

**CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

INTERVIEW WITH: ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

INTERVIEWER: DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

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D= DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

R= ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

D: Today is April 28, 2008 and I am resuming my conversations with Bishop Armando Rodriguez. Today we will begin to talk about the June, 1959 annual conference at *Santa Clara* where many important plans for the future of the Methodist Church in Cuba were discussed. So, Armando, would you like to go ahead get started on that?

R: With pleasure. This was a very important annual conference because, on that occasion, Bishop Roy Short was presiding over the Cuban annual conference and replaced Bishop John Branscomb, who died the year before. At that time, the Cuban people were very excited about the new revolutionary government and the promise that Fidel Castro made regarding the good future of Cuba. All were very excited about our future and, as Methodists, we had a very important plan for the spiritual future of the Methodist Church in Cuba. We had a great leader named Dr. Angel E. Fuster. He was the district superintendent of *Santa Clara* and was the treasurer of the Cuban church, but more than that, he was the spiritual leader of all the Methodist Churches in Cuba.

D: So he was the closest thing to a bishop or a leader in Cuba?

R: Yes. He presided over a committee for the advance of the Methodist Church in Cuba. He presented to the annual conference our goals. The committee wanted to have one or two hundred Cuban Methodist young people working for two years in the ministry of the Methodist Church in different areas. We wanted to establish the Methodist Church in the large cities and towns in Cuba where we did not have many Methodist congregations. We wanted to have pastors to work with the Cuban worker organization and many, many other plans. The annual conference approved this plan with great enthusiasm. We then asked the Board of Missions for help, but we established what part we would give, in a material aspect, with our offerings. When the conference approved this plan, Dr. Fuster, Rev. Victor Rankin, the missionary in the *Camagiüey* district, Rev. Raciel Vasquez, and other leaders visited every local Methodist Church and promoted the plan and asked for a special offering for the next four years. This was a great promotion for Cuba because they presented a great challenge to all the local churches.

D: How many local churches were there at that time?

R: At that time we had about three hundred organized congregations and missions. The important matter was that this committee, in every local Methodist Church, challenged the Cuban people, not only the pastor but also the local leaders and visitors, in an advancement plan to gain Cuba for Christ. In my opinion, this was a great contribution to the Cuban Methodist people because they heard the challenge, they answered the challenge, and they liked to participate in God's work in Cuba. This was a great occasion and great development and I participated in the caravan of the *Oriente* local churches. I also had the great honor, as a young pastor of only twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old and a year after my seminary graduation, to be a part of the biggest plan for the future of the Cuban church. This made me very, very happy and honored. I received a great lesson from participating in this plan. The plan began in a very fast and good way. But, what happened? At the end of 1959 many of the Cuban people had many questions about the reality of the future of the revolution and how they would fulfill their promise for the Cuban people. Politically, at that time, there was a great struggle because many important political leaders of the revolution that came for the *Sierra Maestra* Mountains were very disappointed. For example, Rafael Diaz Lang, the chief of the revolutionary air force, resigned his post because he did not like the fact that all the communist leaders in Cuba were taking part in the Cuban revolution. After that, the *ingeniero*, Manuel Ray, the minister of public works, resigned for the same reason. In October of 1959, *Commandanté* Hubert Matos, the chief of the army in the *Camagüey* province, and his staff presented a protest to Fidel because they did not like the route the revolution was taking. This was a very difficult moment for all the Cuban people because Fidel sent Camilo Cienfuegos, the chief of the army in Cuba, to convince Hubert Matos and his aides . . .

D: I think we covered that last time I believe. Let me ask you a question. How many of those individuals, like Hubert Matos, were influenced by either the Methodist Church or Baptist Church or Protestant Churches? How many of those who became unhappy with the situation were influenced by the churches?

R: I don't know the exact statistical proportions, but a lot of leaders of the revolution had a pretty good relationship with, and even membership in, different Methodist and Evangelical Churches. For example, Frank País in *Santiago de Cuba* was a very good friend of Fidel's and was a son of Rev. País, a Baptist pastor in *Oriente*. There were a lot of Presbyterian leaders that were connected with the revolution and they did not agree with the course the revolution was taking, in reference to the communist situation. The brother in law of my wife, *El Reverendo* Victor Toranzo, he was a Baptist graduate from the Baptist Eastern Seminary in *Santiago de Cuba* and he was the first evangelical chaplain that Fidel had in 1957 or 1958. Why? Because Father Sardiñas, a Catholic priest from *Isla de Pinos*, went to the *Sierra Maestra* to be a Catholic chaplain. Then Fidel told Fran País that he would like to have an evangelical chaplain because he liked to have a good balance of Christian presence with his troops there. He went to *Sierra Maestra* one day with Dr. Sergio del Valle. Then the brother in law of my wife, in Spanish we say *cuñado*, went to the *Sierra Maestra* with great Christian enthusiasm to make a contribution to the Cuban revolution. One year after he was sick and then Fidel allowed him to come down from the mountains and he left the country and came to the United States. At that time, when he was here, the father of my sister-in-law, his *fiancé*, came to the United States and my father-in-law

married them here. When Victor Toranzo knew that the revolution was victorious in Cuba, he immediately came back to Cuba and he was appointed to the local Baptist Church in *El Cristo*, very near to *Santiago de Cuba*. He had a very good connection with Raul Castro, Juan Almeda, and all the leaders he was with while they were together in the *Sierra Maestra* when there were only eighty or one-hundred people. He continued his ministry but, more or less, in this difficult time, maybe 1960, he heard that one of his friends in the *Sierra Maestra* Mountains, a guerilla, was executed. He then went to *Santiago de Cuba*, where Raul Castro was the chief of the army and the main person in the revolution, and he asked for a meeting with him. He asked him, "What happened to our friend?" and Raul answered, "Oh, he did not do good things and the revolution must be very strict with the people in the revolution and we executed him." This was the red light that told my *cuñado*, Rev. Victor Toranzo, the direction the revolution was taking. Without any notice he went to *Havana* and returned to the United States, even without his wife and their first daughter. He was very afraid of the future. Why? Because he was together with this leader and Raul, sometime before, spoke with him and told him that they would like to give to him the *Grado de Commandanté*, as they did with *Padre Sardiñas*. They wanted to have him working full-time for the revolution so he could receive external delegations from other countries, maybe delegations from other churches in the United States. He viewed this with great fear and left the country immediately.

To answer your question, there were many Christian leaders in the revolution that were very upset about the direction the revolution was taking. In the United Methodist Church in Cuba there was the same disappointment. In 1960 and 1961 when the Cuban government joined with the Soviet government, all fifty-three or fifty-four American missionaries we had in Cuba at that time were called back to the United States by the Board of Missions so they would not be in a problematic situation with the struggle between the American and the Cuban government. Eighty or ninety percent of the Cuban national pastors left the country as early as 1961. In 1960, I think, or maybe 1961, the revolution gave the name of the year of the education, *el año de educación*, and took all of our colleges and schools the same way that they took all the Christian Catholic and Protestant schools and universities. One or two years before, we had great enthusiasm with our plan for advancement and the future and extension of the Methodist Church. Within one or two years we lost all the American missionaries, we lost a great majority of the national pastors, we lost all the teachers in the colleges and schools, we lost all the dispensaries and hospitals, we lost many sanctuaries and other properties, and we lost the majority of almost everything. This was quite contrary to our plan for advancement and we stayed with only a few members and had, at that time, about three hundred local congregations and missions and it was reduced to, more or less, one-hundred twenty or so. We only had three elders remaining in Cuba from all the missionaries and elders that we had at the 1959 annual conference and four or five supply pastors working in Cuba. But, we say, "God never left Cuba."

D: So everyone is leaving and you obviously had property where the various churches and missions were located. By 1961, '62, Castro and Che Guevara were expropriating properties:

large farms, businesses, and that kind of thing. Did they do the same thing to the churches? In other words, did they seize the church grounds and the structures? Did they take those over? How did that work? Was it a slow process or was it all at once?

R: It was a long process. They took the colleges and schools in one year. The year after that there were different confrontations with different churches. For example, Fidel sent one-hundred sixty Catholic priests out in a ship. He also had a very big confrontation with the Assembly of God Church and took their seminary in *Manacas*, in *Santa Clara* province, and put some American missionaries in jail as well and he said that the church was to only have services in official sanctuaries. What does that mean? We had a lot of missions and congregations in houses and he stated that there would be no more of that. We were free to have services but only in official sanctuaries, not in private houses, not in rented houses, and not in houses that were the property of the church; if it was a house and not a sanctuary, we could not have services in that place.

D: So was all the church property seized or did it continue as official sanctuary? For example, in the *Camagüey* church, did he say this was the official place and only this place could be used?

R: And we needed to give to them the address of all of our official sanctuaries and the determined which ones were official and which ones were not.

D: So some of them were denied as far as an official church? You might have had a church there but he said no, you do not have that anymore, we've taken it over and we will restrict you to this one?

R: Yes, but more than that. They took maybe ten or fifteen or twenty of our sanctuaries. I do not remember the exact number, but it was many of them. Then, they put a food or *Panadería*, a bakery, in some of the properties; either a store, or school, or something for community use. You would think that this was a very, very hard time for us but we decided to be servants of God in that situation.

D: What were you thinking at that time as far as your future and your family? What were you thinking regarding your personal situation? You were how old at that time?

R: I was thirty-one, thirty-two, or thirty-three years old and I had three daughters. I was assigned *Manzanilla* church in the south part of *Oriente* province. This was a blessing for me. Why? Because in *Báguanos* and *Tacájo*, where I was pastor, I had very strong ties with the guerilla leaders and revolutionary leaders, but when the church moved me from *Tacájo* and *Báguanos* to *Manzanillo*, I felt free of this contact. I was by myself as a pastor, without any connections and friends, and I could start over. In *Manzanillo*, I was only pastor for seven months and then I was moved *Holguín* church in *Oriente*. It was a very important church.

D: A very big town too. How many people lived in *Holguín*?

R: There were maybe three or four-hundred thousand. We had five churches in this city. I was appointed to the John Branscomb Memorial Church and it was an honor for me. There was a

picture of John Branscomb in this church. And, you know, for me to see the picture of John Branscomb, because I knew that he was a great Methodist leader and he loved the Cuban Methodist people, this was a challenge for my personal spiritual life. As you asked me, at that time we were living in a continual struggle of every aspect of life. We had the reality of the church. Many people thought, at that time, that to be in a socialistic society or country, the church did not have a place. This was the reason why many good Cuban pastors and lay leaders of the church left the country; they did not want to be in Cuba when the door was to be closed. They thought the revolution might only last another year and then they would return, but many, many of them left the country and did not return. My wife and I found ourselves in a very, very difficult situation because we, thanks be to God, did not fear the future and we told God, "Well God, we would like to be here in Cuba until the last moment and we will not fear that the door will be closed. We hope that you will put us outside at the last moment." But, after that, we thought, what about the future of our children? They must pay the price of our ministry and, really my brother, this made us very, very uncertain and confused. But, thanks be to God, in the end my wife and I stayed. The only reason we put the future of our children in danger was for the Kingdom of God. We stayed there even when we humanly knew the great danger they would be in. We made an agreement with God. We would remain in Cuba to take care of the church, the work, and the spiritual life of our people and He would take care of the future of our children. We then felt free because this was not our responsibility; the future of our children was the responsibility of God and we trusted that God would always do the best. This made us see the future with optimism of faith and not optimism of the political, social, and economic reality of Cuba; optimism that God would take care of our children and our family.

D: As well as spreading the Gospel, was there also a commitment in your mind about staying with your people in Cuba? In other words, this is my home, this is where I live, these are my fellow citizens, and I feel very strongly that leaving the country would be deserting my people? I'm not trying to put words in your mouth; I'm just trying to understand. Would that be accurate?

R: Yes, this was our point.

D: You could have continued your ministry in American and it would have been very easy.

R: I even had a proposition to work in a Costa Rican church and they said to me that I would be appointed to be a *Villa Quesada*, but we felt our decision was the will of God and we wanted to obey God in all situations. But, at the same time, our position was not to judge the other pastors or other leaders. We felt that they had to make their own decisions and we had to make our own decision and we decided to stay and take care of our work with the help of God. This completely changed our ambition, our plan, and our dream because we were honored to be servants of God, not in a good situation, but in a very hard and bad situation. Then, of course, all the missionaries left the country and in *Oriente* we had 1/3 part of the Methodist congregation, the 1/3 part of the Methodist membership and I was the only district superintendent appointed for that region with only two or three pastors and without any other leaders. Since I was a part of the plan for advancement, I took the idea to call the young people to serve God, to call the women, and to call lay leaders to take care of the churches because, in Cuba, we had had good missionaries with great missionary work. For example, *Omaja Oriente*, Sarah Fernandez, she had a Spanish name

but she was born in Tampa, had more than twenty missions during her appointment. In *Báguanos*, I was the substitute of Eulalia Cook and she had the *Parroquia Mayor*, the main parish, organized there and there were fifteen or twenty missions. We had the *Escuela Agrícola Industrial* in *Preston* with a great number of missions. We had the Mayari Church, where Morel Robinson, an American missionary, had fifteen or twenty other missions. Then we didn't have pastors and we had more than one hundred churches and missions in *Oriente*. God guided me to call the young people and we had a plan that we called *sembradores del evangelio*, to put the seeds in the air. We sent the young people with Christian literature to participate in the illiteracy campaign that we had in Cuba. The literature was made up of Frank Lauerbach's book, *Jesus' History*, and many other materials from the Bible for people to learn how to read and write. We sent hundreds and hundreds of these young people to all the *Oriente* mountains and rural areas to visit house by house and preach the Gospel to every house, which, at that time, was not prohibited. They also gave the people the Christian literature. In six months they visited ninety-five thousand homes, but not in the cities and towns, only in the rural areas and *Oriente* mountains. This was a great experience for me. When I was working with this group of young people I didn't think about political problems and I didn't think about the economic and social future of Cuba; I was only thinking about my task of distributing the word of God to our people, especially in the rural areas. My plan was to have the *compaña de lo segadores*, or the harvest, after six months with the daily reports that were made to me telling me how many houses everyone visited. Our plan was to have 324 young Methodist people working for six months as harvesters in one *barrio municipal*, or neighborhood. But, when the first group of sixty or seventy *segadores* (harvest) for the first experience, we trained this sixty or seventy young people and sent them to the same number of *barrios municipales* to work, eat, and live; it was at that time that Fidel spoke and said that we could only have services in the official sanctuaries. Maybe I had some responsibility for this situation.

D: In other words he said that for you?

R: I don't think it was . . .

D: Were other churches doing the same thing?

R: Well, especially the *Bando Evangelico de Gedeon*; a Cuban native evangelical denomination. They had more or less the same program and I think that we were both responsible for the restrictions.

D: Do you remember the year and the month that Fidel did that?

R: I think this was maybe in 1962. I don't remember exactly but . . .

D: So that pretty much brought the whole program to an end. How long were you able to do that program before it was discontinued?

R: Well, we had the six months of *sembradores de evangelio*; visiting every day and going house by house. Of course, God helped me in a special way. Why, because at that time, or before that time, the government Health Department campaigned to end the malaria problem and

to exterminate the Egyptian Mosquitoes. The chief of this campaign in all of *Oriente* province was a very, very good Methodist, Dr. Manuel Garcias. After that, he came to the United States and he now lives in East Florida. He did great work and they successfully rid the *Oriente* province of the malaria sickness and the Egyptian Mosquito. The government, under his leadership, made a specific map of the *Oriente* province and he gave me a copy of this work and, because of this, I now knew how to get to all the rural areas, how many houses there were, and how many people lived there.

D: So it was almost like a census?

R: Not only a census, but a demographic description. I asked a group of five or eight young people to take the Christian literature and go from one neighborhood to another and I knew where they were. However, we did not have the budget for such a big program.

D: So how did you do it?

R: Well, God provided. We only had twenty-five cents a day for each young person. They went to each place where they did not know anyone. They would say they were there in the name of God and we would like to preach the Gospel and visit all the community. The Cuban people were very kind and they saw these young people, who did not have a place to sleep, and they took them somewhere to sleep and brought them food. I told them that if there was a day when no one invited them to have food that they must buy two eggs, bread, and so and twenty-five cents would be enough. They did this with a great faithfulness and for them, and for me, this was the biggest experience in our spiritual life.

D: So you were able to at least get started and get this process going for a small period of time until it was shut down. So how many months would you estimate that this went on before it was shut down?

R: We had the six months period for the *sembradores de evangelico*.

D: So there was really just one season you were able to do this.

R: Yes. They sometimes experienced this campaign at times when the rain came and they had the Bible and the Christian literature without any cover and they prayed to God, "Oh God, help us!" And they said that the rain would go left and right and they would not have any more rain. At other times some of them had some bad *perros*, or dogs, but they prayed and the angels closed the mouth of the dogs. Now we smile about that, but for this young person, some of them only fifteen, sixteen, eighteen years old, this was the biggest experience in their life. When Fidel closed the door to this kind of work, we asked them who wanted to give two years of full-time, voluntary service. A big group of them, about thirty of them, decided to be lay missionaries, we called them, for two years and then we trained them and sent them to the different congregations and missions with sanctuaries. In that way, God helped us to have a preacher every Sunday in every Methodist Church in *Oriente*. Do you know what my most difficult moment was? When I went to *Havana* and other western provinces for our cabinet meeting, it was very hard for me

because all the other district superintendents and church leaders were only thinking about when we would leave the country. **[End of Tape]**

D: **[Beginning of new tape]** So they were already trying to leave the country.

R: I was sorry for them because I knew that they had a great fear about the future and they had the same sentiment as we had before about the future of their children.

D: They were distracted by that to the point of not being able to think ahead in Cuba?

R: In Cuba, and they did not think about the future of the Cuban church and so. When I had the opportunity to speak in the cabinet to the group they said to me, "Oh, Armando, you are crazy. You have a crazy plan." They did not understand me and this was very disappointing for me.

D: So you were very proud about explaining what you accomplished and they were not receptive to it at all. They just pointed out to you the fact that Castro had put an end to this.

R: They felt that we did not have a future with this kind of work and that I was crazy and that I was an idealist and not thinking with common sense. But when I went back to *Holguín* and was with the group of young people, I felt like a new person and we said that together we would go ahead.

D: Regardless of what they said in *Havana*.

R: Yes. I didn't ask for an offering or budget from them in *Havana*. I only asked of them one thing; that they permit me to promote and receive the offering that the Methodist Churches in *Oriente* gathered for the advancement plan. Since that was my region, they permitted me to do so. Then we asked all the Churches, because they saw all our work and how the young people sacrificed their time and their daily life, and they answered our calling in a big way and we had twenty-five cents for each one every day.

D: Let me make sure I understand here. So, when you instituted this program and it was working successfully, Castro ended it. Did he end it before you went back to *Havana* to explain what you were doing or was the program still underway when you went back to *Havana*?

R: No, he made the new restrictions when we were in the experience step of the harvest. We visited all the rural areas and mountains and distributed the literature and Bible and New Testament, but when we were preparing the six months of harvest, to have the young people now in one place for six months instead of visiting one place a day, that was when Castro made the restrictions. At that time, we said, "O.k., we accept that, but now we have a challenge for you. How many of you would like to volunteer full-time for two years as lay missionaries in Cuba."

D: So that kind of work was allowed?

R: Yes, because they would be appointed to an official sanctuary. That way we had a person living in a parsonage because, if not, the government could take an empty parsonage.

D: So, if the parsonages are empty that means the government takes them, but if somebody is living there, even a volunteer, they would leave it alone.

R: Not a volunteer but a pastor, a leader, or a preacher.

D: As long as one of your missionaries was in the parsonage, even if they were only eighteen years old or nineteen years old without any real training, they could still say that they were the pastor? You make them a pastor, they were a pastor? And the government recognized this?

R: Yes, they were the pastor. We began a new time in our ministry at that time. Every year and every month more people left the country, more restrictions from the government were passed down, and more executions took place. However, despite all of that activity, we were giving a message of salvation and hope; not in political matters but in spiritual matters.

D: Let me ask you about the degree of support for the revolution in *Holguín*? Wasn't *Holguín* very close to *Oriente* province? How close was it?

R: *Holguín* is two-hundred kilometers from *Santiago de Cuba* and . . .

D: Would you say that *Holguín* was supportive of Castro and very involved in the guerilla movement? How was that area affected by the revolution or rebellion?

R: In *Oriente* it was a difficult situation. For example, the chief of the army in *Oriente*, I don't remember who it was at that time, but he was a very important army chief for Batista, was killed in the streets of *Holguín*. This was a very difficult time because the government put a group of people in jail and executed five or eight people they said were involved. There were many problems in *Holguín* during the revolution. Of course, I was in the eyes of all the revolutionary leaders and one of the leaders of the church in *Havana*, Dr. Carlos Perez who was the treasurer of the Board of Missions when the missionaries left the country, was told, "You need to speak to this young person there in *Oriente* and *Holguín*, Armando Rodriguez, and tell him that he is in great danger doing this work with the young people." Our house and our church in *Holguín* were surrounded by security to see who was coming and who was going. There was a group of young people from the church in *Niquero*, in the south of the *Sierra Maestra* Mountains, that were working in the city in *Holguín*. The police took them to the police station and asked them who they were. Some of them were the leader of the committee for the defense of the revolution.

D: And they were members of your congregation?

R: Of course and because of that, our people did not have any political motivation. I never spoke with them about what I was thinking politically, but I told them that they were a servant of God and an ambassador of the Kingdom of God and they must go everywhere in the name of God. I also told them that they must love those who were in favor of the revolution and those who were against the revolution and they were to be an instrument of reconciliation because there were a lot of divided families. We challenged them in a Christian way and let them know that there was nothing that could stop their Christian spirit and this way of work. We were very

strong in our principles and very clear about what our task was during this difficult time for Cuba. For that reason, we were happy to be in Cuba in that situation. We saw how God took care of us in every bad situation. Everything was for the glory of God. I said that my file in the secret police of Cuba must be a very big file because I was in jail different times and so.

D: We will talk about that in the next few days. We're looking at 1961 and we've just gone through the special program that you put together, which had a degree of success but then was curtailed by Castro. Can we take that up to 1963 and what you were doing in the Methodist Church up to that time?

R: At the same time that we were having the great, wonderful, and victorious experience, the general situation in the Methodist Church in Cuba was very disappointing. For example, I think it was in 1961, we didn't have an annual conference because all of the pastors were thinking about the political situation and about other matters, not about preaching the Gospel in Cuba. We only had one pastoral retreat in *Matanzas* seminary. The cabinet made the appointment of the new leader for the New Year, but it was during a very disoriented situation. Thanks be to God that I could have a different situations in my life. As I told you, when I went back to *Holguín* and *Oriente* and I met with the wonderful group of young people, I was in another world; not in the world of the fear that the other Methodist Churches in Cuba had. At the same time, I had some family difficulties. For example, my wife was a public school teacher for primary school in *Holguín*. It was nice for us to have two salaries because a good amount of both salaries went to the budget for the twenty-five cents for the young people. But the political situation in education was very hard and the government told every teacher that they much teach communism and atheism in the schools and we said, "this is not for us." Also, in December of 1963, our fourth child was born, Armando Jr., the pastor here in Christ United Methodist Church. So we had four children and my wife unable to work in the school and take care of the children and she did not want to teach the communist curriculum and she resigned her teaching position. This created a more difficult family budget, but we were happy to do that because this was for the best. We also had, at that time, a three family house. One of my brothers, he was married after the death of my mother, lived on the farm with my father and my oldest sister lived in *Yaguaramas*. One of my other brothers, Manolo, worked in *Cienfuegos* and was married and had a home in *Cienfuegos*. As a pastor, I was in *Oriente*, but I learned many of their problems. First, during the agrarian reforms the government took my father's farm, which was only thirteen *caballerías*, about 500 acres. The first step of the reform said that a farm had to be thirty *caballerías*, about 1,200 acres, but the second step said that a farm of five *caballerías*, only fifty acres qualified for collectivization. They only permitted them to live in the house and have a very close garden. My brother that lived on the farm was the owner of the cows, he had more than one-hundred fifty cows, and the government took them. Another one of my brothers, René, owned the tractor and truck for the farm work, but the government took all of this. They were in a very difficult economic and social situation and this affected me in one or another way because my family was suffering. But, thanks be to God, I always prevailed because of my communion to God and His kingdom and His church. They visited me and I gave them hope and spiritual care. In the end, my father and my two brothers left the country in the freedom flight from *Valalero* to here in 1968. My brother, who lived in *Cienfuegos*, left the country as well. Seven of our ten brothers live here in the United States.

D: So when they left the country, your father particularly, did he go to live with your other brothers and sisters? Where did they go?

R: They went mainly to Orlando.

D: That was in '63, '64?

R: No, 1965 to 1968.

D: So they all, more or less, came to Orlando.

R: Yes, they came to Orlando and one of my sisters went to Puerto Rico. Her husband was a dentist and they worked there but eventually moved to Miami. My two youngest sisters, Oilda and Idelisa, were blessed by God and by the Methodist Church. In 1957 or so, when we had an international evangelical campaign with more than one-hundred twenty American preachers for one week in every Methodist Church in Cuba, there was a pastor from the Methodist Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan that visited the *Cienfuegos* Church where they were members. When he went back to his church in Grand Rapids, he made a report of what he did and saw in Cuba and there was a Methodist family, the Thomas family, that told him they would be delighted to have Methodist young women with them in their home with their family. When he told our pastor in *Cienfuegos*, my sister, Oilda, the second youngest sister, was selected and she went to Grand Rapids to study in high school. One or two years afterward, the family said that they would like to invite the other sister. And our youngest sister, Idelisa, went to Grand Rapids and studied also. Oilda is a widow now, but she has three children and four or five grandchildren in Orlando and Idelisa, who turned seventy-one years old last April, is living in San Diego and has a very nice family. She married a very, very nice American man. But they like to live here in Florida, speaking Spanish. (laughter)

D: So, by 1968 you were probably the last one in your family that remained in Cuba, correct?

R: No, I had two brothers and one sister that remained in Cuba even when I came to the United States in 1990. One of them, Jesus, the only one of us who has died at this time, was a very important person in the government. He worked in the diplomatic office for the government in Canada, France, and Panama. That was very hard for my father because, as a revolutionary official, he could not have any communication with our father. This was very hard for my father, but this is the life and this was no different than every other family in Cuba. My father was a great Christian and a lovely man.

D: So he was probably the only person in your family who participated in the government as a profession. Was he younger than you?

R: Yes, two years younger than me.

D: Is he still alive today?

R: No, he died five or six years ago in Cuba. But his widow and his two daughters are outside of Cuba right now.

D: They are in the United States?

R: His widow is in Miami with one of her daughters and his youngest daughter is living in Mexico City.