

**CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

INTERVIEW WITH: ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

INTERVIEWER: DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

PLACE: LAKELAND, FLORIDA

DATE: APRIL 9, 2008

D= DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

R= ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

D: Today is April 9, 2008 and I am with Armando Rodriguez. I'm delighted to be with you here today and we're going to begin an oral history project that's going to last several days. I'm very glad to be here with you today Armando. Thank you very much. We're here at your residence which is located at 720 East Park Street, Lakeland, Florida. We're going to start with some basic questions. What year were you born?

R: I was born in November 30, 1929.

D: 1929. Where did you live, where were you born?

R: I was born on a farm that my father, Manuel Rodriguez, owned and the name of the farm was, *Ojo de Agua*, Eye of Water, in the south part of the *Las Villas* province, now it is the province of *Cienfuegos*.

D: So your father was a farmer?

R: My father was a farmer. He bought this farm and he met with my mother, Elisa Borges, and they were married.

D: Where was your father from?

R: My father was from the area of *Calimete* and *Amarillas* in the province of *Matanzas*.

D: As a younger man, did he buy the farm before he was married?

R: Yes

D: So what did his parents do and when were they born?

R: His father died very early, when they were children. I suppose in the Spanish American War, and so I did not know my grandpa from either side.

D: Do you know whether he was from Spain, or whether he had lived in Cuba a long time?

R: Yes, they belonged to a family that, of course, in the beginning, they have come from Spain and some little part from France; my blue eyes belong to France. But our ancestors were Cuban for three or four generations before.

D: So maybe as early as the 1820s or 30s perhaps?

R: Yes.

D: But you really don't know?

R: I don't know, no. I don't know what happened to either of my grandparents.

D: Do you have any idea when they would have passed away?

R: No.

D: So your father was on his own?

R: Yes.

D: Did he have any brothers and sisters?

R: He had two brothers and one sister, Jesus, Filomeno, and Cuca.

D: Do you know whether his family was involved in agriculture, were they involved in agriculture?

R: Yes, they were in agriculture and, also, in commerce. My father, before he owned his farm, he worked in commerce, in the area of *Matanzas* province.

D: So he grew up in *Matanzas*, and then by the time he reached manhood he bought a farm in the southern part of the Island, and there he met your mother?

R: Yes, and they were married there.

D: And what about your mother's family . . . do you remember what year that was they were married, or, do you know?

R: They were married in 1924.

D: Sure. Did you ever know her family . . . your mother's family?

R: Yes, they were from this area of Yaguaramas, she had three other sisters, Angela, moved to Havana, and Ana and Leonila moved to *Camagüey* province and she also had one brother, Fernando, who lived in Havana.

D: Would they visit pretty often, did you have a chance to meet them?

R: Not very often, but sometimes.

D: Did you have a chance to go to Havana as a little boy?

R: I went to Havana after my time of working in *Matanzas* province when I was a young worker.

D: So you grew up on a farm?

R: On a farm until I was sixteen years old.

D: What kind of things did you do on the farm and what kind of things did they produce on that farm? And how large was the farm?

R: The farm, in Spanish we say *trece caballería*, thirteen *caballerías*, I don't know what this mean in acres. I suppose, more or less, three hundred, four hundred acres. And he grew mainly sugar cane, but he also grew vegetables for our family use, and also he had cow and pork and chicken.

D: So you had plenty of work to do?

R: Yes, we had plenty of work to do and I can tell you that I had a happy childhood with a very good atmosphere of love and everything.

D: Were you the oldest in the family?

R: No, we are six brothers and four sisters. I am the sixth of them.

D: What were the ages . . . or just tell me . . . you don't have to tell me each family member but, what were the ages, when was the first born and then when was the last born I guess would be one way to cover it?

R: The two first, Nora, born in 1918, and Antonio in 1921...My mother was a widow with two children and then . . . she and my dad had Manuel in 1925, Oscar in 1927, René in 1928, Armando in 1929, Jesus in 1931, Lydía in 1933, Ohilda in 1935 and Ildelisa in 1937.

D: When was the last born?

R: In 1937. Right now in 2008 my older sister, she is alive, she is eighty-nine years old. My youngest sister is seventy-one years old, and I am seventy-eight years old.

D: Tell us a little bit about your mother's family. What was your mother's family . . . was she from that area? Do you know whether her family was directly from Spain, or had they been in Cuba for a long time?

R: In my understanding, their family was the same as my father's. They belonged to a different generation of Cubans.

D: Probably three or four generations back? What was her name? Her maiden name?

R: My mother's maiden name was Borges.

D: So on that farm, did your father sell sugar cane and livestock, and also vegetables? Did he sell to big companies or people in the community?

R: Yes, he only sold the sugar cane to the one sugar mill factory in *Constancia, Central Constancia*. And the other things that he grew was for self-consumption, because this was a rural area with other large farms and everyone had their own products and he didn't sell any milk from the cow. We only had the income from the sugar cane.

D: That's where you get your cash money?

R: Yes.

D: How much education do you think your father had? Did he go to school, college, whatever?

R: He and my mother had only and elementary education. This, in Cuba, met until sixth grade because they lived in the places where there was colleges or universities.

D: What are some of your first memories as a child would you say, growing up on the farm? What were some of your first memories?

R: Was a regular memory . . . was, we were playing with my brothers and sisters. We were helping in some task in the farm. And I was very happy to be, on many occasions, working with my father. Really, he is my hero.

D: What did you admire most about him?

R: Oh, I admire his form of life. He had a great principle, a great concept of morals, honesty. He was a very compassionate person. He helped any person who had less than he had and anyone who needed any medicine or anything. He helped all people. Some of my brothers said that he was not a good administrator because he shared with others.

D: He gave away everything.

R: Yes. And he was a very loving father. I didn't remember anytime when he gave me physical discipline.

D: No corporal punishment?

R: No corporal punishment, he was very loving. And, of course, I also have a great memory of my mother. She was a very loving mother. She was a hard working mother, as my father. And she was also a very organized person. You would not think she would be with ten children, but she did everything one day in the week or everything had a place in her itinerary. She died very early at forty-seven years old, during surgery in Havana. I was seventeen and my youngest sister was nine. This was a very hard time for us as family. But my father died at ninety-six years old and he died here in Orlando, Florida because, of course, when Fidel came he took all the farms and property. One of my brothers, Oscar, had about one-hundred fifty cows and the government took them. My brother, Rene, he had a tractor and other equipment and the government took it. At that time they came to Florida.

D: Now back when you were a child did your father hire workers on the farm to help with the sugar?

R: Yes, of course . . .

D: How many workers did he have on the farm?

R: This depended on the time of year. For example, when he was planting the sugar cane he needed for a week maybe ten or fifteen workers. And when it was time to harvest the sugar cane, he had, more or less, the same amount of workers. He transported the sugar cane with a *carreta con bueyes*. This means a good transportation by cow. A wood cart with two big wheels and then the cow was pulling the cart.

D: Were there a lot of people that you saw every day or was your farm isolated? Was your farm isolated or were there many other families that lived nearby?

R: Our next neighbor was maybe less than one kilometer and there, of course, the owner of other farm and so there was maybe in the immediate area about five or eight other families and other farmers.

D: Besides your parents, when you were growing up, who did you most admire? Were there any people that you met that you admired growing up? Any teachers or anything like that; that you admired, people you looked up to?

R: Well, I admired a lot my brother Manolo. He was my hero, my ideal. And there was other family that I respect a lot.

D: Did you go to school? Can you tell us about your school? How you went to school and what that was like?

R: Yes. In that place, within more or less ten miles, there was not a school. Then, especially my mother, she taught all of us, the ten children, how to write and read and then also mathematic. This was the three most important subjects, but we also had from time to time a traveling teacher that went to the each area and they gave lessons. But not one organized lesson. But our father and mother were very interested in our education and they, my father, bought some books and different things for our education. And also, when I was about twelve or thirteen years old, my older sister was married and she moved to *Yaguaramas*, the next town, and then myself and three more of us went to her home and we studied there. And on that occasion I made the sixth grade, or I finished elementary school.

D: So that brought you up to sixth grade, did you continue on after that?

R: After that I was returned to the farm but I was studying by mail. I love the accounting and then I make one contract with some accounting school in Havana and they sent me the lesson. I studied and then I took the test, and so in that time, when I was sixteen years old I was an accountant and then also I was a typist and I thought that I was a big person (laughter), a very important person. Then I asked a relative who was chief of an office in the sugar mill of *Central Zorrilla* in the *Matanzas* province. I went there in 1946 and I worked in that place as an office boy. This was until 1952 when the sugar company sent me to the central office in Havana.

D: I see. So that was at age sixteen, you were sixteen and then you worked for them one year, two years?

R: I worked for them in the office in the sugar mill from 1946 to 1952, and in the central office until 1954 when I resigned and went to the seminary. This means eight years. I worked there eight years, from 1946 to 1954.

D: Now when you were growing up on your farm, did you ever come into contact with any Americans at all? Or did you know anybody that had been to the United States?

R: Yes, my father he had some friends, Cuban and American, in the United States and at least one time they came and visited and many of the owners of the sugar cane, I suppose in the beginning, the sugar cane factory, where he sold his sugar cane, was owned by an American and after that Cubans bought the company but we had this way of contact and also, after that we had some contact with the American Methodist missionaries who worked in Cuba in *Cienfuegos*.

D: Do you remember his name? Do you remember the missionary's name?

R: Well, of course, the last of them when I was converted and I participated in the life of the Methodist Church was Dr. Carlos Stuart. He was a very important person in the history of the Methodist Church in Cuba. Of course also, the missionary who worked in the college that the Methodist Church had in *Cienfuegos* not far from our farm, and then in that Church in *Cienfuegos* I was converted when I was about twenty years old and I had very good contact with them.

D: When you were growing up, were you a Christian growing up or did you have chance to go to Church very much on the farm . . . or have access to that?

R: No, on the farm we have not Church or school or electricity or highway. But, my father when he was a young person he had contact with the first American missionary who went to Cuba and when he was living in the *Matanzas* province and he had a good understanding about the gospel and the religious life, and also he had a cousin that lived in *Abreus*, about twenty miles from our farm, and this relative sent us a Bible and other Christian literature including the *Evangelista Cubano*, the magazine of the Methodist Church in Cuba that was edited twice a month.

D: And that would have been in the '30s, in the 1930s or 1940s?

R: Yes, this was in 1930, 1940 until the revolution they printed this magazine.

D: Now when you went to *Matanzas* working for the company, was that in the city of *Matanzas* or was it in the province?

R: No, this was in the central part of the *Matanzas* province in the *Los Arabos* municipality close to *Colón*.

D: Was that more of an urban center than what you had been used to?

R: No, this was more or less a rural town, very rural town.

D: Was your mother's family Christian?

R: Not exactly, but I was speaking about my family and the main Christian contact was the *familia Valero*, my father's cousin.

D: Can you remember anything that happened in your childhood before we go to the *Matanzas* . . . can you remember anything that happened in your childhood that was particularly distressing you or required a lot of . . . it was a very solemn occasion or was a bad memory I guess, do you remember having any bad memories?

R: Really, I don't have any sad remembrances from our time. On the contrary, everything was very peaceful and very quiet and we were a very happy family and I remember that every day after dinner we had a family gathering; this was a very special time in my life.

D: Dinner being a mid-day meal or in the evening?

R: No, in the evening. All of were in the dining room and then my father guided the gathering and he spoke with us about all the problems . . . everything that took place that day; how the agricultural products were, what need of rain he had, the situations he had with the workers, the situations he had with the cow and the horses

D: Making sure everyone was doing their work correctly?

R: No, but sharing how he managed everything and this was a very important time in my life because I learned, of course, a lot about real life.

D: What did you do for fun? Did you play baseball?

R: We played with other children in the neighborhood, *beisbol* and *quinbumbia*.

D: Did you sing?

R: Yes, Cuban songs.

D: What were some of the most popular Cuban songs that you remember singing or listening to? Did you have a radio?

R: We didn't have a radio, we didn't have T.V., but my father was a subscriber to two important communications in Cuba, *El Periodico el Pais* was a national newspaper and also *La Revista Bohemia* (a magazine). That was also a national magazine and, although we were in a very isolated, rural area, when we learned to read we knew everything that was happening, not only in Cuba but all around the world. I remember when the Second World War came, I read the newspaper every day . . . well not every day because the newspaper came to *Yaguaramas* and we picked them up two or three times a week, but I read all the developments of the Second World War.

D: How familiar did you become with the politics of your Island, who was the leader . . . Machado I guess . . . Machado was the leader? Did you ever hear your father talk about him?

R: I was born in the Machado era but I remember two types of history about Machado. The first four years, the first period, was the best government my father said that we had in Cuba because he developed industry in every different area. But, the problems started in the second period and then all the situations were in the second period, but we have two phases in the Machado era and I remember one popular song that they sang which was, *Machado haciendo leyes y el prueblo*

comiendo harina. This means that Machado was making new laws but the people were eating *harina*. *Harina* is the corn. And for Cubans, the more low level in food is *harina* or corn.

D: When you were growing up, what would you say was the attitude toward the United States among the people that you knew? Did they like the United States, did they not like the United States?

R: At that time, and after that time, I would say before the revolution the ninety percent of the Cuban people had a very good concept about the United States and the American people. And they saw the United States as a country that liked to do the best, not only for them but also for others. And in Cuba, when a person had work with any American enterprise they were a very happy person and we didn't have bad feeling as found in Spain or in other Latin-American countries. The Cuban people always were a very friendly people to the United States.

D: Now the company that you worked for, I would imagine, in Matanzas and then many other companies, was that company owned by the United States, was that an American company?

R: No, in the beginning, of course, the American's founded them. But, in the process, in that time, this sugar cane enterprise belonged to a Cuban family.

D: The one you worked for?

R: Yes.

D: One of the other things that I want to ask you about before we move on too far is, when you were growing up, you're white, you're a white man, and your family was white, what kind of conditions were there for the different races? Was there segregation as we had it in the United States between white and black? Did you experience that growing up?

R: Well, I will say two things. In the first place, the Cuban people grew up with a very good fraternal fellowship with all the races. Then, of course, the main race not white was the black people and also the Chinese people. Also there were some Arabic people, especially in the commerce.

D: Jewish people as well, correct?

R: Jewish people but not so much, mainly in Havana and in the big city. In the rural areas we lived in very good harmony. But in other ways, for example, in my town of *Yaguaramas* there was in white club . . . I mean an organization, social organization, for white and a social organization or club for the black people. But, in spite of that, we went to the same school and we went without any bad relationship as, of course, in that time there was in the United States.

D: Now would that situation be different in big cities like Santiago or Havana? Would there be a difference in the city versus the country as far as relations go in your mind?

R: Although I was a farmer boy, I think there was the same attitude, more or less the same, especially in *Santiago de Cuba* and *Oriente* where the main black population lived. Then, of course, the situation was better. But in our mind, for example, there was not the possibility of marriage between a black person and a white person, but we didn't have a problem with that, this was the main discrimination.

D: So that was something that nobody would conceive of really?

R: Yes, sure.

D: That is white people and black people marrying, that would probably never ever happen, correct?

R: No, this situation was more real in Puerto Rico. In my opinion, in Puerto Rico, they are more open and free to another race.

D: Well let's go to Matanzas now then. Can you tell me what your normal working day would have been in Matanzas when you were working there? What was that like?

R: For me this was my great success. (laughter) To be a young farm person of sixteen years and to work in the office in a sugar cane factory, this was a very high position for . . .

D: Whiteshirt?

R: Yes.

D: Tie?

R: For me. And then I receive my salary, but in the beginning my salary was only sixty pesos a month. But this was great for me. I considered that a great success in my life. And also, I, in the first year, I worked only in the sugar cane month, in the *safra* month.

D: Which is when they pick, harvest, correct?

R: Yes, harvest, and the sugar factory work.

D: Now what month was that normally?

R: This was from January to April. They made in three and a half months more than five million tons of sugar. Now, the government, in order to make one million and a half tons, they need to work six months.

D: Armando can you share with us a religious experience during your childhood; a personal religious experience?

R: My religious experience in my childhood came from especially my father who taught and spoke with us about God, the gospel, and the difference between the Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches. And after that I had a very important personal experience. When I was six years old, on the farm, came one *huracán*. A very, very, bad *huracán*, and we were in our home and the wind went down the roof of my house and then our father told us we will remain here at home because if we left the home, there are many dangerous situations. And then we went *de bajo la mesa, como se dice?*

D: Under the table?

R: Under the table in the dining room, a big table, and, in that moment, when we were there the rain was coming, of course, the wind and so, I remember for all of my life the prayer that my father said. This was a very little and simple prayer. I don't remember what words he said, but I remember that. I saw through this prayer one peaceful experience without any fear, and my father, in that very bad moment, that I said for myself at six years old, Oh God is a reality and we can be faithful to him in all the situations. And then this put in me a spirit of confidence, peaceful, and I don't have any bad remembrance of this bad experience. Also, I remember from my childhood faith that mother sat down on the couch and read the Bible every day. And, of course, we read the Christian literature and the Bible; but these two things, events, had a tremendous impact on my entire life.

D: Well now you're off to Matanzas as a professional accountant in one of the large sugar refineries in Cuba. What were some of your first impressions when you took your new job?

R: My impression was that I was a very important person. (laughter) My impression was that I liked to learn and that this was a great opportunity for my development and I needed to learn a lot. I was working without any specific task, but helping every one of the other workers that needed help. I was in the office not only during work, but at any time that I could be . . . for that reason I worked in the first year only, the time of the *zafra*, the harvest time of the sugar cane. But the second year, during the harvest time, one Sunday I was in the office and the manager of the sugar mill came and called me to his office and he asked me, "Oh Armando, will you like to work here all the year?" (laughter) And this was, for me, another big opportunity. And from that time until the end I was working all the year.

D: Where did you live, did they have a place for you to live or?

R: Yes, there was a house for the office and other employees of the company.

D: What were some of the things you did as you moved along the first year, the next year? Did you actually become involved in accounting at some point?

R: Yes, then I had some special job, mainly in the cane department. This means to take account of the sugar cane that the sugar mill receives and what amount belonged to each one of the land owners. There were many land owners. And then I worked also helping in *Departamento de nóminas*, the payroll department. And I had very good contact with the land owners and also the workers of the factory.

D: How many people worked in the mill altogether?

R: I think that around, in the harvest time, there was more than three hundred.

D: How many people were full-time in the office?

R: In the office we had, in the harvest time, about ten; and during the rest of the year, maybe six.

D: What was the name of the company?

R: *Compania Azucarera Zorrilla* (Zorrilla Sugar Company).

D: O.k., we're back in Matanzas, what year did you begin at Matanzas again, what year was that?

R: I begin to work in 1946 only in the harvest time and then I began in 1947 permanently until 1952 when I was sent to the central office in Havana, until 1954, when I resigned and went to the seminary.

D: From '46 until '52 can you go through the progressions of your duties? That is, you started as an office boy and then you had many jobs, I'm sure, up to 1952. Can you go through those?

R: Well, as I told you, after 1947 I was working as office boy, but in 1947 I had a special duty, mainly in the sugar cane department, this was with the land owners during the harvest time. And then, the rest of the year, I work in the Accounting Department. And so the salary was increasing, of course. At first, my salary was sixty pesos a month. In the second time, I made one hundred twenty-eight, and in the last time one hundred fifty-two. This was not enough, but since I begin as a boy, an office boy, they didn't pay enough but I was happy because I didn't have many expenses, many bills to pay, I paid only the food bill in the restaurant.

D: Were you in a kind of a dormitory situation? Did they have meals for you at the mill? Did you live in company housing there?

R: I lived in the company house and for free.

D: That was part of the job that you got the free housing.

R: Yes, free housing. And I paid for the meal, but only thirty or thirty-five pesos a month for the three meals.

D: Did everyone in the mill eat there as well, just about? Did everybody have the same situation?

R: Well, there were different situations. Of course, many of the workers had their own house and family there. They didn't use the restaurant. There were other workers that had a group arrangement. They had a person who cooked for them. And the others, that didn't have family in the town, we ate in the restaurant.

D: In the 1940s, political events were changing quite a lot in Cuba, what were some of your memories in 1940, '41, '42 . . . I'm sorry, '46, '47? That was right after World War Two.

R: Yes. Even before 1946, when Batista was the elected President from '40 to '44, I and many other young people and most of the Cuban people were against Batista and they saw in Grau San Martín hope. For that reason Grau San Martín won the election with a very, very high proportion and all of us were very happy thinking that the political situation will be changing. But, after one or two years we knew that he was the same as other politicians and then the people were very angry on that occasion.

D: The same being bribery, corruption, graft, that kind of thing?

R: Yes. And also, there was some group that was fighting in the university and other places. The security problem, the violence was very high at that time.

D: And it emanated out of the university?

R: Yes.

D: And Grau was from the university, correct?

R: Yes. Grau was Professor in the medicine school.

D: Did Grau have his university backers, I guess, or were there conflicts among the different university factions.

R: He was a man without any specific personality and principle. He was speaking against the corruption of Batista and, for that reason, the people followed him. But he was not a person with a real personality in principle and he wished to be with all the groups.

D: His party was the . . . ?

R: *Auténtico, partido auténtico*. Do you know what mean *auténtico*?

D: Sure, can you describe that for me?

R: Yes, this was the *Partido Rrevolucionario Cubano*. That was the party that was founded by Jose Martí. And they say *auténtico* because it's the same party that Jose Martí founded.

D: They represented their party as an heir to Martí?

R: To Martí, and Martí is a big leader in Cuba as you know. But he changed, he was corrupted, many people in his government made many, many mistakes and, for that reason, in 1948 when Prío Socarrás became President, all the Cuban people were very unhappy with the way of life in Cuba.

D: Now, if we go back to 1940, wasn't there a new constitution that was written in 1940?

R: Yes, this constitution was a very nice constitution. And the good purpose of the leaders in Cuba put together, they thought, and they made, we think, the best constitution that we had had. But, for that reason the election was started because, before that, there was a period from 1933 that Machado was finished and many other different Presidents, not elected, and, in that time, Batista gave the *Golpe del Estado en cuatro de septiembre*, four of September of 1933 and he work, more or less, as Fidel did. He was a sergeant, but the sergeant who had the task of sending the orders; and he was together with three or four other sergeants and they carried out the four of September Coup of State.

D: *Coup d'état*? And they fired the officers?

R: Yes, but he was the chief of the Army. He was not the President, but he was the man of power. And he put different people in political positions.

D: From 1933 until 1940, would you say that among the people you knew, and then yourself and others, what was their opinion of Batista? You would have been young, very young.

R: No, no but I have and I heard a lot of history.

D: Right, what was the general opinion of Batista at that time, until 1940?

R: I will say the general opinion, it was not only Batista; there were different leaders in front of Batista. José Miguel Gomez was one of the persons elected as president but he lasted only a very short time, and many other leaders. I say I heard from my father that the main leader against Batista in that time was Mario Garcías Menocal. And my father was a very good sympathizer with Menocal, but Menocal and the other leaders of the opposition made an agreement with Batista and my father was very unhappy with Menocal. And then, after the constitution of 1940, Batista made an arrangement with Menocal and the other leaders and he said, "Please elect me as official president in 1940 and after my four years you can do

everything,” you know, and all the other leaders agreed with that. And, for that reason, Batista was elected in 1940 with a very close relationship with the Communist Party and with both the left and the right hand. They divided the power, a little power to each one. A very famous communist leader was Minister of Agriculture. And for that reason he had what they liked. To be official president, to receive money for corruption, and he was happy with this. And then, he was right and when Grau San Martín was elected in 1944 he didn't do anything against it and he gave the power to him.

D: Now what do you think Grau's position was on communism, or on socialism? Is it true that he was more to the left and was more sympathetic with that point of view?

R: No. In that way Batista was more sympathetic and had an agreement with the communists. And Grau, no. And then in the time of Grau San Martín the communists were a little far from the government. But, the communists profited the time when Batista was preside and they made a good deal with the worker organizations and, more or less, all the worker organizations in 1946, when I had my first work, the worker organization of the sugar company was under the communists and there was a very important leader, very honest, Jesus Menendez.

D: Was he the head of the sugar workers' union?

R: Union Yes.

D: Was that nationwide?

R: Nationwide yes.

D: Did you ever come in contact with him when you were at the mill?

R: Not with him but in my sugar cane enterprise work, one brother of him. Of course he was a very good communist, Alfonso Menendez.

D: Were the sugar cane workers organized in unions pretty much throughout your entire experience, even when you were a child? Do the unions go back that far, the sugar cane worker unions?

R: The sugar cane worker and all the other unions. The leader of all the national unions was the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba*, Confederation of Cuban Workers. The general secretary was Blas Rocca, a communist, and many of the unions for different workers were communist. Really the worker union was in the hand of the communists, but after that Grau San Martín and Prío Socarrás, they were against the communists and they lost all the power. For example, I don't know in what year but maybe in 1948 or '49, Jesus Menendes was killed in *Manzanillo* by a captain of the army.

D: Assassinated?

R: Assassinated Yes. And in different way they stopped the communist control of the worker union.

D: Now was that killing orchestrated by the military?

R: Yes.

D: Batista?

R: Not Batista. This was in the time of I think of Carlos Prío Socarrás. Juaquin Casilla, Captain. And I knew him because he was the chief of the army in my area and in that time he was making politics for some other military and he visited my farm and my family and I remember him. And even two of their daughters, they were very good Baptists in the congregation where my wife's father was a Baptist pastor, I don't know if you know that she is the daughter of a Baptist pastor.

D: What kind of things, when you worked those six years, those four years, did you do for entertainment? Was there more opportunity for entertainment in that community then where you grew up?

R: Yes there was, but not so much. I, of course in that time, we worked six days in a week from Monday to Saturday.

D: Eight hour day?

R: Eight hour day, and in the last time we had forty-four hour in for forty-eight. This means that the law was that we work on Saturday only four hour until noon. But the Sunday we went to *Los Arabos* the close town there, to go to the *Teatro* and *Cine*. (Theatre and Cinema) This was mainly because all the time we were working and, of course, when I was in the sugar mill I began to study. And then, I went to Havana to the university and I bought the book in order to take a test, special test, for the university. My goal was *Ciencia Comerciales*, commercial science or business administration. As an accountant this was my goal.

D: Would this have been a four year program, two year program?

R: Four year program. When we began studying in the university, four year, but before that, as I was not a professional accountant, as I didn't have the *Licenciatura*, the high school or college, then the university had a very nice program for people as us that can study and take a test, very hard test, and then to come to the university through this test.

D: So your dream was to attend the business school at the University of Havana?

R: Of course this was my dream because my father, when I was child, he challenged me, “Oh Armando you must study and to prepare and to do your best.” My father was my hero. And then I had this goal. But, the year when I was ready to do the test in the business school, they started that, to have the right to do this test in this school, we must have at least twenty-five years, and I was only twenty. (laughter) But then I said, “Oh I need to do something,” and then I went to the other school, social science, and they didn’t have this age requirement. And then I took the test in the other school. I was approved and I studied as, I will say as extension student. I didn’t go every day to school but I was registered and I bought the books, I studied, and then I went to take the test, final test, there. And then, I, in 1954, I was a graduate of *Licenciado en Derecho Administrativo*. This is more or less Master in Business Administration. And then I had some matter common to the business school, but, at that time, God called me.

D: If we go back to your time in *Matanzas*, you went to the movies?

R: Yes.

D: What were some of the movies that you enjoyed watching back then? Did they have American movies?

R: Yes, there were some westerns and also the Mexican movies. The Mexican movies were very popular in Cuba because, in that time, Cuba was the most developed in all the region. I will say to you even in the Latin-American region. Maybe Argentine with their tie with Europe was more or less, but when I went to my first international gathering in the Church in 1961, I was in Argentina, Buenos Aires, and then the cars that they used were very old. And in Cuba we had the car of last year. In Havana, the agency of car they put the new car in the same day that they did in New York and the main city here in the United States. And then, in Cuba, in that way for Mexico and even Puerto Rico, we were more developed than Puerto Rico, and Cuba was, I will say, honestly, in the first place in economical development. Of course, there was poverty, there were many problems, but the other countries had bigger problems than us but they didn’t have the economical development that we had in that time.

D: Now in 1946 were there telephones and electricity on the Island, pretty much by that time, in 1946?

R: Of course radio, we had radios. In that time, when I went to the sugar mill in 1946 the electricity that we had in the town was produced by the company, not three or four years after that then came the national electricity company.

D: General Electric?

R: Well, we say *Compañía Cubana de Electricidad*, but was owned by American enterprise.

D: Now also railroads, were there railroads in your memory growing up, or were railroads not extending to your area? Do you remember?

R: Yes, I remember, we had railroad. Federal rail in a little time about eight . . . two or three miles from my farm, that went three days in a week: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. And they went from there to the *Cienfuegos* Bay and then we had there some ships to *Cienfuegos* City. And then, in *Yaguaramas*, ten miles from us, we have a railroad that the train came every day, then we had a connection with all Cuba: Havana, *Oriente*, etc.

D: So you could ride, as a little boy, to Havana on the railroad?

R: We needed to go by horse to the railroad station in Yaguaramas.

D: When was the first time you went to Havana, do you remember the first time?

R: Yes, I remember very well because the central highway in Cuba was about three miles from the sugar mill where I worked. And then I went to Havana by bus and my uncle, Jesus, my father's brother, lived there and then I went to his house. And then, in 1947 my mother had a surgery in Havana with the best medical doctor that we had, but she died in the surgery. She had a heart problem and she died at forty-seven years old. And, after that, of course, I went to Havana to study.

D: As you progressed in the company, did you go to Havana? Did you go on business or visit there, travel there?

R: Not in any relation to the business but only when I was transferred, moved to there. But I visited in 1950, I think, I took the test to come to the Havana University and, of course, in that time I went back because there was a very good communication way through the central highway of Cuba.

D: Now back in '46 through '50, did people that you knew have cars? Were there a lot of cars?

R: No, very few people had cars but some had, and of course, one new Chevrolet you could buy for two thousand Cuban pesos because the Cuban pesos had the same or a little biggest price that the American dollar. Before Fidel, Cuban pesos were two cents more than the American dollars.

D: So a peso and a dollar were pretty much equal?

R: Equal or very little more.

D: And you made how much a month again?

R: At that time I made one hundred fifty-two and I had been a very good administrator all my life, and when I resigned in the company, I had more than two thousand Cuban pesos saved. But, what I say, I don't like to go to the seminary in a big, because this amount in that time was big savings. And then I resigned in January 1st of 1954 and I bought many thing and I made my

budget and when I was the first time in the seminary, the 1st of October of 1954 I did what I like. I asked to my pastor in Havana to loan me ten pesos for my trip from Havana to the seminary, in *Matanzas*, (laughter), because I like to live by faith not with a savings account.

D: Baseball, how much did you know about baseball? Did you play baseball?

R: I played baseball and I was very fond of the game

D: Was it a very popular sport?

R: Yes, very, very popular in sport. And there was the professional organization for baseball in Cuba, very, very high condition and many of the Cuban player went to the major league here in the States, for example Oreste Meñoso.

D: Minnie Minoso?

R: Yes and Adolfo Lague, Miguel Angel Gonzales, many other . . .

D: Tony Olíva?

R: Tony Olíva, Tony Perez.

D: Now, when you were young, growing up, and also in *Matanzas*, did you know all the players, did you go to games, did you ever have a chance to go to the games?

R: When I was in Havana, working in Havana, I had many opportunities and, of course, my team was *Cienfuegos*. There were four national teams, *Almendades*, *Havana*, *Marianao*, and *Cienfuegos*. And my team, of course, I was there from the region, was *Cienfuegos*. And I went to the stadium in Havana one time when *Cienfuegos* was playing with Havana. And I take one ball (laughter). This was a very nice experience for me.

D: Can you reflect a little about your political activities at that time?

R: I will say that I was very involved in the political situation of Cuba because, in the magazine that we received in our farm, nationally, this was *Bohemia*, a very nice magazine. And they had one section that the called *In Cuba*. And they wrote about all the political situations and this was a very special section for me.

D: When was the first time you began reading that magazine? How old were you when you started paying attention to that?

R: Maybe when I was nine or ten years old because this was in a very regular literature in my home.

D: And you were able to follow the politics of the country?

R: Everything and the world's problems. Then, as I told you, when Grau San Martín won the power we were very excited, but after that the corruption was in the Grau San Martín government and then Eduardo Chibas founded the *Orthodoxo* Party and I was one of the first members. I was the president, of the Orthodox youth, in my municipality and then I was the recording secretary in the province, executive of the youth, Orthodox youth, for all of *Matanzas* province. And then I knew two important people, Dr. Mario Muñoz. That was the medical doctor that was with Fidel in the *Oriente* struggle . . .

D: In later years?

R: Yes, and then Julio Reyes. He was the organizational secretary for the same executive in Matanzas.

D: Now this would have been '48, '49, '50?

R: Yes, '48, '49, '50.

D: In the beginning?

R: In the beginning of the *Orthodoxo* Party.

D: Of the movement yes.

R: And I was with Chibas, and Dr. Muñoz and the other leaders in the Chibas movement.

D: Not Fidel, but Chibas?

R: Not Fidel. Fidel was Orthodox but in Havana.

D: Right in Havana, at the university?

R: Yes in the university. I was with Chibas at all of the meetings and I had, I don't have them now, but I had a picture with him at the event, I had pictures when I was candidate for commissioner of my town. There was the Chibas picture and then my picture. In 1950, the Orthodox Party was very small and in all the *Matanzas* Province we didn't have any Orthodox representative to the congress. We didn't have an elected Mayor in the municipality. We only had nineteen commissioners in different municipalities and I was one of the nineteen commissioners. Of course, I was very close to the leader in Havana.

D: At where was Chibas living?

R: In Havana.

D: Where was he originally from, do you remember?

R: I think he was born in Havana.

D: But he visited you there often?

R: Yes, all of Cuba, and this was a very nice experience because from 1950 when we had few elected officials on any level of government. In 1952, all the Cuban people knew, and even the American government knew, that Eduardo Chibas would be the elected president on June 1, 1952. And what happened? Many other politicians from other parties came to Chibas to be with him, and this was a very sad situation and time because, for that reason, he killed himself and then Batista took the power in 1952. Of course, we don't know, when Batista finished his government in 1944, he left the country. But, two or three years after that, he came back to Cuba. He was in Cuba and, I think that he was elected a Senator for some province. But he was quiet. But this date, 10 March 1952, he took the power and, on that occasion, we the Orthodox Party was against that, and he made his rule of government that if any Senator, Representative, Mayor, or Commissioner would like to continue in their work, they must sign the rule of government that they could not contradict this. He put out the constitution of 1940 and he established his rule of government. Of course, I didn't sign this rule of government and I was put out of my task in the government. But, I'd like to say that this year, 1952, was a very special change in my life. In the first time, one year before in 1951, I was converted in a very great way in the Methodist Church in *Cienfuegos*. Then, in June of 1952, I was transferred from the sugar mill to the Havana office. And then, in June of 1952, I met this young girl named Elida. This created a big change in my life. I lost all the political contacts, I didn't see Mario Muñoz, Julito Reyes and the other members of the Orthodox Party. Not just because of the Batista government, but I changed the orientation of my life. At that time I was interested only in my work, in my studies, and in my Church. And then, I didn't have any contact any other group. In July 27 of 1953, Fidel and Mario Muñoz and Julito Reyes and many others attacked the *Moncada Barracks* in *Santiago de Cuba*. But, two months later, on September 23 of 1953, I felt my special calling from God to the ministry.