herminio, Jose Antonio, Eduardo, and me.

[0:02:00]

Armando: So it was Alejandro, Alfonso, Jose Antonio, Herminio, and Eduardo and me. We were six boys. Six boys and one dead (unintelligible). Six and three girls. That's nine. Yes, because Alejandro is one. Alfonso is two. Herminio is three. Eduardo is four. And me is five. It's eight of us.

[0:02:30]

Interviewer: And I was going to ask you, what did your dad and mom do when you were in Puerto Rico, as a child?

Armando: Oh, my dad was a businessman.

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Interviewer: But what did he do? Did he have a business?

Armando: Yes, a store, cigar store.

Interviewer: But was he the owner? Or did he work there?

Armando: No, he worked there. And my mom was home. In the cigar business too. She worked with him. Because, you see, that was contraband. And he was in jail for three months for that.

[0:03:00]

Interviewer: Yeah?

Armando: The caught him with a lot of cigars.

Interviewer: It wasn't allowed before...?

Armando: Oh, yes, it was prohibited.

Interviewer: Prohibited?

Armando: It was prohibited, yes. But...

Interviewer: But why was it prohibited before?

Armando: Because he did it under the table. We have to tell the truth, right?

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Armando: But he sold it cheap, you see.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Armando: And so he always worked with stores and merchandise.

[0:03:30]

Armando: He sold merchandise in the countryside too. That's what he did.

Interviewer: And when you were growing up, what did you and your siblings do at home?

Armando: At home, well, we worked at home. Oh, they had all of us doing it. I've worked since I was 7 years old. When I started working, I'd earn 10 cents. And for four hours, since I'd go to school at 12:00. I'd earn five. And then, well, I told the manager, I told him, "No."

[0:04:00]

Armando: Because it was picking up cane, you see.

Interviewer: (Unintelligible) from cane.

Armando: Uh-huh. And I told him, "Well, I'll charge you by bulk instead." Because since I had to go to school like at 11:30 to learn something.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Armando: You understand? To learn something. I went to school for five years. But I know how to read and write. And in math, nobody takes a penny from me. I add. I subtract. I multiply. And I divide. Nobody gets me there. When it comes to matters of land measurements in sticks, and wages for work done (unintelligible), no foreman stole a cent from me. Because I knew. And I was taught by the son of a man who was a teacher. But at that time it wasn't in English. It was a teacher you had to pay. Because my grandfather - whom I knew, on my father's side, who was the one who taught me to work - he was able to send one son to school, who was my dad.

[0:05:00]

Armando: Because you had to pay. Yes, you had to pay. Because otherwise things were very sad. At that time, things were very cheap. Rice cost 3 cents.

Interviewer: Yes.

Armando: The beans cost 4 cents. The cod cost 4 cents a pound. That's when I was growing up, you see. But since my father's father had farms, you see. He grew all of that, from rice, from beans, all kinds of beans.

[0:05:30]

Armando: He had land to spread his tobacco seeds to sell by the thousands, you see, for those who grew tobacco. Because my dad made a living from that. My dad had land and planted those tobacco seeds. And in the morning, sometimes people came from Rosario, from all those places where they grew tobacco, you see. Well, for weaving, for the cigar to smoke. And my dad...

[0:06:00]

Armando: ...when it was 7:00 in the morning, he sold 10 to 12,000 tobacco plants.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Armando: For 2 pesos for a thousand.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Armando: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: That's very cheap.

Armando: Oh, yeah. And I know about that tobacco plantation. I know about cane. Growing sugarcane. I know about agriculture. I like the work. And if I could work today, I wouldn't be here. I'd take my pension because I always had to take it. But I'd be working.

[0:06:30]

Armando: Because I can work and earn what I want.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Armando: But I can't work. I can't work. I want to leave from here. Because I know that any moment, they'll have to knock down the door to the room. I know that I'm going to die one of these days. Yes, with the heart, nobody saves themselves. And that about suffocating, asphyxiate me. But I've worked. My life has been work. I worked here in a laundromat. And I think I came here in '46.

[0:07:00]

Armando: In '46 or '49. I know that I've been here 26 years in this house, which I bought. I was alone when I bought this house. Well, I've been married twice. And I got divorced and I found another woman. I have 10 women I'm responsible for.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Armando: And now I'm alone.

Interviewer: Well, I was going to ask you, going back to when you were growing up, did your brothers and sisters also have the opportunity to go to school?

Armando: Oh, yes, all of them.

[0:07:30]

Armando: All of them know about letters. All of them.

Interviewer: And what was it that they taught you in school?

Armando: Well, they taught us everything is Spanish. English, you see. About notebooks, books, rulers, tables. All those things, you see. That's what I could learn, because I'm hopeless with English. I never could learn it because my tongue is tangled. Because from my mom's side of the family, they were all stutterers. And there was one who, when he was going to pronounce a word...

[0:08:00]

Armando: ...took an hour.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Armando: Yeah. Because to say "papa," he'd go p-p-p. He needed an hour to say "papa." All stutterers. There was one, my mom was two, three - there were four stutterers and one boy who stuttered.

Interviewer: And I was going to ask you, when you were growing up, what chores did each of your siblings have at home?

[0:08:30]

Armando: What did we do for (fun)?

Interviewer: What chores? What responsibilities? What work did your mom and dad assign to you?

Armando: Oh, since my dad always had horses, we had to go get grass. We had to go get firewood because we cooked with firewood. Water. Oh, we had to be cleaning. We had to be weeding out over there. The coffee. There were balls of coffee that we had to (unintelligible). They taught me to work, yes.

Interviewer: And like how old were you when your dad told you, well, now it's time for you to start...

[0:09:00]

Interviewer: ...helping us around the house and all that and in the farm?

Armando: Oh, no, since we started walking. From the time we were little. Once the child walked, well, if he didn't do one thing, he would sweep or clean the house. And the girls at home would pick up around the house. And then sit to work on handkerchiefs or shirts. Understand?

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Armando: Oh, yeah. We worked. And I couldn't keep what I earned. After I was already a kid, already in love, oh no, I had to give it all to my dad. And God forbid I didn't. Because otherwise, oh, yeah. We wouldn't earn anything. Now children do decide what to do with the money they earn. But not before. The one who earned a peso had to go take it to the father. Here you go. And he wouldn't give him anything, maybe a cent or two. No, we didn't have that.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

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Armando: Oh, it was just work. I know how to work.

[0:10:00]

Armando: And I wish I could work. But I can't work.

Interviewer: And after that job that you had, what was the other job that you did?

Armando: Oh, I cut cane. I picked (unintelligible). I watered fertilizer. I planted cane. I planted tobacco. I did all kinds of work. All kinds of work. When I came here, I had a callus here from all this. And little by little it fell apart. And I started working in a laundromat. Three days after I got here I was earning \$30 at a laundromat.

[0:10:30]

Armando: (Unintelligible). And that's why I'm more useless. You understand? Because really now. Little by little, I exercise, you see. And I worked almost 22 years. I retired there. The boss didn't want me to leave. The manager went and told him, tell him, "Martinez, no pension. Pension nothing." And I told him that I couldn't anymore. I couldn't anymore.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Armando: I couldn't anymore. This leg is healing now. You see? A special sole.

[0:11:00]

Interviewer: Yes.

Armando: This leg - when I was 10 years old, I fell.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Armando: I fell. And then I went to a clinic that's on H and 6th.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Armando: Uh-huh. That's for the bones. And I hope God gives that man who works there a thousand years to live and I hope he earns millions of dollars. I think he's Cuban, the interpreter, on Fairmount and 20th. And so...

[0:11:30]

Armando: ...well, I went over there and I told him that I had bunions. This, you see?

Interviewer: Yes.

Armando: You see. It's already breaking my shoe. I have another one here. This one and this one- and I showed him this one, and he told me, "Look, Martinez" - he calls me Martinez, I'm Armando. My name is Pedro, but people call me Armando. You see? I'm Pedro Martinez.

Interviewer: Pedro.

Armando: My dad's name. So he tells me, "Look, I'm going to take you..."

[0:12:00]

Armando: He told me, "Go." I told him, "But I don't know, Mr. Morales" - that's his name - I said, "Mr. Morales, I don't speak English." He says, "Well, I'm going to take you." I already had my green card from Medicare for buses and all that. So he told me, "Do you have a card?" I said, "Yes, I have it." He said, "No, because I can take you. And you don't have to pay anything because I have orders (for that), you see." So he took me. And we saw some doctors there. And they operated on my bone. They took the bone out.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Armando: They did like a lot of stitches here...

[0:12:30]

Armando: ...from the top of the toe up to here. I think that like 18 stitches. And they fit in the bone. And shots because I can't get anesthesia because of my heart, you see. But I dealt with it as best as I could, you see. And now on October 3, it's been two years. And now I have to get this one operated on. But then, this leg was out of place, you see, since I fell it came out at the hip.

Interviewer: Yes.

Armando: To the back, to there. And I couldn't...

[0:13:00]

Armando: ...since that fall. And since parents before, well, they were, I don't know. They weren't so careful about their children.

Interviewer: Yes.

Armando: And me, avoiding that they would hit me, I didn't say anything. And it's that since I was little I was trying to get ahead. There was a place where people played cards. And it belonged to some rich people. On horseback from over there in San German. Right in front of where I was born. So there was a man who had (unintelligible) in the land on a little ball, like on a little hill. And on that hill he had...

[0:13:30]

Armando: ...a table with wood boards to play cards. Those people went there. And he made thousands and thousands of pesos, you see. Those people came to play cards and they put aces, you see? Well, they put 500 or 1,000 pesos down, you see, and the one who got the pot, got the money, you see? And so they came on horseback. So well, I was quick. I was quick. And it wasn't for me, it was for my dad. That's why God helps me.

[0:14:00]

Armando: I would run, and two men came. One was Manuel Santiago. The other one Ramirez. They came on horseback. They called me "kid." And in the afternoon, I carried what I could, five times, and I'd make a big package of big grass, you see. I made like 10 trips. But I brought the grass, and so since I had grass, well, they told me, "Hey, kid, take care of the horse." They tied it up like that with the rope. And another one like that.

[0:14:30]

Armando: And so I gave them the grass there. Well, okay. And then my mom made pies, "empanadillas". And I was going back and forth selling them. And so I got a can like those that are made of zinc. And I made a cover with wood. And I made a little cover. And I had a cup. And I filled that little can with water and I put ice in it. So I found a way to do things.

Interviewer: And where did you get the ice?

Armando: I bought it over there.

Interviewer: How much did it cost?

Armando: Oh, that didn't cost anything.

[0:15:00]

Armando: It cost half a peso or a peso. On all the stores, see? And since the water was cold too. It was from the well and since I had the cans. And one would tell me, "Kid, give me a glass of water." And I was selling pies and "empanadillas". And I had my change in my pockets. And I sold my mom's things. Those (card plays) happened two times. I made like 5 or 6 pesos.

[0:15:30]

Armando: That was before. Banana pies for 2 cents. How much do they cost today?

Interviewer: Yes.

Armando: I sold the "empanadillas" for 2 cents. And big ones. Big coconut sweets for a cent. And they'd ask me, "Kid, give me a cup of water" to clean their hands. I'd give them a cup of water. And I'd give a penny. Oh, that was a big deal. And since these people had money they didn't think about it. So when they came to get the horses...

[0:16:00]

Armando: ... "Here you go, kid." One peso. And who was that for? That wasn't for me. "Look, dad. Mr. Manuel Santiago gave me a peso. And the other one Horacio Amparan gave me another peso. Here you go, dad." And so sometimes from the 10 cents and 5 that they gave me, I had 3 or 4 more pesos in my pockets. Yeah, I found a way to get ahead. And one day, since I had a horse tied up, I went running...

[0:16:30]

Armando: ...to the entrance to my house; my dad's, there was a mango stick and I got tangled up in a mango root and I fell. And my leg got out of place. But I kept running because that's how boys are. And from the time I was 10 up to now, I've had problems with this leg. From the time I was 10 up to now this was turned this way.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Armando: I mean I can walk pretty well. The leg doesn't hurt. So (unintelligible), I go into the kitchen and put on an apron. And so...

[0:17:00]

Armando: And I was running. And I started having problems with that leg. And pain and pain and pain and pain. I worked like that up to my age now. And it's been a year and a half since I went to get treatment for this leg. It's been a year and a half that I've been walking with this. I paid for this. After this, went to a doctor and I explained to a guy who's there with the doctors.

[0:17:30]

Armando: And I told him that I fell when I was 10 years old. And this leg had gotten out of here. So he went and told a doctor, "He fell ten years ago. And his leg is out of his hip." And so the doctor told him, "Oh, that's an old injury. There's no solution for that." He said, "Get X-rays. I have a doctor who can fix it."

[0:18:00]

Armando: That's how it happened. I get tired. Well, they got X-rays and he says, "That can be fixed." So the doctor came and took the X-ray. "Yes, doctor, they got X-rays. They put something down here. And they got X-rays." And the doctor said, "I can fix this."

The doctor thought he could fix it in three months. But no. That was already hardened. Understand? That's already hard because it's a bone.

[0:18:30]

Armando: And that was a big ball here. Look. And it doesn't hurt me at all. And the leg is almost even.

Interviewer: Yes.

Armando: I couldn't even squat, I squat now. I couldn't even squat now I squat. I couldn't put my shoe on. Or wash it. Now I sit in the bathtub, wash my legs and all that. The leg is almost good. I think that God willing...

[0:19:00]

Armando: ...God willing, I think my leg will be better by October. By October it will be a year and a half. More than a year and a half. And I'm almost better. So I had two shoes fixed, you see? And they're there. And each one of these cost \$15. I paid for both soles. But I have a card that pays for the clinic and pays for the doctors, the hospital and everything. And my social too, you see. And I pay \$30.

[0:19:30]

Interviewer: I was going to ask you, when you were growing up, what work did your sisters do at home?

Armando: On shirts, on handkerchiefs.

Interviewer: They sewed?

Armando: They sewed, yes. Hats.

Interviewer: And what else did they do? Hats.

Armando: And matters in the kitchen. Because with my mom there wasn't way around it. That was the work in the house.

Interviewer: And did anyone else live in your house other than your dad, your mom, and your siblings?

Armando: No.

Interviewer: Just the family.

Armando: My dad, my mom, and the siblings.

[0:20:00]

Armando: They didn't let us go anywhere. If we wanted to play, at home. And not at the neighbor's house. "You're not going to go bother people anywhere else." No. So long they let us go to granddaddy's home. And my grandparents came to get me at home because they loved me a lot. And at 5:00 in the morning, I was with my grandpa. Holding up the young cow, to milk it. He milked five or six cows. Not so much milk, but from five or six or seven liters of milk.

[0:20:30]

Interviewer: Yeah?

Armando: And that was for the children, to send a liter to one son or two liters or this and that. And I remember as if it were now, that they had (unintelligible) like this (unintelligible).

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Armando: And they hung it like this. There they always had roast sorullos. They had baked arepas. And they had a dozen or two of cheeses. What was left over was for making cheese. Yes. And (unintelligible) had farms and harvested rice.

[0:21:00]

Armando: He harvested beans, harvested corn. He kept the coffee from one year to the next. The cacao. He kept the dry pigeon peas from one year to the next because he got the (unintelligible) so that it wouldn't get damaged, you see, which didn't go bad. Oh, yes. And he had everything there.

Interviewer: And let me ask, and around that time, what other work did you do?

Armando: I just did agriculture.

Interviewer: Agriculture

Armando: And work with the hoe. Rough work.

[0:21:30]

Interviewer: And what was your home like religiously?

Armando: Catholic. Oh, yes.

Interviewer: And were you very religious?

Armando: We didn't have roads before. To go to church in San German, where I was baptized, they had to take shoes. People almost didn't use shoes, you see. But to go out, you

see. And take them, put them in a bag, and go without shoes. Because there were rough patches all along the way. And hanging on to the cables to get there.

[0:22:00]

Armando: And then there was a gorge before we got there. We washed the shoes there. We dried them. And we'd put them on. And we'd leave old shoes at a house nearby to go on. That's how life used to be. I know how life used to be. And, what's more, when I was a young kid, I liked dances. I didn't fight with anyone. No, or go to jail, thank God.

Interviewer: What did your parents say about fighting?

Armando: Oh, no. Not my dad.

[0:22:30]

Armando: Not my dad. No, no. Well, always it's the same the whole world over because there's always one he likes more in the family, you see. But I grew up. And people before were ignorant, they were wild, you see. They carried the cross-shaped daggers. And boys in shorts a dagger stuck out around the knees. You see. And not me.

[0:23:00]

Armando: I'd go to those dances and danced. Nobody messed with me. They respected me. I don't know what it's like to fight with anybody. And I'm 73 years old. I've never been to jail, thank God and the virgin, to this day. I don't know what that's like. No.

Interviewer: And when you were young and single, what did you say...?

Armando: I was a lady's man.

Interviewer: What did your dad tell you about women and drinking?

Armando: Ah, no. Well, my dad drank. My dad drank.

[0:23:30]

Armando: (Unintelligible). He always had some because he bought it by the gallon. But my dad never, never (unintelligible). And he got killed while drinking. A woman.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Armando: Yeah. Because he went out to the trifle shop with two workers (unintelligible) and when he got home, (he) said - because my dad, he got along. He would call her "baby". And he would - you understand?

[0:24:00]

Armando: And he says, "Baby." (Unintelligible). He said, "I feel bad." He lay down. Seven days later he was dead.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Armando: A woman killed him. Maybe it was something she gave him.

Interviewer: But, I mean, what did your dad tell you about women?

Armando: No, it's what I was saying, "Wherever you go, you have to go like men and respect everyone." God forbid that somebody came and we...

[0:24:30]

Armando: ...him talking, we would start talking. Oh God, right there, boom, there you go. No. Before people raised kids with a lot of respect.

Interviewer: And so how did you and your brothers meet girls?

Armando: Oh, no, because they gave me a chance to go out, since I was very organized. Because one time, I remember, that I liked to dance. And I was a lady's man since I was young. My wife and I broke up because of that. We broke up. We broke up seven years ago. And when...

[0:25:00]

Armando: ...I'd go because he liked to play. He played a lot. And he carried cards. And carried a coat and a flashlight. You see, there was no light at night. And there was a dance at a house. One of my uncles was playing (the guitar) there. Another played the "cuatro". Another the bass drum, another the "guacharo", you see. The music of the countryside.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Armando: But since those places were wild, well, people went there drunk and everything. So I was in love. So I went. It was very up high.

[0:25:30]

Armando: I went to the man. What was the girl's name? She was like 12 years old. And I was almost the same age. And I say, "Oh, Mr. (Chito) was his name" - what was the girl's name? Pretty, a short girl. She was pretty. She had fat legs. And I said, look "Mr. (Chito), are you bringing (Mary)..."

[0:26:00]

Armando: ...let's go over there so that (Mary) and I can dance." He said, "Well, let's go." he loved me quite a bit he was a short man. Well, we went and came back. Like at 6:00 it was already almost dark. And there were even family members in the house, you see. And we started dancing. I (unintelligible) in my pockets and dad playing cards outside, you see. (Gambling), because he liked to (gamble). Oh, yes. So well, it was quite far. It was like - from where the house was...

[0:26:30]

Armando: ...oh, like ten people killed themselves there.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Armando: Yeah. So those people from those high places who were ignorant. And they liked dad a lot in those places. Oh, nobody messed with dad. And wherever he would leave (unintelligible) to play. And to drink. Oh, yes. So, well, nobody fought with my dad. People respected my dad. But my dad was with everybody, you see.

[0:27:00]

Armando: So when my dad called me and told me, "Kid, let's go." I said, "Dad, go. I'll go later." Since he knew how I was, he'd go. Well, and like at 12:00 at night, I was dancing with the girl. The house with a window like short. He left (unintelligible) They came and- it's a place that- People there were very wild. Brother would kill brothers.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Armando: Yeah. One day before I came to Philadelphia...

[0:27:30]

Armando: ...when my wife had already come - no, not yet. Not yet. I liked to raise fertile sows to give birth to goats that produced milk. I had a goat that gave me two liters of milk. And I raised hens and everything. I learned from the time I was young, you see.

[0:28:00]

Armando: And I went to dance at that same place. And one of the guys came and he was in love. I was dancing. And the girl told me, they all got together and she told me, "Armando, let's dance." But I wasn't doing anything, you see. We were dancing, but without anything more, you see. And the boyfriend came with a bottle of (unintelligible) in his pocket. And he told me, "Turn around." But he pulled me. The owner of the house and the others - a cousin of his came with him too. But he lived (next door).

[0:28:30]

Armando: Hey, you can't imagine, man. And he said, "Look" - he was twangy - He said, "Look, don't be so ignorant. Armando is a decent person. Armando is a good guy. How are you going to do (unintelligible)?" And he (unintelligible). He took him apart (unintelligible) he took him apart. And then I told the man, "I'll leave (unintelligible)." He said, "No, you're not leaving from here. We'll leave together." It was like 10:00.

[0:29:00]

Armando: It was a place that was all rocks. He said, "I have a flashlight. I have (unintelligible). And we're leaving." He lived right next door. Listen. And he just (unintelligible) to the cousin because he did that to me. And I was embarrassed, you see. And then I told him, "I'm leaving." And the girl told me, "No, you're not leaving from here." They said no again. Because I knew how to dance, you see. I knew how to dance, you see. And, well, I had the chance, you see. "No, you're not leaving from here." And after he left, that they took him apart, that girl came to dance with me and everything. "Oh, stop that, girl." But none of, you know...

[0:29:30]

Armando: I had a woman. I had my wife, you see, who lived (near there), you see. We broke up like (unintelligible), you see. And then the next day he found me and he told me, "Oh, Armando, forgive me for what I did." I say, "Don't worry about it. If I know that you had four (unintelligible) in your head. That's nothing." And then I repaid him with a good deed. He wanted to go to Mayaguez drunk. And I got him out. He was drunk.

[0:30:00]

Armando: And he had to go up some hills around the same place where he did that to me. And I took him close to his house. Like at 11:00 at night. And through a ravine. And I took him, almost with him over my shoulder. (Unintelligible). Then, well, the day of that dance when I was with the girl, (unintelligible). Those people from Cotuí started arriving on horseback. And there was one called (Chiquito) de Jesus. And he grabbed the "cuatro" that they were playing.

[0:30:30]

Armando: "Nobody is playing one string of the "cuatro" here again. Nobody is dancing here anymore." Drunken. And I saw the commotion, and I told the girl, "Damn" - I think her name was Maria - "Look, go that way through the window. And I'll catch you." And I called Mr. Tito, the father. And she climbed the window and I caught her. And I got her down from the window. And I went and took them almost home. And I was a little kid with shorts. But I was in love, eh? I was in love, eh?

[0:31:00]

Interviewer: Now that you mention those shorts, did you have to use shorts until you went to...?

Armando: Oh, until we were men. Yeah. I bought some little suits, because I liked dressing well. I was a kid, but I worked. I worked. I worked. And I could use them, you see? And a crepe suit, which costs more than \$200 today - I had a crepe suit made in cream and gray in English thread.

[0:31:30]

Armando: The tailor charged me 3.50 for one of those suits. And since my dad sold that, my dad would get those styles of suits to me. He would bring them to me. The cut would cost me like 7 pesos. The suit would cost me 10.50 pesos. But that was a (unintelligible). But a suit made with English thread, white thread, and a cashmere suit, to change - oh, I dressed well. Oh, yeah. I dressed well.

[0:32:00]

Interviewer: And I was going to ask you, what did your dad and mom tell your sisters about men?

Armando: Oh, yes, the one who fell in love had to go to the house. One day a very rich man came. And he had farms all around. Mr. Alfredo Ramirez. And he fell in love with my eldest daughter, (may she rest in peace).

Interviewer: With your oldest sister?

Armando: Yes, the eldest of the three.

[0:32:30]

Armando: Her name is (Ana Lydia). She would sit in a chair like that. And he would come around looking at the farms - some farms that he wanted to buy, but it's that he was in love with my sister, you see. And he would come above the (unintelligible). He's say, "Mr. Pedro, how are you?" "Well, good, Mr. Alfredo." A very rich man. A man who had - (he was on equal footing). And so all those farms in Añasco...

[0:33:00]

Armando: ...over here in Cabo Rojo, over there in San German. Oh, that man had farms - 200, 300 acres, 100 acres. And that (added up). So I worked over there too. I was in all those places. I was even made a foreman. I've been foreman. I've been everything. I've done everything. And he was in love with my sister. So he took the chance and spoke with her.

[0:33:30]

Armando: And he told her, "Look, Lydia, if you accept me, look at this farm. They will sell this farm to me for 7,000 pesos" - which at that time was a big deal, a farm worth 7,000 pesos. "Look, I'll give it to you with title. I'll build a cement house for you there worth 10,000 to 12,000 pesos."

[0:34:00]

Armando: "If you accept me. And for your father, Mr. Pedro, I'll make him an administrator in a colony."

Interviewer: What's a colony?

Armando: A colony is a big farm.

Interviewer: Okay.

Armando: With a lot of acres, you see. From 500 or 600 acres, you see. Or 200 acres, you see.

[0:34:30]

Armando: "And I'll put that in your name." She answered, "Mr. Alfredo, you're making a very good proposal. But the day that I leave here I have to leave-. You already have your wife." And he had mistresses. He had mistresses on all the roadsides. They had good houses and land for them. On his name. He had a lot to offer, I say. That's why I go out with money and dressed well. I'm old but the girls like me.

[0:35:00]

Armando: It's okay if they don't want me because I'm not young. But it's not because I have money. I know that. Oh, yes. I have girls who are 20 and 22 years old. I live alone but I live happily. I live in peace. And so my sister answered, she told him, "Mr. Alfredo, you made a very good proposal, but I don't accept that. If you didn't have anything...

[0:35:30]

Armando: ...any man who doesn't even have anything (unintelligible) but me going to live with a man like that, no." And she didn't accept. If she'd been one of these girls, she jumps at the chance. No, well, no. And then a man who didn't have anything came. Yes, he had his little farm and all that. And he was a lady's man. But he'd broken up with his wife. Well, she accepted him and she loved him. Well, she's not doing badly today. He died.

[0:36:00]

Armando: Because (he shot himself) in the heart. Well, he didn't leave anything to her. But he had an acre, he had (children), and so the acre that was by the road, my sister got half. And the other half went to the children, you see. Since he was married to my

sister, you see. And he had not married the other one. They sold it. They gave her half of that acre and half of the acre to my sister, who's there. No, she died. There's a (unintelligible).

[0:36:30]

Armando: She had two daughters. One in New York and another one first one she had died. And the one who died, because she died in childbirth. The girl was born but she died. That one grew up. But there's the half acre of land. They offered it to her here, because she was in New York, for 10,000 pesos. She said, no, well, I'm going to build a house over there. Well, she came here because she married a guy who was a (list-keeper) (unintelligible) Mr. Alfredo Ramirez. He was a (list-keeper). He kept the...

Interviewer: Lists.

Armando: Uh-huh.

[0:37:00]

Armando: Those books, eh? She came to New York. She got 30,000 pesos. She built a house that cost 25,000 pesos on that land. She's there. And now she has a son. And already got married.

Interviewer: And so were your parents strict in terms (unintelligible)?

Armando: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: Did they tell your sisters that they had to be married to leave the house?

Armando: They had to be married to leave.

[0:37:30]

Armando: And not what they do today. Eh, I'm going out, I'm with so-and-so. No. They had visits there. And when it was (unintelligible), well, it was time to sleep. It wasn't until 12:00, no. At 9:00 or 8:00, no, no. Not today. Today, oh, I'm going with a girl to such and such place until midnight. No. That didn't happen before. No.

[0:38:00]

Armando: That's different today. That dance I told you about, well, I (didn't touch her any more). That's the truth. Those people carried those knives Sevillian, they carried dagger and revolvers. He was tough. He was tough. Yes. One of those from over there, (unintelligible). No, (unintelligible) with him. He went off and grabbed the Sevillian and slaughtered one. (I say), "Can we dance?" "No, you can't dance."

[0:38:30]

2000A English Translation

Armando: He went off, he stabbed another and hit the kidneys He also died. He said, "No, you can't dance. Sit down. You can't dance."

Woman: (Unintelligible).

Interviewer: Hello.

Armando: (Unintelligible). Do you know how many died?

Interviewer: How many?

Armando: Well, like eight or ten went to the hospital. And when I got home, I was suffocating because I was running so fast. And I said, "Dad, dad" - I couldn't even talk.

[0:39:00]

Armando: He says, "What's the matter?" I say, "Dad, a bunch of people got killed over there. Like 10 people got killed over there." He said, "Didn't I tell you to come home" - "Dad, but nothing has happened to me. I'm here." That's why I tell you that I danced, I had some drinks, and nobody messed with me. And I'm a man and I don't know how to fight. Nobody has ever hit me in the face. And I haven't touched someone else's face either. Not me. Not me. I respect the boys. I respect the girls. I respect old men. I respect old women.

[0:39:30]

Armando: A woman who's married and falls in love with me, I'll even leave the place. But no. Now, a woman who's free, if I won't have (unintelligible), I'll say, if she gives me a chance. If not, no. Understand? With all my years, I don't know how to fight. I haven't been to jail, thank God. Understand? I haven't fought with anyone. Nobody can say that I've disrespected them. In this place where I live...

[0:40:00]

Armando: ...if I were a man who lived other people's lives, but no. I don't live your life. Or yours or yours. I live mine. If I see something, I pretend I didn't see it. I'm not interested in anyone's life. I'm interested in mine. I like order. I like to live here where I am). You think there's nobody here. I'm here, right? But I go to bed at 6:30. I told you yesterday.

Interviewer: Yes.

Armando: It's true that I go to bed at 6:30, right? They know it. Nobody hears me.

[0:40:30]

Armando: I get up to go to the toilet. You hear when you flush the toilet. Nobody hears me. I turn on that little TV, but I put it so that nobody hears it. I turn on that little radio, nobody hears it. I hear it. I turn on a soap opera. That's at 5:00. And I sit there on that armchair. I listen to it there. When the soap opera is over...

[0:41:00]

Armando: ...I put the TV on. I get the temperature and all that. It's 6:30 and I eat. And at 6:30, I go to bed. If I'm sleepy, I go to sleep. If I'm not, I don't. Look, (unintelligible). And if I fall asleep, I fall asleep. And if I don't fall asleep, I don't fall asleep. The truth is that at 6:30 I'm in bed.

Woman: (Unintelligible).

Armando: Yes, they belonged to Nardo. They got them. But it was a salad. Yes, one that's a salad, only.

[0:41:30]

Woman: (Unintelligible) pumpkin here?

Interviewer: Mr. Armando.

Armando: That smells (unintelligible). And the next day, well, the one who got stabbed in the back here died. Now, he was killed. He was killed (unintelligible). He was killed there. And the one who got stabbed over here, he died. Another one who ran away, he didn't die because (unintelligible) (ditch). Here another one.

[0:42:00]

Armando: You don't want to know. Three of them died, I think. Four. And thank God I gave the girl back to her dad to take her back home. We were kids, 10 or 12 years old. We were kids. And my dad, "I told you to come." "If nothing happened to me, dad. Look, I'm here. Tired, but I'm here." Understand? It was like 15 minutes away from home. And in those places...

[0:42:29]

Armando: ...nobody messed with me. A girlfriend of mine came and my next-door neighbor – gave me five or six girls. I went to a dance, I took those five or six girls. When I got there I had it made. They took me to eat over there with the girls. They gave me the beers. And I left there at 5:00 in the morning (unintelligible) it finished. I'd be all sleepy. The last house I went to...

[0:43:00]

2000A English Translation

Armando:I fell on a chair and fell asleep there. Then they put me in a bed to sleep. That's great.

Interviewer: And Mr. Armando, I was going to ask you, what type of dances do you know?

Armando: I dance everything. I like it. But I get tired.

Interviewer: And do you play any instruments?

Armando: No. I didn't like that. I'm not good at that. Because I'd drop the instrument to dance.

Interviewer: And do you sing?

Armando: No.

Interviewer: You don't sing.

[0:43:30]

Interviewer: And what year did you come to the United States?

Armando: I think that in '49 or '46.

Interviewer: During World War II?

Armando: I know I've been in this house like 26 years. And lived over there like three years.

Man: (You're like my age here, right?).

Armando: Yes.

Man: I was born when he came.

Armando: I've been here like 28 years.

[0:44:00]

Interviewer: And how were the economic and political conditions in Puerto Rico when you...?

Armando: Before it was better than now.

Interviewer: Yes?

Armando: It's true that we made little money, but we lived very well. The food was vast. You see? The rice was 3 cents.

Woman: Things were cheap.

Armando: Things were cheap. You had a very good suit made, which costs 200 pesos now - well, for the people who could wear them, like me.

[0:44:30]

Armando: Not to brag, but I could wear them because I worked. I liked to work, you see. And a suit that was, for example, cream crepe with thread, which I think costs 200 or 300 pesos today, and maybe you can't get it. I could wear it. It's not to brag, you see. But a cashmere suit, before, but cashmere cost...

[0:45:00]

Armando: ...60 pesos. But I could wear it. And a crepe suit was 10 or 12 pesos and now it costs 200. A suit with English thread, which could get caught on a wire if you pulled it would tear, but that didn't (unintelligible). But you could do it. But it was better before because before there was plenty of food.

[0:45:30]

Armando: But, look, how much did a pound of beef cost? Well, when I was raising my son - and I have just one son. An adopted daughter. The one who I was trying- who works over there, two kids, you know. So, was the door open?

Man: No.

Armando: And who opened it? Okay. Thank you. It must be (Nardo) who opened it, right?

Woman: (Unintelligible).

Man: The door over there? It was open.

[0:46:00]

Armando: It was open? You're right, I left it open. Go, close it for me, okay? So before, I'll tell you because I did it - I found a way to make things happen too. When I got married, I lived in a rented house for six months. But since I worked, within a year, I built a little house made out of pichipen wood

[0:46:30]

Armando: Today it would be worth like 5,000 or 6,000 pesos. And I built it with 350 pesos. Bedroom, living room, and kitchen with a balcony. I didn't pay rent. I built a little house. Then I bought land and I made the house larger. I built two bedrooms.

Interviewer: What year was this?

[0:47:00]

Armando: When I came here.

Interviewer: So this was here...

[0:47:30]

Armando: So one Saturday, I went and said before that. She sewed. I said, "Well, let's buy the dress so that you can get married." You get prepared. She sewed her herself. Well, I gave her money. She sewed her dress the way she wanted it. I say, "And prepare everything. We're getting married on Saturday." So when I went in the afternoon, I said, "Tell the girl"...

[0:48:00]

Armando: ...because they liked me a lot. Not so much the dad. He got upset with me because they turned against me. And I didn't go over there, you see. So she told me - I found her working on handkerchiefs at a sister's house - and she tells me, "Let's go to the house." I say, "You know that in your house they said that if I went over there, they'd set the dog on me." And I already shaved my face. She says, "No, well, if you're a man you'll come to the house with me." I said, "Yes, I'm a man. I'll go with you."

[0:48:30]

Armando: So we walked arm-in-arm. (Unintelligible) I don't know if she's died, you see. One time that I went from here, they were both there and they accepted me and loved me a lot afterwards. That was (unintelligible). I said hello. They didn't say hello to me.

[0:49:00]

Armando: I was embarrassed. I said, "You see." She says, "No, but go up." When on the chair where he was rocking, he said, "Sit down." I sat down. She sat on the chair and I stayed there. When it was 9:00 at night, I came. So I say, "You see." She says, "Well, I'm going with you." I say, "No. Not like that." You prepare, shop, and we're going to get married. Well, we got married. So I went on a Saturday.

[0:49:30]

Armando: I got married with a minister. They didn't charge me anything. But that was written down. To get divorced then she had to pay. Because then I wasn't there. Then I broke up with her. I lived with her for five years. She was good. But she wanted to be in the neighbor's house. And after I get married, I don't like to see my woman at the neighbor's house. I've never liked that. In my mom's house, I wasn't there every day. No.

[0:50:00]

Armando: I didn't like it. I asked for her blessing. And she lived like that. I sat on a mango stick that was there, and then I went home. But I never liked being in someone else's house. I've never liked it. No, that's ugly. If I'm in your house today, in his house tomorrow, I don't like that. Like I tell you, the later the visits, the better. Understand?

Interviewer: And I was going to ask you, how were things in Puerto Rico...

[0:50:30]

Interviewer: ...during the Depression, during the 1930s?

Armando: Well, I'll tell you that there was a war. We had to wait in line to buy two pounds of rice. But it was (unintelligible) they had to give it because of the price - 8 cents per pound, you see. So I bought in bulk. Because I bought at a warehouse. And I saw that people who had stores went there. And I went and told them, ""(Hati) , let's make the tab."

[0:51:00]

Armando: And I saw - since I know about letters - and I bought there. Retail price, you see. That's how I bought. So 100 pounds of rice. He sold it for 8 pesos. And they sold it for 15. A hundred pounds of sugar, he sold it for 6 pesos. They sold it for 8. You see? So I said, ""(Hati)" - and so I saw...

[0:51:30]

Armando: ...that the lard tin was 3.60 per pound. And I didn't know. I noticed. I said, ""(Hati), and for how much do you sell the lard tin?" One knows you have to sharpen up. He said, ""Well, I'll give you the rice for about 8 pesos." While I charge 15 for it retail. I say, ""Damn, from 15 to 8 or 7." I got up and said well,

[0:52:00]

Armando: buy the tin can, because I had a family, you see. (Or I didn't have it with me), but the woman had five children I raised, including the one I mentioned, ""mami," (Joe)'s mother, who was six months. When I brought her, we weren't married, you see. But okay. And I'll give it to you for about 3. I say, uh-huh, well tomorrow I'll come here Hati. Well, I left. He said, ""I'll give you the sugar for 6 pesos."

[0:52:30]

Armando: The sack. And there were some white sacks that people used as shirts to work with the cane. They had shirts made of that. Listen, one of those shirts ironed was a big deal, you see. I used it to work. I bought those blue shirts from (Ireland) to work. I

say, okay, I left. I say Hati, we're going to make a tab. I tell you, I had some because at home when there was a bowl of corn not even one grain ended up on the floor.

[0:53:00]

Armando: Understand? When I picked up dozens of chickens, the oldest hens in a few hours to (unintelligible). To sell there. At home they picked up 150 or 200 eggs. I did live well at that time, when things were cheap. I'd say, "Give me a sack of rice. Give me a tin of lard. Give me a sack of sugar. Give me four bars of the blue soap."

[0:53:30]

Armando: That became scarce too. matches became scarce. There was a barber who turned on the lights to cut hair. I don't know how he could turn one of those matches into four. And he lit it up so well. Because you couldn't find them either. Listen, when the rice scarce times came. Look, if what I'm telling you is not true, listen, let me become mute - God forgive me - that I won't be able to say one word.

[0:54:00]

Armando: When that happened, that we had to wait in lines to get two pounds of rice for 8 cents...

Interviewer: This was during the war?

Armando: Yes, man, things got - and they gave lard to the big warehouses that sold in bulk, you see, they sold to all the stores. A pipe of lard, you know the big ones. Then, well, I used some gabardine shirts, pants. I had the shirts made by the tailor.

[0:54:30]

Armando: They charged me 7 pesos for the pants and the shirt. I'd have the clothes made. With pleats here, pleats here, pleats on this pocket, and pleats on this pocket. The pants and shirt fitted to my body. I'd have two sets made, two shirts and pants, you see, to go out, you know? And he charged me 14 pesos for the four pieces. And I went to that warehouse. So he told me, "Armando..."

[0:55:00]

Armando: ...look, come tomorrow." Well, when that war came, I had a sack of rice that was full and one that was half full. Let me go mute if it's not true. I had tin of lard that was full and another one that was half full. The soap - I had to wash with that plant (unintelligible) I had to wash. I had matches in bulk at home. You know? Coffee? I tell you, I had everything at home. Sometimes my lady left and there were times when I came in and look...

[0:55:30]

Armando: ...it was like I was shopping at a store. I say, "Look, the thing is to get ahead, right?" Because we made handkerchiefs on commission. I would go out looking. People would come to our house to get 300, 400 dozen handkerchiefs, you see. And I had money. And spent more than anyone because I had money. There were times when someone said, "Give me five dozen of (unintelligible)." It'd break my heart. I don't know. People say that sorrow is punished. They say that sorrow is the sister of (unintelligible). People say, you know. But (unintelligible) a bad word. But who is good hearted is good hearted.

[0:56:00]

Armando: I'd come. "Yes." He'd say, "Give me five dozen." Oh, but look, they had four children, you see. There was a crisis, you know. Because there were people who lived- It's like people who have money. They live well. But the people who don't have it, don't live well. I'd say, "Give me five dozen." But, look, would you pay for them, look. I still haven't had coffee and it was noon. Tears would stream down my face. I felt so bad. All those little children all like that. Yellowish.

[0:56:30]

Armando: I'd say, "Yes, no problem." I'd pay for them. Sometimes I'd go looking for him and he didn't have them ready. But what can you do? I did them the favor. I'd go someplace else and it was the same thing. I'd go looking for them to their house. But we gave back a lot. 400 or 500 dozen were traded. They'd leave 10 pesos. Two cents for each dozen, you see. But I had to go order them and go get them and take them to the town. It was just 2 cents. Others ripped us off, you know? Man.

[0:57:00]

Armando: And her, well, that woman would come and she'd be (weaving threads). The mother of my son; the same as Joe's grandmother.). I say, "Is it finished?" Well, when (unintelligible), those warehouses got 8 sacks of rice, 3 for the hospital, and it's for selling retail to those stores, for selling to those stores in the countryside. Even sold to other warehouses.

[0:57:30]

Armando: And then a pipe of lard. So he says, "Armando, come early tomorrow so that with the clerk" - he wanted to make me a clerk. I said no to him, that I didn't like that. And we started to (unintelligible), listen. Those eight, those five sacks of rice - by two pounds. I was quick like a machine. Because you have to learn the knowhow. There weighing and laying. And then we had to show those sacks. The clerk tells me,

"Listen" - I didn't need the rice. I didn't need it. I already had a sack and a half. A can and a half of lard.

[0:58:00]

Armando: Well, I got one can with five pounds of lard. I took it with another idea, not for me. Because I knew how things were. The clerk tells me, "Look, let's empty half of this sack. You go under the stacks because it's a big warehouse." (Unintelligible) I say, "What if they find it?" "No, they won't find it." We throw the sack over there - for me, you see, and I didn't need it. And let's fill up your container. Since we were both locked inside the warehouse. Well, when the store opened...

[0:58:30]

Armando: ...there was a stream of people, but they came in one by one. A line here, by two, to get two pounds of rice. What lard were they going to get? Look, I left there (unintelligible). And my gabardine that I was wearing - they'd tell me, "Oh, Armando, look, get something for me." What was I going to get? If what I got out was the wood from the pipe. Well, during those times. When everything was over, they lived next to the house.

[0:59:00]

Armando: My house like this and another one like this. Listen, (praying to all the saints in the sky), that God this and that. I say, man. And when everything was over, he says, "Armando, you didn't get anything." I say, "Don't worry. I have some." But when I come from there to here with the half sack. That was to get a cart in and get it out through the back of the store. And get that stuff out without people seeing. The wife says, "Oh, Armando." "But don't worry, honey".

[0:59:30]

Armando: "Everyone already left. Let them take it." Well, I put half a sack of rice in the car, put the lard. Another thing. When I get home, she says, "Look, nobody got the (unintelligible)." And do you know what I did? I went to all the neighbors. "Come. Here you go. And here you go." And I gave away the five pounds of lard and the half sack of rice that I'd paid for. Four pesos and the five pounds were 27 cents.

[1:00:00]

Armando: And I paid for it. Understand? And then I gave it away to all the neighbors. Here. Here you have a little bit of rice. Here you have a little. Here is a little bit of lard. Here's some more. Because I had one can and a half more. One sack of rice and a half more. But the war lasted a while, you know. Then I'd go and buy some hog to

fry it. It didn't give anything. Because if the hog doesn't eat fat it won't produce lard. Did you know that? But then there was a butcher...

[1:00:30]

Armando: ...who skinned the hogs and sold (rinds) to me. I was lucky. I was lucky. "Look, I have a few (rinds)". I'd get the lard out and I'd eat the pork rinds. Thank God and the Virgin, that to this day, I haven't suffered. And when I got married, I go to a man in the same town - when I got married, that my mother-in-law told me...

Interviewer: And I was going to ask you, what year did you get married?

[1:01:00]

Armando: I was very young. I was like 17 years old.

Interviewer: Like in 1920? Around there?

Armando: Well, I was born in '04. And I was 17.

Interviewer: '21.

Armando: Like in '21 I got married for the first time. From there on, it's been (a stormy weather). That's why I'm alone. I'm already tired of them, you see. In this house, I've had six women. And not old ones. Not old. Young ones.

[1:01:30]

Armando: Because the only old one I married is the one I have, and she's not old. And I was with her for ten years. We broke up seven years ago. Understand? And so when I got married, that my mother-in-law told me - it was with the first girl, yes - "Oh, look, (Hando)" - they called me (Hando), then she loved me a lot. They were crazy about me. "Look, the girl" - I say, "Nothing about the girl." Don't you know that married people should be in their home?" I had a lot of (unintelligible), you know. Because my grandpa taught me. And my grandpa told me, "Look, if you have two cents, spend one."

[1:02:00]

Armando: "And save one." That was my grandpa. So I rented a house there near town, how much did I pay weekly? If it belonged to a rich man. He had properties and rental houses. Do you know how much he charged me for a house that had a living room, bedroom, kitchen, and it had a latrine in the backyard?

Interviewer: How much did he charge you?

Armando: Fifty cents a week.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Armando: Big living room.

[1:02:30]

Armando: Big bedroom. And a kitchen and dining room together. And a latrine in the back. Fifty cents a week I paid. Then I built myself a house. The same girl lived in the house. But I broke up with her because she was always at the neighbor's house. Well, we broke up just because of that. You can believe it. And (unintelligible) black and white, but I don't (unintelligible).

[1:03:00]

Armando: Because they know me. I fell in the bedroom. He took me to the hospital. Right? They carried me over the shoulder to get into the car (unintelligible). He knows it.

Man: (Unintelligible) fifteen minutes, he would have died.

Armando: I'd have died. They let him. Look, the guard told him, no, go back that way. Right? Go back that way. I was almost dead.

Man: (Unintelligible).

Armando: Oh, man. Leave that. He took me, him and the brother. Because when he came down, (Alejo), he had already gone.

Man: To leave.

Armando: Yes, to leave. And I was like this. My son called me.

[1:03:30]

Armando: From California. I'm thinking about going over there. I know that I can't be alone anymore. Understand? And I grabbed the phone. I was looking for pants and socks to go. I felt bad already. And not anymore. I was already (losing it), you see. And when I grabbed the phone, says, "Oh, dad. How are you?" "Oh, son, I'll tell you the truth. Don't get scared. Don't get scared. But I can't keep talking to you because I'm..."

[1:04:00]

Armando: ...off to the hospital "Well, go." That was a bad time. I shouldn't have said anything. He called. He made more than 20 calls. He called over there at that time. Understand? He said it was taken care of. That was every day. He went crazy. So I told him that they won't let him come here because... understand? (Unintelligible)

and that's not close, you see? So I did like this to (Alejo), his brother. They help me here a bunch.

[1:04:30]

Armando: They help me here a bunch. So I couldn't anymore. He says, "What's the matter?" "Oh, I can't do it." He knows it. And he went and called and said - it's lucky that they have (unintelligible) still. That he was about to leave. I say, "Come here."

Man: I was already in the car to leave.

Armando: "Come because Martin is very sick." To take him to the hospital. It was 11:00 at night, right? I remember it clearly that the doctor - look at what he said - God gave me energy - he says, "Ain't it true it was true?" A girl came now. He says, "Why did you bring him? For drinking or using drugs?" I say, "I'm sorry, no smoking, no drink, no drugs."

[1:05:00]

Armando: "What's the matter with you?" I told him. Listen, God told me. "Hey, take it easy." "No, take it easy you," I told him. Because that's how the doctors are, you know, late like that. Listen, man. I can't talk. Well, I can't. I was there like 12 days. The woman showed up over there but she didn't know. cause I didn't have here. And she still calls me sometimes. And I say, no, I'm fine. I don't want any more love to take care of.

[1:05:30]

Armando: No, I want to be alone. I know that you need women. But if I'm going to die and I have a woman, I still die. Understand? And if I don't have one, I still die. And I'm sick and then women are very (unintelligible), you know. That when it's not one thing, it's another. And I can't get upset. If I get upset, my stomach turns. I don't know what I have. That turns and I (unintelligible).

[1:06:00]

Armando: Look, I got dull in my hands. I got dull in the knees. I tell you the truth. I can't get upset. That's why I don't go anywhere. That's why I told you that I go to bed at 6:00. I close the door over there. Nobody hears me here. It's nothing. I don't bother anybody. (Unintelligible) look, (unintelligible). So I don't bother anybody else. Understand? It's because I'm too sick. But I've worked. And if I could work, I'd be working because...

[1:06:30]

2000A English Translation

Armando: ...work is a pastime for me. Because the one who wants to see, well, lazy people, you see. But work is a pastime.

Man: Lazy people are the ones who don't like work.

Armando: ...the ones who don't like work. But the one who works is entertained. Understand? My life is work.

Interviewer: And I was going to ask you, you said that you moved to the United States like around '46, right?

Armando: Something like that.

Interviewer: And why did you move here?

Armando: Well, I'll tell you why. Every father loves his children. And every mother loves her children.

[1:07:00]

Armando: Well, they say it's not true. I don't know. But I think every father loves his children. Because even cows and animals love their children, right? A cow who has a calf doesn't want anyone to touch it. Understand? Well, because the woman I was with - after I left the one I married - came over here. And she had that boy. And she brought him. And so then, I said - then I left my father-in-law...

[1:07:30]

Armando: My father-in-law lived well because he was a bricklayer. Her dad. And I left him in the house there because he loved me a lot. And I left him in the house. And I came following my son. (Unintelligible) because I didn't live with them. I went six months later. And I told my son in California - I've gone over there twice. I have three granddaughters who call to me. One is 11 years old. One is 6 and one is 5. And they call me. And he says, "Dad, come over." What are you going to do? Sell the house. No, I'm not going to sell it. Because everything is expensive.

[1:08:00]

Armando: And I'm not going to (give it away). (Unintelligible) because you know that you can rent it. Before you realize it, it's firewood. And my house is in good shape. And I'm calm here. Look, if I found a family that had an apartment, with a living room, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom, I'd pay \$140. Because you know that now an apartment costs...

[1:08:30]

Armando: ...\$140, \$150, \$200, right. Look, I have that floor rented there. It has three rooms. It has a living room, bedroom, and kitchen, and dining room. It's the same as this. That living room and this. Because it's not divided. And the bathroom. I charge with some help (unintelligible). Do you know how much? Twenty pesos. It costs 200 pesos today. Right? It costs 200 pesos today or 240 pesos.

[1:09:00]

Armando: Because today a little room for a man to live by himself costs \$20.

Man: They rent them over there for 30 pesos and 32. That's 130 pesos weekly.

Armando: Tell the truth, because you know. How much does this floor cost? How much does the third one cost? How much does this floor here cost?

Interviewer: It costs quite a bit.

Armando: Well, look, over there what they have is the kitchen and...

[1:09:30]

Armando: ...the dining room are together. They're not divided. It's like this one - like the living room and this one. And it has its bedroom and its living room and its bathroom. I charge 20 pesos (unintelligible). That's it. I'm giving it away. I'm not charging rent. The same with the third floor. But I don't want money. What I want is to live in peace. And to have company.

[1:10:00]

Armando: Understand? If I live in peace, I don't care. I don't care, you know. I like to live in peace.

Man: The ones who live in the building don't bother anybody or anything.

Armando: No. When my phone rings, I'm on the chair and I stay like this. So, look, I'm not good for anything. And I can't be alone much longer. I have to go...

[1:10:30]

Armando: ...to be next to my son. And I don't like to live just anywhere. Because I don't sleep. Look, my daughter, sometimes says, "Dad, (unintelligible) I'm going over there." I don't sleep. I don't know how to live in anyone's house. I'm used to living in my place since I got married. And I can't get used to any other place. It's not my fault. Understand?

Interviewer: So when you came to the United States, where did you come? To Philadelphia?

[1:11:00]

Armando: Here to Philadelphia. No, I'd been in New York.

Interviewer: In New York?

Armando: Yes, when I was young I'd been to New York. Before I got married, yes. And I was there seven months. (Unintelligible). Look, back then do you know how much they paid to work in New York? Nineteen dollars.

Interviewer: Nineteen? And what did you do in New York?

Armando: Oh, man. Jobs that (unintelligible) paint. Getting that sheen, the one you scrub with, and you got number one, number two, and number three.

[1:11:30]

Armando: And that one that's like silk. I worked in that.

Interviewer: And how many years did you work there?

Armando: Oh, I got sick. Because I had worked at night. (Start) at 7:00.

Interviewer: And where did you live in New York?

Armando: At my sister's house, the one who married the man I told you about. That she was over there.

Interviewer: And what place was that?

Armando: That was in Brooklyn. There were horse stables in front. I'd stand there and those horses went blu-blu-blu. I've worked...

[1:12:00]

Interviewer: And how many years were you in New York?

Armando: Just seven months. And I didn't like it.

Interviewer: And what did you do then?

Armando: I didn't do anything. I went to Puerto Rico.

Interviewer: Puerto Rico? And how long were you in Puerto Rico?

Armando: Oh, until I came here again.

Interviewer: And what year was that?

2000A English Translation

Armando: It's been a while now.

Interviewer: But when did you return to...?

Armando: No, I came here like in '46 or '47. So three years later, well...

[1:12:30]

Armando: ...I was alone and I bought this house for myself. I got it. I paid it off in ten years.

Interviewer: And have you always lived in this house?

Armando: Oh, in this house. No, I lived here on 10th.

Interviewer: On 10th?

Armando: Yes, I lived there with a buddy of mine who came. And I looking for an apartment over there on 16th and (Vine). And I ate over there. Because I didn't know English, you know. And there weren't Latin restaurants here.

[1:13:00]

Armando: There wasn't a Latin restaurant. The (Trilla), that one. There wasn't a Latin restaurant here. There were hardly any Puerto Ricans.

Interviewer: You said that you went to New York and returned to Puerto Rico. How long were you in Puerto Rico before returning?

Armando: Before returning here? Oh, no, of course. Because that's when I got married.

Interviewer: Yes, yes. But how long were you in Puerto Rico? The first time.

Armando: I was 17 years old. I was there seven months.

Interviewer: Oh, and you returned to Puerto Rico?

[1:13:30]

Armando: And I was there all that time until I came in '46.

Interviewer: And what work did you do here in Philadelphia?

Armando: In a laundromat. Worker. (Kill people). For 22 years.

Interviewer: Twenty-two.

Armando: Twenty-two, almost 23 years.

Interviewer: And why did you decide to come to Philadelphia?

Armando: I came after my son.

Interviewer: The second time too?

Armando: No, not the first time. Because the first time I didn't have a son. Now after.

Interviewer: So you worked in the laundromat for 20 years. Were you always...?

[1:14:00]

Armando: Almost 22.

Interviewer: Twenty-two.

Armando: And then I retired. I haven't been able to work more. And if I could work, I'd work because that's when I really had fun. And not for earning what I earned, because I'd work for what I earned, no matter what it was, because I know I'd be entertained. Because I know that I was entertained. When I worked, I woke up singing. Oh, yes. And when I was coming here, I was very happy. Very entertained. I like work. But what can I do? Here I'll do anything.

[1:14:30]

Armando: But then I have to stop because I'm going to drop dead. I can't.

Interviewer: And do you plan to return to live in Puerto Rico at some point?

Armando: No, I don't know. Because I have that son in California. I think that if I sell the house today, well I know that in two years I can get \$30,000 for the house, you know. In two or three years, this is going to be worth a lot. This is the center of (Marti). I'm in the center of (Marti). They can't expand (Marti) over there just because.

[1:15:00]

Armando: It has to be up this way. And they're going to take this. And if they want my house, they have to give me my money, what I ask for. It's not like that. Because each person owns their property. And I'm not (just hanging out here). And I don't owe. I owe this light bill that they're going to sue me about. They read it now. The gas comes on the 30th. I have to pay it when they send it. And I don't owe any bills for anything, thank God (unintelligible). Do you know what I owe?

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

[1:15:30]

Armando: Life, which God gave me. I don't owe anything else. I owe God for life. Because I can't have debts. Oh, no. Look, I told you that I had to be here, right? Look, paying

attention to that. I don't like to get the bills. I go over there to pay the same day. One day I go in a hurry to pay. They had \$27 that were mine. One dollar that was mine. And \$7 that I owed.

[1:16:00]

Armando: They got \$28 from me with all the papers. And I got my wallet back with the papers. But they took the money. Because they have to take that. Of course. And I didn't need it. I asked God to play with that money and take it. I don't have ill feelings toward anybody. That's why God helps me. If I can't do good, but I don't do wrong.

[1:16:30]

Armando: I don't do wrong. If I can do good, I do it. But I don't do wrong.

Interviewer: Mr. Armando, so did your son grow up here in Philadelphia?

Armando: Yes, he came when he was 7 years old. He was already in first grade.

Interviewer: And what school did he go to in this area?

Armando: Oh, no, I don't remember. He was over there. And he didn't like school either. If he'd listened to me, he would be - well, he has a good job.

[1:17:00]

Armando: But he would be maybe in an office. Because the mom could and I could, you see, but he never liked school. He tricked me. He told me, "Dad, I'm going to work because I spoke with the teacher, because they're going to" - and he went to work at a factory. And he came here. And he gave me \$5 every week. Go put it in a drawer. And then he told me, "Because I'm going to school at night." He tricked me. He didn't go either.

[1:17:30]

Armando: Then when he told me, "Dad, I'm going over there with mom again." I said, "Well, son, you're over there." He said, "Well, look, that money there" - when I need change, I changed it - "Bring it." He put it on the bed. I think there were \$250. He gave me fives. And I didn't take it. I left it there. I say, "Take that money." "No, that's yours." "No, take it. That's not mine. Take it." He went and bought a (unintelligible). What we were talking about before...

[1:18:00]

Armando: ...that kids had to give the father what they earned, no, not me. I've never taken from my son. I give him.

Interviewer: And at what age did he start working? How far did he go in school?

Armando: No, he was already in age for it.

Interviewer: He was like 16? Or less?

Armando: I think he was like 18.

Interviewer: Eighteen.

Armando: Yes, he knows. He has a good job. My son earns almost \$11 per hour.

[1:18:30]

Armando: Because it's hard to load those trailers. The person has to know how. Because they have to know how to load them. Because they can't load them too much. And since he already knew, you see. Now he has a lawsuit. I don't know how it's going to end. Honestly I don't know because he hurt himself (unintelligible) the muscle here. And they (cut) a bone here. I don't know.

[1:19:00]

Armando: They give him \$324 every two weeks. He earns good money.

Interviewer: I was going to ask you, in this neighborhood here, how is it divided racially?

Armando: Well, I don't (unintelligible) from here, you know.

Interviewer: But what's the main group in this neighborhood? Are there Puerto Ricans? Blacks? Americans?

Armando: There are almost no Puerto Ricans here. Well, there are Puerto Ricans over there. When I came to live here and bought this house, there were no Puerto Ricans here. None.

[1:19:30]

Armando: Just white Americans. There was a building in front that belonged to nuns, the sisters. There were like 20 sisters in two houses. They only went into one house. And I met just one Puerto Rican. There were no Puerto Ricans here, other than me. The lady there told the man who sold the house to me...

[1:20:00]

Armando: ...look, here you could go up to the second floor. They told me that if I didn't cover that (I'd be penalized). And I made a closet there to put groceries. Open it there so you'll see.

Man: (Unintelligible) the stairs (unintelligible).

Armando: (Unintelligible) look. Open it. Open it. Look, I put that there for groceries and to put stuff there. That (unintelligible)...

[1:20:33]

Armando: ...to put groceries there. That went up to the second floor. So they told me to cover it because I'd get a \$50 fine. And I covered it. And there were no Puerto Ricans here. None. And the Americans who lived there were young girls. And, oh my God, a Ukrainian, beautiful. I'd drool. And they called the owner of the house...

[1:21:00]

Armando: "We thank you because you sold the house to a beautiful Puerto Rican person who knows how to live." You see? I'd sit there on the stairs. They'd sit there and surround me. To talk to me. I understood them through signals, you see. Because I don't know English, you see. And I communicated with them and there was an American woman. And she had a husband. A brother lived there in the house too.

[1:21:30]

Armando: Then he left and gave me the address so that I'd go over there. And I never went. Married woman I'd say it's dangerous, you know. The guy who falls in love with a married woman has one foot in jail and one in the cemetery. If it's a young woman, a free woman. If she gives me a chance, that's okay for me. But a married woman...

[1:22:00]

Armando: ...well, honestly there are men who aren't (unintelligible) to see women, you see, who have a woman who's not worth your time. And if you look at her, they kill you. I know that. I know a lot, you know. Because I'm a bohemian man. No, I'm old but I'm a bohemian man. I know about women. Look, a woman goes by there that I've never seen, I can tell you, and I'm not wrong...

[1:22:30]

Armando: ...and sorry for being informal, if she's in love or if she's not in love. I can tell you. When a woman falls in love, if the man is dumb, doesn't know about women, he doesn't know it. But with women, you can tell they're in love even in the way they speak. Understand? You can see it. Because she doesn't speak how she normally speaks. And she doesn't walk how she normally walks. She shows off more as she walks and she talks to you in another way. Look, (unintelligible).

[1:23:00]

Armando: I tell you, because I've had 10 women. That's why I tell you. And today I don't have any and I still have. When I feel like sleeping, I sleep here. Because when she calls me, if I feel like going, I go. And I don't have (trouble), there's no danger. Understand? And if I want to sleep with someone, I do it. Because I don't like sleeping alone either. I know about women.

Interviewer: But have you ever experienced some type of discrimination?

Armando: No.

Interviewer: Never?

[1:23:30]

Armando: What's that?

Interviewer: Discrimination. For example, because of the fact that...

Armando: I understand more or less.

Interviewer: Yes. Yes. But because of the fact that you're Puerto Rican, someone has refused to offer you housing or work or any right that you have?

Armando: No, I had more than enough. In Puerto Rico, I had more than enough. I tell you that when I retired, the manager called the boss. He says, "I don't want Martinez to leave."

[1:24:00]

Armando: "We need Martinez here." Because I said that I needed three days off work because I was going to retire. And the manager said - bring the other ashtray here, no, no, take that one. Look, there are two over there. He said, "I don't want Martinez to leave. Pensions are nothing. The pension is little money. Don't go. We need him here."

[1:24:30]

Armando: "We can't give him the three days off work." And I told them that I was coming, you see. If I couldn't. I couldn't because this same leg. I was on the machines on the labor standing on this leg. Because I couldn't take the pain on this one. One time, (unintelligible) I had to go to a hotel over there in (unintelligible). The watchman knew me. He opened the door to me. He told me, "Sit down." I was there. I couldn't even walk. Not today. Now it feels pretty good.

[1:25:00]

Armando: He says, "We can't give you the three days off work. Well, give him five months." I worked. I worked for \$1,680, which, by the way, I earned \$400 more. And like two years later, in '70, they sent back a letter from social security. Because I didn't know that what I earned, half of it was for social security. That means that from the extra \$400 I earned...

[1:25:30]

Armando: ...I had to give \$200 to social security. But I didn't know anything, you see. When I went over there, I say, "I'm sorry. I don't talk English. It's not in English." He says, "Okay." He was Mexican. So he tells me - and I took the letter - "What happens is that you worked in '70." I say, "Yes, I worked for the \$1,680." He says, "Well, you didn't report it to social security." I say, "I didn't know anything about that." He says, "Yes, because you earned \$400 more."

[1:26:00]

Armando: "And social security should get \$200." Those \$200 aren't yours. I say, "Well, I didn't know." I say, "I didn't steal it. I didn't steal it. I didn't know it." He says, "And they're going to ask you for it." He says, "How are you going to pay it?" I said, "Well, I get \$160 a month" - I got \$160 back then or \$138. I don't know. Honestly, I don't remember. He says, "How are you going to pay it?" I say, "Well, take away \$10 a month. Because that's what they could take away."

[1:26:30]

Armando: Because I wasn't refusing to pay it. I had to pay for it however I could. I say, "What you give me is a pittance." He says, "Well, I don't know. I'm going to put \$20 but I don't know what they're going to do." How are they not going to accept it? Well, he says, "They're going to keep sending you the check. Now when they're going to charge you, they're going to send you a letter." Then they sent me the checks, I think three or four months, every month. And then they sent me a letter saying they were going to charge me \$20 a month.

[1:27:00]

Armando: Well, I kept paying and paying. But since I kept track, when they charged me the \$20 - I kept track - until they just had to charge me \$7. Then when they sent me the check they charged me the same \$20, which, by the way, my check was stolen from my pocket. And \$2 more that I had here. I said, "I'm leaving." When they sent me the check where they had charged me the same \$20, I go over there again. The same Mexican guy helped me. On 6th and H.

[1:27:30]

Armando: When I went over there, he said, "Well, what's the matter?" I said, "Well, I came because you fixed that for me yourself in (unintelligible), that social security was over there. That was when you charged me \$200, that you were charging me \$20 a month. And now you have to charge me just \$7 and you charged me \$20. You owe me \$13." He says, "You're right." He says, "Well, don't worry..."

[1:28:00]

Armando: ...we'll report that and they'll return it. When I was coming over here, I take the trolley on 11th to get off at (spring garden) to change the check there are the little bank. I had \$2 here and the check in the same envelope that they send it in. When I get off - there were a lot of people getting on there - I look and the check and the \$2 weren't there. I got on the trolley again and I searched. He said, "What's the matter?" I said, "Take it out, one check and \$2 more."

[1:28:30]

Armando: And he searched and searched and there was nothing. Someone had already pocketed it. But then I turned back. I went on foot. I was there in a moment. And the same guy helped me. I said, "I came here to tell you that I was missing \$13 in my check, right? Well, now someone stole my check and \$2 that I had." He said, "Yes." They called and reported it right away. He says, "Don't worry. You won't lose the check. Was it signed?" I say, "It wasn't signed." He says, "If it's been signed, they always give it back."

[1:29:00]

Armando: "And if it's not signed too." Honestly it takes almost two weeks. Well the next month they sent me the same check and the \$13. And then in a month they sent me the check too. They gave it to me.

Interviewer: Yes. Have you ever had a big problem living here in Philadelphia?

Armando: Trouble?

Interviewer: Any problem.

[1:29:30]

Armando: No, the problems that I can tell you about refer to the notices that I get from city hall about the house, you see. Like now that they set a date for a meeting. And that was because they were going to register the houses to charge money, you see? But I didn't go because I don't know English. They send me letters. And I don't know what they say. And yeah, that was I think in '75. I know it was two years ago. So they sent me a bill. They charge me \$31.

[1:30:00]

Armando: But since I didn't owe anything. Well, what was I going to pay? Then I went over there. There was a girl named Juanita, you see. Then she says, "No, because what happens is that they asked him to come to a meeting. And he didn't come." So she told them, "Well, he doesn't know English. Why is he going to come?" They said, "But he has to pay \$31." And they sent me a bill and they charged. And time passed but I had to pay in the end.

[1:30:30]

Armando: And then I had to go.

Interviewer: But why were they charging you \$31?

Armando: Well, because I didn't go to that meeting, since I don't know English. So Juanita went and fixed it. Because I know how to defend myself. Otherwise they would have charged me \$30. After I went with Juanita - I have a license. Because I have a license since I bought this house. This house was a rental building. And they paid \$9.

[1:31:00]

Armando: However, I don't know how it was. But I paid the \$9 because he paid them. They billed me. But, then there was a law, where they were charging \$5 per floor, so \$15. And it's been three years. I'm paying it. But now this year, that I went to city hall, then I had to pay \$15 to register. I paid it. And then Juanita, an American who knows Spanish, went with me. And we waited and waited until we got the papers.

[1:31:30]

Armando: She filled them out. Then they brought a bunch more. Then they called me and I went over there. They say, "Now there's a law." But since I know, you see. That's why we have to know some English to defend ourselves. But she didn't know how to defend me. And she knew. But since she's American she doesn't understand that, you see. There are people who don't understand those laws. They say now there's a law...

[1:32:00]

Armando: ...that requires that houses with three apartments, they have to pay \$15 a year. I say, "Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. Me pay for three checks a year \$9. Now three years, checks three years, me pay \$15 every year, every year." They say, "Okay." And Juanita was quiet. Because that guy said I had to pay \$30.

[1:32:30]

Armando: He went and looked, of course, he found that I have a license, that I'm not a fool. He said, "Oh, it's all right." (Unintelligible) \$10. I had to pay \$10. But if I didn't know how to defend myself in that harsh way I spoke, then I'd have to pay the \$30. I say, "You see, Juanita? If you tell them how I told you, that I have a license" - I've been paying it for 27 years - "then we wouldn't even have to come here." But since she's American, you know, they get those jobs but they don't understand.

[1:33:00]

Armando: She even says, "Do you have any papers at home?" Look, the papers for the house it means if I have Title of property. She says a paper. It's a paper, yes. But it's the original document that proves that it's my house. She says, "No, but that's" - I say, "Yes, sir, yes." Even the lawyer who defended me, I had to pay him \$100. "Do you have any papers for the house?" He knew Spanish. I say, "What do you mean paper? What's this? This is the original document that shows, look, Armando Martinez. Here it is. Here's the date." I have my original document.

[1:33:30]

Armando: That's the document for the house. So she went in there and spoke. She said, "The man is following the law. The man lives within the law." Oh, then that I didn't have the meters (unintelligible). I say, "Well, those meters," I said, to the lawyer, and tell them, "If I don't have the meters, it's them who owe them to me. They have to get them for me." Because I bought that house that way. And the guy who sold it to me bought it the same way. The city is at fault. The government that granted permission to build it.

[1:34:00]

Armando: If I knew English, my God. Who would mess with me?