

Enrique Levy  
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Samuel (S): Thank you so much for doing this. We are almost ready.

Enrique (E): You are in Chapel Hill?

S: Right now I'm at the University of Miami on a grant from the Cuban Heritage Collection and so I'm down there this semester which is pretty cool but I'm up here for a wedding so I wanted to see...

E: But normally you're at University of North Carolina?

S: That's where I'm getting my doctorate. Yeah.

E: Is there a professor there Perez?

S: Perez is the last name? Louis Perez?

E: Not Louis Perez. He is not the one I mean. The other guy, the other person, he wrote several books on life on the... how do you say that in English? He was talking about Cuban association with the American culture and things like that. He is from...

S: And what is his name?

E: I can't remember.

S: Not Lars Schultz?

E: No, no, no. He's Cuban.

S: Not on the history faculty.

E: No. If he's anything he's in the romance languages or something like that.

S: Okay. No I haven't read him. I should check him out.

E: But I don't remember his last name.

S: Do you remember the book?

E: No. You know when you get to be my age you forget a lot of things.

S: Alright can we start with the Jewish community in Cuba? What I'm really interested in... cause this whole idea of ladino being this language that kind of drew you guys to Cuba, was that just your town or was that a larger community of Sephardic Jews?

E: Well there was a larger community of Sephardic Jews that came not just from that town. They came from various towns.

S: Okay but in that area of the former Ottoman Empire?

E: In that area that is called today is the European side of Turkey.

S: Right.

E: Then it was called Tracia, T-r-a-c-i-a. That's the Roman name. The Ottoman Empire of course took in what is today Turkey and all the area south of Bulgaria, all of Greece and then on the south on the way to Egypt. The people that came to Cuba came from mostly that area where Istanbul is, Istanbul and the adjoining towns. I traveled from Istanbul to Silivri in one hour. I remember the stories of my mother it was eight hours and you had to take a boat and things like that. So they came from that area and there were many towns in that area. One of them is Silivria or Silivri in Turkish and that's where my parents came from and many of the Jews that went to Cuba came from there.

S: Is there still a community of Jews in that area?

E: Not in that area. There is a community of Jews in Istanbul and in Izmir which is on the Eastern side but not in those towns.

S: Was that the Holocaust or...

E: They left way before. The main... there are two reasons for emigration. One of them is economics. The Ottoman Empire was disintegrating. That area of what is today Turkey was a battlefield. A battlefield during the Balkan Wars and a battlefield during World War I. Gallipoli, the famous battle of Gallipoli, Churchill's folly. That's in Tunisia. So anyway, not too far from there. So that's one thing. The other one is conscription. Every male from the age of 18 to 55 was conscripted into the Turkish army. So the men left in order not to be conscripted. I have two uncles that left my mother's family... my mother's family was my mother and a sister and two brothers. The two brothers left in order not to serve in World War I. My grandfather who stayed there with my grandmother and the two girls, at that time they were girls, he paid to have fake papers to say that he was above age 55. He grew a beard and from that day on he wore a fez. Okay? So he passed World War I sort of with fake papers so they would not conscript him. But then comes the point that after World War I, 1919, things were terrible and at the same time families were split.

S: And there was a war going on.

E: And there were wars going on. The Turkish Republic did not come into existence until about 1923 so there were these wars. So all of that. Families were split. Take my mother's family, two brothers are in Cuba. So then there are lots of other people there. Now what I'm going to tell you is what I heard from my mother and my aunt and my grandmother. In the town of Silivria... I didn't send you something I wrote about Silivria did I?

S: I don't think so.

E: Okay. I have a whole write up about Silivria.

S: That would be great.

E: In the town of Silivria there was a rabbi, which happens to have been my mother's uncle. Gershon Maya was his name. And Gershon Maya, the story goes, which I believe  $\frac{3}{4}$  of it is legend and  $\frac{1}{4}$  of it is true because they said it so many times that legend becomes truth, that one Shabbat he said to the congregation, "I am leaving. All my children, all my male children are in Cuba. What am I doing here? I am leaving." He was the rabbi of the town and everybody in the congregation said, "If you go, we go." And so they went to Istanbul to get papers. Three months later the legend goes, they went to the Aron Kodesh in the synagogue, they opened the doors, they took the sacred torah, they went to Istanbul, they got on a ship and they went to Cuba. That was the end of the community of Silivri. That is a fact. How do I know this? Well the story goes that they all came in one big bunch to Cuba and at the same time, later on in Miami there was a Turkish Rabbi Myeer Melamet and he and I had a conversation and he said, "When I was in Izmir in Istanbul in 1923, the rosh yeshiva told us, 'Go to Silivria, go to the Jewish quarter and take off the mezuzahs from the doors because if not they are going to be desecrated.'" He said to me, "I went to Silivria. There were no Jews left and I took the mezuzahs from the doors." So I kind of like confirmed that in 1923...

S: Everybody was gone. How old was your mother at this point?

E: When she left, 14 and my father was 18.

S: Got it. But they weren't from that same town?

E: They were. Both of them. My mother and my father were born in Silivri. They left at the same time. They took different ships from Istanbul to France. One of them, my mother, went on a Mediterranean cargo ship, my father went on another ship. The group met in Marseilles. They went from Marseilles by train to San Nazaire, which is a big port on the western side of France. And in San Nazaire they boarded a ship which was on its maiden voyage called SS Cuba, which ran from San Nazaire to La Coruna, which is a port in another part of Spain to Cuba and to Veracruz and then went back again. It was part of the company Generale Transatlantique de France. I have a picture of the ship.

S: Do you? I would love to see it at some point.

E: You know what? Lets go upstairs because I have the documents upstairs.

S: That would be excellent. Were there pogroms as well or no?

E: No, no. Nothing like that. I mean there was friction but not mass killings or...

S: Got it. Once you were in Cuba... Wow this is so cool. What a cool home.

E: We've lived here many years. Since 1979 actually.

S: Once you were in Cuba, did the Jewish community operate as a cohesive unit or were the Sephardic Jews separate from the Ashkenazi Jews?

E: They were separate until they began to intermarry but at the very beginning they were separate. The first thing that united them, the two communities together was the formation of the state of Israel. They galvanized themselves into that.

S: So '48 then?

E: Here we go. My grandson is doing a roots project so he asked me for... let me show you this picture. This is my mother and this is her brother, her brother's wife, and the rest of these people are relatives of her. This was after my grandfather died. My mother went to live in their household. She was still single.

S: What year was this?

E: 1930. Okay so here is a copy of it.

S: Wonderful. If you could email that to me that would be fantastic.

E: Do you want me to print it? I can print it now but I can email it as well.

S: Yeah email is actually better just because I like reading things on my computer and then I can just quote you directly. It's okay if I use this?

E: Yeah, yeah. There is a Facebook page or group, how do you call that? A page? Called "Descendants of the Jews from Silivri" and I contributed that to it. So that's in the public domain. But let me show you... see that's a typical street in Silivri today.

S: How many Jews lived in Silivri?

E: At that time maybe a couple of thousand. Silivri is famous all over Turkey for their yogurt. When you say yogurt in Turkey they say, "Silivri en iyi yogurtlu" Which means the best yogurt comes from Silivri and they have an annual yogurt festival.

S: Wow. How many languages did your parents speak?

E: My mother only ladino. The women were only ladino. My father spoke ladino and he spoke Turkish. Now my grandfather on my mother's side spoke ladino, Turkish and Hebrew. My grandfather on my father's side spoke that plus one more language which was Bulgarian because he was a merchant of cheese and he had to go to Bulgaria to buy cheeses and all his products came from Bulgaria. He was sort of like a wholesaler. He bought cheeses and then he cut them up in pieces and sold them to the little stores. So he knew Bulgarian. This is a fountain in Silivri. Still exists. I went to Silivri.

S: Do you speak any Turkish?

E: None. This is Cuba.

S: Wow. That's incredible.

E: But you see, this is how I tell the story, I was telling you exactly that starting from here. The story is more of a legend because at one Shabbat Gershon Maya... my mother's uncle told the people that conditions were... like many other families he already had sons in Cuba so he said he was joining his sons. That created a furor, which prompted the decision that since the head of the congregation was leaving everyone else was also leaving. Preparations took place and a few months later the Jewish population of Silivri went to kal, which means synagogue to get the torah. That's true because all those torahs are in Havana.

S: Still?

E: Still. I've been to Havana several times. I've checked them.

S: Which...

E: In the Sephardic Center.

S: Where is the Sephardic Center?

E: In Vedado.

S: Yeah. Not with Adela?

E: No that's the patronato.

S: Okay. She's fantastic. Super helpful.

E: Yeah. That's the patronato. So I say they board the steamship for Cuba... the Generale Transatlantique and then with a stop in La Coruna they sailed to Cuba. The last group of Silivriese went to build their lives and their community in a new land.

S: Who else lived in Silivri?

E: Greeks. A lot of Greeks.

S: But you guys didn't speak Greek at all?

E: Interestingly enough, I had forgotten, my two grandparents spoke Greek. The men, not the women. The women were protected in their little ghetto.

S: You can answer that.

E: Adele I think will answer. Lets see. See this is the... grave of my grandmother in Havana where I had it rebuilt because it was a mess. Have you been to the cemetery in Cuba?

S: The big one in Havana?

E: Near Guanabacoa.

S: By the zoo? It's like on the far side of Vedado?

E: No. That's the Colon Cemetery. This is a Jewish Cemetery. That's my grandfather's grave, which I rebuilt because it was a mess. It was cracked open.

S: Where is that?

E: In Guanabacoa, which is outside of Havana in... there are two cemeteries, one is the Ashkanazi, the first cemetery. Then the Sephardim decided they were going to build a different one and they did.

S: When your family arrived in Cuba there was an existing Jewish community right?

E: Yes. But... Naciente. The arrival of that group was very welcome. Why? Because a rabbi came. Gershon Maya. There was no rabbi.

S: Your great uncle?

E: My great uncle. There were no rabbis in Cuba at that time and he was a rabbi in Silivria and he came.

S: So did he then serve both the Ashkanazi and the Sephardic?

E: No. No. There were very few Ashkanazi at that time. You know the history of the Jews of Cuba? The first Jewish community was American. They came with the American army in 1898 and after the Spanish-American War. And the reason they came was they were the providers of things to the American army. They were the merchants and they established the first synagogue in Vedado on Paseo, which was the American synagogue. Then they established a cemetery and they reason they established a cemetery is like I say, you need a traumatic event for the Jewish community to move very fast and it is that one Jew died and they had to bury him in the Christian cemetery. Then the community said, "Well this can't happen." So they went and bought a piece of land in Guanabacoa and they built a cemetery. And if you see the entrance to the cemetery at Guanabacoa, that's the name of the American congregation on top.

S: And were remnants of that still around when you were growing up?

E: Oh yes. Very much so. But they were the first ones to leave after Castro. Quick. I think you've wrote your Master's thesis on the Americans between '59 and...

S: ... '61. You looked that up?

E: But I couldn't find it.

S: It wasn't great.

E: But you know, I'd love to...

S: I can send that to you. My theories about all of it have changed significantly.

E: They have? Have you read a lot of the *Havana Post*?

S: Yeah. I've been living in the *Havana Post* archives. I was actually just looking at the *Havana Post*. I've been tracing major events in the *Havana Post*. So how they respond to things throughout the '50s and it's interesting. Also it's interesting talking about race with people that I interview because a lot of the Americans that I interview say they didn't know about race until they got to the United States, like racism wasn't a thing in Cuba. But then in the Havana classifieds you have all these people who are offering themselves as domestic help saying that they were white which was interesting to me. I didn't know if that was a response to what they perceived as American culture or... I don't know. You were probably disconnected from that world a little bit.

E: A little bit. I... although I grew up in a 100 percent Cuban community. There was not Jewish influence.

S: Thank you so much.

E: Now what's your email?

S: It's finesurrey@gmail f-i-n-e-s... you got it.

E: Oh here it is. Now I have to look for the Silivri.

S: That you so much. I really appreciate this. Documents like this are so helpful. What did you do for work when you were here?

E: I'm a chemical engineer.

S: Where did you go to school?

E: Louisiana State University. LSU.

S: Oh that's right. We talked about this. For sugar right?

E: I worked for chemical engineering and sugar engineering. I did both. Where is the Silivri document? With pictures. Here we go. Send. Okay now I think before we go on lets look at my archives okay? Because then... Okay Candler College.

S: Wow. You guys did reunions?

E: Yes we did.

S: When was the last one? Or do you still do reunions? Wow. Wow. That's outstanding.

E: Did you go to Havana to see these places?

S: This is Candler?

E: Yes. This has changed. This building was redone.

S: No Candler wasn't part of my project until I got back honestly.

E: And this is Buena Vista, the girl's school.

S: Does it still look like that?

E: No. It's falling apart. It's horrible.

S: You've been back right?

E: Yes. Several times. Okay, you speak Spanish right? Well this is something which was written by, what's her name? Mercy Abrieu. Abrieu was a professor at Candler and this is Abrieu's daughter. She lives in Colombia. Alright. Now this is quite a lot of information about the Methodist church in Cuba, in Candler and how they came and so on. And a lot of stuff now. For example here is a list of all of the professors. So that's one of the things.

S: So would somebody like Carol English be on that list?

E: Lets see. By the way, this Gilbert is a missionary.

S: B.F. Gilbert.

E: Right. A family that went to Cuba as missionaries and the grandson of this Gilbert lives in Miami. Novo. His first name... his last name is Novo. He went to school with me. Here are the people who were in high school with Mrs. Sandback. The coach of the baseball team just died two weeks ago.

S: Did you play baseball?

E: I was terrible in sports.

S: Really? You've got good size though.

E: When I got to Candler I was tall already and the basketball coach called me and said you have to come in and try. Two weeks later he said, "You're a lost case. You can't jump." And still I can't jump. I ran track. Anyway I think you should have these.

S: Thank you so much. Now your father, they moved to a small town...

E: Macareño.

S: Macareño and there was a sugar mill there right?

E: Right.

S: And the U.S. sugar mill was kind of responsible for all of the employment in the town like that...

E: Totally.

S: So all of the services, were they also responsible for them or was the government involved at all?

E: The government was not involved at all. For example the electric plant belonged to the sugar mill company. The water supply belonged to the sugar mill company. The streets, not that they maintained them but whatever they had to do it was the sugar mill company. All the homes were ownership of the sugar mill company which was given to employees. It was like a company town. Here in the United States I don't think there are many company towns left but there were because I remember one time going to an interview in Arkansas to a paper company when I was looking for employment and had graduated chemical engineering. And it was a company town. The store was the company the houses were painted the same way, everything. That's the way it was in Macareño.

S: And Macareño, m-a-c...

E: M-a-c-a-r-e-ñ-o.

S: Was that, it seems like these existed many places. Like Preston seems to have a massive...

E: Oh yes. Preston was part of United Fruit I think.

S: Yeah. And like Delicias and Chaparra also. And these were all kind of of the same mode where it is a company town...

E: The same mode. For example the company, the sugar company that owned Macareño also owned Baraguá and Florida and Punta Alegre. They were three sugar mills in...

S: Baraguá near Holguin?

E: No. Baraguá is in the middle of the province of Camaguey and Punta Alegre is to the northwest of the province Camaguey. Of the old province because the provinces have been chopped up. They used to be six and I think now they are 14 or something.

S: So did you ever venture to other sugar mills?

E: Oh yeah. Yeah. Many.

S: And were some of them, because if it's all sort of at the discretion of the company, did the company have to operate under certain rules in terms of providing education and providing... no rules?

E: No rules.

S: So were there different standards held by different companies?

E: I would imagine there were but I couldn't vouch for them. For example which sugar mill had a better school that was built by the mill company, I couldn't tell you. But some of them were quite picturesque in terms of where the hierarchy of the entire company lived there was manicured lawns and bungalow types of...

S: Was that your town?

E: In my town too. We didn't live there because we didn't work for the sugar mill. We lived in the other place.

S: Was there tension because you weren't beholden to the sugar mill?

E: No.

S: And you said they were very revered by the town right?

E: Well revered, not revered not in the sense that they were respected, because they were the bosses. You know, they were it. They were it.

S: I mean what do you think of that dynamic?

E: Well that is, interestingly enough, have you read Garcia Marquez? Well you know about the bananeras in Colombia. Same thing. Of course the bananeras in Colombia were quite autocratic, you know, and larger. But it was that tension in that they were the bosses.

S: I mean the way I'm imagining it... latifundia...

E: Latifundi. Latifundia is huge tracks of land that are owned by a certain organization or individual and they did have latifundias because of course you had a sugar mill but that sugar mill has to be fed by a huge amount of sugar cane which is grown around the sugar mill and then it's dotted by a place called colonias. They are las colonias and the colonias are the people who are taking care of the agriculture. People who live there take care of the agricultural part of growing the cane, cutting the cane, packing the cane and weighing the cane and sending it all to the sugar mill for about six months of the year that is the task, four or five months, the rest of it was the agricultural tasks, watering, etc, etc, etc. So the latifundia is all of these lands. Some of them were private and some of them were owned by the sugar mill, the company that owned the mill. The private ones were owned by los colonos. Now interestingly enough, colono is the person who inhabits the colonia right?

S: So colonia is just a place where they grow sugar cane?

E: Well la colonia is, you're right, but specifically a little, tiny town, a hamlet of about maybe ten homes.

S: Different from a batay?

E: Different from a batay. A batay is bigger.

S: And then los colonos would sell...

E: Would sell the cane to...

S: Is that what Castro's family would've been doing?

E: Exactly. Right.

S: Did you ever venture around to these colonias?

E: Yeah. I used to go there with my father because my father's business was, it was a credit economy, you know, sold things on credit and you collected at the time that they were earning money. The Cuban economy was la safra y el tiempo muerto. El tiempo muerto they weren't working. So they were, on the other hand, had to consume things. My father would extend credit, later on he would have to go and collect. I went to these colonias everywhere with him to collect. And many times I went with him by horse because the roads were not passable. We didn't have a highway going into Macareño until 1952. Before that it was all rail.

S: How did people live during the down time? Was there a real shift when people knew they wouldn't be working for eight months?

E: First of all, a lot of people came, let me find this... came to the sugar mill just for la safra and they didn't stay there for el tiempo muerto.

S: From where were they coming?

E: From many different places. They came and they... There it is. This guy they blocked, he has a video about...

S: Why did they block him?

E: I don't know. Okay this is... no, no this one.

S: That's your time in Candler?

E: That's my time. I wrote this and it was put in a place called Candlercollege.org and when I went there to get it for you, Candlercollege.org doesn't exist anymore and I don't know what happened.

S: That would be awesome to read. How long is that? Eight pages. And it kind of describes your life there and the activities.

E: Yeah well what it describes was how a boarding student lived there, which I was. I was a boarding student. And I also put in all the signaturas on the classes that we had to take, that I had to take in order to graduate from a bachelor of science in high school. Here the professors are next to it. You see? Español 1 Sna. Louisa Gonzalez; Ingles 1, Ines Queto; Matemáticas 1 Francisco Gonzalez. I wasn't a very good student.

S: No?

E: No, no, no. In fact maybe I can show you something that I wrote that... Oh here we go. Once Dr. Romando, Dr. Romando Rodriguez, during in one of his repartees looked at me in desparation, "Levy," this is a Spanish phrase that is very famous and you find it in Spain, "Lo que natura no da, Salamanca no presta." You understand what it means? Okay. So to this day, it was the most telling and cultural way of calling me stupid. Dr. Benitez, he's a math teacher, once called me after class and pointed out that I had five consecutive zeros for my monthly score in matemáticas and told me if I was pitching a baseball game and my grades were the score of the opposing team, I would go to the big leagues. But I got through.

S: Yeah. You ended up doing engineering. I guess your math got better.

E: Yes. Definitely. In engineering I did a lot of advanced calculus and stuff like that. So this is... and it's personal, this is very personal because for example I put in here my parents did not want to place me in a Catholic school. We were Jewish and my mother and father decided I should not be in that environment where Catholic teachers and rituals were part of my education. They gravitated toward Candler College but gave no thought that it was a Christian missionary Methodist school. They had no idea. The only thing is that, you know, the people were dressed like them. They didn't have las sultanas and crucifixes in front of their chest and all of that.

S: Did non-Catholics go to schools like Belen or no?

E: Probably very few. Belen was like, in Cuban society, was like going to Exeter or going to Andover. It was the school. And that's where the people from Belen and later on they went to the Havana Yacht Club.

S: So when you thought about other schools, did you think about Ruston ever or no?

E: Well Ruston had no boarding.

S: Right. But in terms of how you're talking about Belen as this incredible school, was Ruston thought of in that light?

E: No. It was thought of as an American school. Ruston was an American school.

S: And Candler wasn't?

E: No. Candler had, at one time, had close to 1,800 students. A very large number of them in elementary school and then in bachillerato, comercio and high school. So it had bachillerato, which was, you know what bachillerato means?

S: Yeah.

E: Comercio which was three years of... and then high school which was four years.

S: And you were placed in bachillerato.

E: Yes I was in bachillerato because if I wanted to go to the University of Havana, which I did, a high school diploma from Candler wouldn't have gotten me in.

S: Who was in high school?

E: Many Americans. Americans who lived in Cuba.

S: And did you associate with them or no?

E: Yes.

S: Were they your friends or was it intermingling?

E: Well I lived in two universes. One universe was the school and in the classroom and the other universe was a boarding student. I was a boarding student. We were 120 boys and about 50-60 girls living at Buena Vista. And so we fraternized a lot in that universe.

S: So that's how you became so close to Virginia?

E: To Virginia, exactly. Exactly. Yeah. And to many others. Carmita and all the others. And then the girls who were in bachillerato came every morning to Candler to the classrooms.

S: Got it. And did you ever take classes in high school?

E: I did.

S: Because that...

E: Well English. I wanted to...

S: Oh and the high school was taught in English?

E: Totally.

S: Now like on the sports teams, was that all combined?

E: Combined.

S: Was your track team filled with high schoolers?

E: Oh yes. Definitely.

S: Did you ever feel a part of the American culture at all?

E: No. No.

S: How about the American Jews? Was there any...

E: No.

S: Were there other Jews who may have felt closer to Americans as Jews?

E: Closer to the American Jews who were in Cuba?

S: Well I mean cause I'm trying to understand the lines in terms of this community. So how it fits into this narrative.

E: Yeah. The Cuban community, first of all 80 percent of the Jews lived in Havana and of the people who did not live in Havana, the 20 percent of the Jews who did not live in Havana, most of them were Sephardic. There were very few Ashkenazi congregations outside of Havana. On the other hand, there were quite a few Sephardic congregations outside of Havana. There was one in Camaguey, Santiago de Cuba, Cienfuegos, Santa Clara, Camajuaní. But they were all Sephardic and all Turkish. So our closest connection was with Camaguey.

S: Do you think you were further assimilated into Cuba than maybe the Ashkenazis were?

E: Definitely.

S: Because of the language?

E: Well no. Because we were isolated. We lived in this little town of Macareño and we were three people who were Jewish.

S: Right. I'm talking about Sephardic Jews versus Ashkenazi Jews.

E: Oh. Sephardic Jews, they were separated, not isolated but separated until they began to coalesce and come together and there were two places. One was patronato but that didn't come in until the 1950s where the patronato became sort of like 'patronato Jewish community center' where there were a lot of activities. And then there was the synagogue Beth Shalom, which happened to be housed in the same building. You remember the one with the arch? Well that entire building was used by the community, which right now there is even a theater there. So they had quite an edifice. So that. The second one was El Casino Deportivo. Did you ever hear about that? Okay, El Casino Deportivo was a beach club where all the Jews came, Ashkenazi and Sephardic.

S: Was it only Jews?

E: No but the Jews overwhelmed it.

S: Why is that?

E: Well first of all, they would not have been admitted to the Havana Yacht Club.

S: Because they were Jewish?

E: Because they were Jewish and because they were not of the Cuban family, 72 generations all the way back to Spain or whatever. Batista was not allowed. Then he blackballed.

S: Yeah. Then he threatened to build a highway through it. And so Casino Deportivo was one of the Big Five though?

E: No. It was not. The Big Five were... some Jews were at the Miramar Yacht Club. That was one of the Big Five. But the big place was El Casino Deportivo.

S: Do you know Samuel Farber?

E: Samuel Farber... No.

S: He's a historian of Cuba. He's Jewish as well and he lived in Marianao. He taught at CUNY for awhile. I think you would enjoy speaking to him.

E: I would love to.

S: I'm going to email you his email address just to put you guys in contact. He's a very big time historian but he's retired now and he's been a big asset to this project. We talk a little bit about the Jewish community in Cuba sometimes. So Miramar had some Jews... So those were fancier Jews?

E: Yes.

S: Was there an Ashkenazi/Sephardic component to that in terms of who belonged to the Miramar?

E: No well first of all it was very few. The big bulk was in Casino Deportivo.

S: But the ones who were in Miramar were also in Casino Deportivo?

E: No.

S: Okay. You would be in one?

E: You would be in one. Miramar was upscale from the Casino Deportivo.

S: So did you go to Casino Deportivo...

E: Well I did. Not a lot of times because I wasn't there. I was in boarding school. But my cousins who lived in Havana, my mother's sister had always lived in Havana and I had two cousins there, female cousins. One of them was married. The other one was single and whenever she went to the casino I would tag along with her. And I enjoyed it tremendously because there was the water and so on and so forth. Something interesting about the Casino Deportivo, as you entered the Casino Deportivo it was pretty ornate and then you came into a room and there was a lot of cillones. In every one of them you kind of like saw an old woman sitting there, talking to each other and what they were doing was making shidduchim.

Shidduchim is the Hebrew word for arranged marriages. They were saying, "Look who came in here? Don't you think he would be good for your..." That's what they did. And many, many things were arranged. Do you know who Ruth Behar is?

S: Yes I've heard... not well. You can remind me.

E: Yes she's a wonderful person. She's an anthropologist and she's done a lot of work in Cuba and on Cuban society and Cuban communities. She's at the University of Michigan and she got a MacArthur Genius.

S: Oh wow. She's for real.

E: Yeah. Anyway so that was the Casino Deportivo. Interestingly enough personally when I entered the University of Havana, I was already away from Candler College. I was living in the City of Havana. I lived in a boarding house in the City of Havana as a student at the University of Havana and part of the University of Havana benefits is you had...

S: This is '55?

E: This is '55 and '56. Right. Part of the benefits were you belonged to the Balneario Universitario, which was a beach club. Which was a wonderful beach club. It was right on the edge obviously of the city and it had the largest swimming pool in Havana. It was an Olympic sized swimming pool. But to me the thing that I remember very much was that they had sort of like made posetas, which is sort of like water places like that. In other words they come to the edge and then they build a concrete here and concrete there and see you sort of have an outside swimming pool inside the sea. So the water would always come in and wash it out.

S: Salt water?

E: Salt water. Right. Because you were in... and that's what the Balneario Universitario had. Three of those.

S: Wow. That's crazy.

E: It was fantastic.

S: Yeah getting out of a boarding house for the first time. I could imagine. Freedom. You've got these Methodist services ever Sunday... Were there Jewish events at the Casino Deportivo?

E: Oh yeah. There were dances. There were weddings.

S: For Jews specifically?

E: For Jews. The weddings could take place anywhere but many of them took place there because... and interestingly enough the Casino Deportivo was right here. And right here was the street which I don't remember the name. Over here was the

largest theater in Cuba. It was called Blanquita. Today it is called Karl Marx. It has 6,000 seats. It is huge.

S: Wow. Where is it?

E: Right in Havana. Next to the Casino Deportivo. Almost next to the ocean as you cross Almendares, as you cross over to the right you see the building. So what I wanted to tell you is over here was a street, the Jews began to gravitate and they began to buy apartments right here. This is where my parents wanted to live when they left... when they wanted to leave Macareño. Enfrente del Casino Deportivo. That was where they were.

S: Was the ownership of the Casino Deportivo Jewish?

E: No. It belonged to the same man who owned the theater. His last name was Ornado but I don't remember his first name. Ornado definitely. And his wife used to go there. Her name was Blanquita so this is why the theater was called Theater Blanquita.

S: What about like Julio Lobo? He was Jewish right?

E: Well that's... you know he wrote a book right? Or there was a book written about him.

S: I'm reading it right now. I'm only on page 60. This one?

E: That's right. And I think he says in there that his family was half Jewish descendents but his daughters and everything they are Catholic and they are very prominent Catholics in Miami. Julio Lobo controlled the sugar industry trading.

S: Yeah he bought it all up during the revolution at one point too.

E: The name of his company was Galban Lobo.

S: When you were at LSU did you have any hopes of working for him or no? I mean was... what did you want to do when you went back?

E: No. Well here's the situation. Before the revolution established itself and began to confiscate things in Cuba and all of that, I had already interviewed in Cuba with the DuPont Company. When I returned... I wrote to the DuPont Company in Havana and said I'm a student in chemical engineering and so what I am doing right now is asking if you have any type of summer internships. So they said, "Come talk to us." So when I landed, I think it was Christmas vacation, I took a day off and I went to... it was near Havana. And I talked to the DuPont Company and had a very good interview. They said, "Sure. Come."

S: Was the interview in English or in Spanish?

E: Spanish. Sure come and work this summer and then we'll consider you for permanent employment.

S: Yeah so that was the game plan.

E: And then boom. So I'm over on the other side. I'm in Louisiana and I'm making due because my parents couldn't send me any money. I spent my junior and senior year without money. I was very lucky because I found a job as an analyst, analyst in chemical, chemical analyst in a lead refinery in Baton Rouge. And I used to work starting Friday at 5 pm when the people would leave the normal week. The lead refinery wouldn't stop. It can't stop because they are big furnaces you know. So I worked Friday evening, all day Saturday, all day Sunday and handed in my results and everything Sunday evening when the...

S: So you just didn't sleep?

E: I slept in the cot.

S: Wow.

E: I slept in a cot in the laboratory. And if they needed a sample to be analyzed they would wake me up and I would go analyze it and give them the result. But wow, listen to this. The first eight hours I made \$1.50 an hour. After eight hours it's time and a half. After 16 it's double time. So by Saturday I was making double time. All Saturday and Sunday.

S: Right and you get credit for the whole time you're there?

E: Absolutely. I'm working. They're bringing me samples.

S: How busy were you?

E: I was busy. Especially if they had trouble. The whole idea of the chemical lab, the chemical lab did many things but the most important thing is you melted the lead in the furnace and then you created what is called slag. Then you move the slag out to bring in more lead. Then you have to analyze the slag because if it has a certain residual amount of lead you bring it back to extract it. So that's the whole thing. And that refinery was right next to Ethyl Corporation, which is a huge industrial that doesn't exist anymore. It's called Albemarle. Ethyl Corporation used to make tetraethyllead, which was an antiknocks compound for automobiles until they were outlawed.

S: Wow. You've lived many lives.

E: Well I'm not that young.

S: Why didn't you go to Pincen? Was that ever a thought?

E: No. I didn't go to Pincen because my parents didn't send me there and by the time they decided I'm going to go to boarding school then it had to be secondary education. Pincen didn't have that. Pincen was only elementary school.

S: Okay. Was there a thought, did people in your town know about Pincen?

E: Yes. In fact I have a friend who I just talked to him a few weeks ago. He lives in Colombia and he went to Pincen and after Pincen he went to Candler.

S: Got it.

E: And after Candler he went to LSU.

S: So that was a feeding, in some ways Pincen fed to the other Methodist schools?

E: But there were other Methodist schools. There was one Colider Atolan. And another one called Elisa Bowman. And then there was a Baptist school in the mountains, El Cristo. Right. I have a friend who went there who is in Miami now.

S: That would be an excellent contact for me if possible because I'm going to be in Miami for the next two months. Do you think he'd be willing to talk to me?

E: Yeah. He went to Candler. But I think in his early...

S: Cause I'd love to speak to someone who went to El Cristo.

E: He's a wonderful person. He's a doctor and he just left Cuba.

S: Wow. So that will be a very interesting perspective.

E: He's very close to Virginia. They come from the same place.

S: He's from La Gloria?

E: No.

S: Okay from the second town that she lived in.

E: Right. Virginia is from Coruba and Coruba is... when Virginia and I talk she says, "Coruba que ya no existe." And I say, "Macareño que ya no existe." So Coruba is a tiny hamlet next to Mayarí and Carmona, Doctor Carmona is from Mayarí. His father owned the pharmacy in Mayarí. Mayarí is a very interesting town. His father owned the pharmacy and he's a person of color. The big store in Mayarí was owned by Gold, an Ashkenazi Jew. And Mayarí was fed by the United Fruit, which controlled all the lands. Preston over here and Nicaro.

S: I actually interviewed a Methodist missionary who worked in Mayarí who was there in the... the Robinsons. But yeah, there were rumors they had to flee the town. I think Mayarí was going to get bombed or something during the revolution so they had to flee it and they went to the agricultural school near Preston. Anyway, he would be a fantastic contact for me also. Did you have any relationship with American Jews?

E: No.

S: Did other Jews... Like did American Jews belong to Casino Deportivo?

E: I don't know.

S: Cause I'm trying to understand, these people who come down who are Jewish and seeking a community seem to have fallen into the Anglo-American community and I'm trying to see if there were any links also...

E: Which people?

S: The Jews from the United States who are coming down to work in the movies, to work in the... like the Goltzes is a family that I know. But yeah I'm trying to figure out their relationship to it all. What type of history did you learn at Candler?

E: Oh a lot of history.

S: Cause I think about the way I learned history growing up and the way we treat Columbus is really interesting because I think if I were in high school today he'd be treated much more critically. Were there any aspects of the history that was being told to you that felt different from how you think of history today?

E: Probably not and I'll tell you why. First of all bachillerato in Cuba was governed by the Department of Education of the country of Cuba. When they established what you had to learn in bachillerato you have to fulfill the requirements of the Department of Education of the country of Cuba, then you get a diploma. Even though you're taking the classes in Candler, for every one of the subjects I gave you a list of or I will give you a list of the government comes in to test you. And the government then gives you a grade and at the end of the five years you get a diploma from Candler but you can't take that diploma to the University of Havana. They won't accept it. You have to go to the Instituto de Marianao which is where Candler was an adjunct, had a link to it, and you get their diploma. Because remember they came to test you for every subject and you had to pass and now you have a diploma of the Instituto de Marianao. That's accepted in the University of Havana. Okay, why am I telling you all of this is because there was a syllabus that says what you will teach in history. So all of the professors what they did was to follow the syllabus. Of course in Candler we had excellent professors, very interesting professors so they would deviate and so on and so forth. All the professors were lecturers. By that I mean the type of education that you sit around a table today and you discuss. You sat in a chair and he sat up there and he talked and you listened and then he we would say, "Levy." And that would be death to me you know because he was going to ask me a question or for homework or something like that. In mathematics for example, Dr. Benitez was the professor of mathematics. He would say, "Levy, come to the blackboard." And he would then say, "Here's a problem. Solve it." And you had to solve it in front of all the other students so there was that but it was very stratified. You had to follow the syllabus because when they came to test you, they came to test you according to the syllabus.

S: And when you say they came to test you, is this a standardized test that everybody took?

E: No this is a professor from the Instituto de Marianao would come in to Candler and we were in a classroom and he would bring in a test and give it to us. This is not the same test that Belen test. This is not the same test that Ruston got. This is a test for that moment for that classroom.

S: So it was always a different test but it was created by these accredited institutions?

E: Right.

S: But they worked for the Minister of Education.

E: Right. They were professors in the Instituto de Marianao.

S: Which was what?

E: It's the secondary school. It's the government secondary school in the area of Marianao.

S: So it was a public high school?

E: A public high school. That's right. There was a public high school in Havana. There was a public high school in Vedado, and there was a public high school in every major city in Cuba. One in Camaguey, Matanzas, etc.

S: Why wouldn't kids go there?

E: Well first of all it's free. So they would go there but if you want to be a boarding student there is no place to be.

S: So people who didn't live in major cities didn't really have public options for high school?

E: No. They had to go to... if you lived for example in the entire province of Camaguey, which was quite large in population, there were only two public high schools, one in Ciego de Avila I think and one in Camaguey.

S: So you had to either live in one of those places or find a private school.

E: Right. And it was free. And if you passed their curriculum then you were able to get into the University. In order to start bachillerato you also have to pass a test. You heard about that? It was called preparatoria. And so after sixth grade you spent the seventh grade, I think it was the seventh grade... right the seventh grade preparing for the test. You took the test and if you passed you went into bachillerato. If you didn't pass you took it again and again and again until you passed it.

S: Where would you have worked if you worked for DuPont?

E: In Havana.

S: In Havana. They had a main lab there?

E: They had a lab. A paint and coatings plant and a company.

S: And it's not connected to the land that they owned in Varadero?

E: No. The Varadero land is owned by one man, Irene DuPont. So he happens to be from the DuPont family. A multimillionaire but the company was in Havana.

S: Got it. And it wasn't his company...

E: Well in a sense he was one of the major shareholders in the company.

S: Got it.

E: After I finished my university education in the United States, I went to work for DuPont. That was my first job in the United States.

S: Where was that?

E: In Parlin, New Jersey.

S: Is that how you ended up here?

E: That's how I ended up in New Jersey and I haven't left.

S: Wow. Because it's exactly like Cuba.

E: Just like it. When I need a fix I get in my car and go to West New York and Union City.

S: Got it. Yeah it used to be more Cuban than it is today.

E: Yeah. There is a restaurant there called Rumba Cubana that I go to.

S: Maybe I'll try that. Sounds good.

E: So let me see. I need to send you... what happened here?

S: Thank you so much for doing this. And I apologize this interview has been a little all over the place because I'm filling in blanks that I've thought of since our last interview which was really helpful. So I still have all of those notes as well.

E: There is something wrong with my computer. Let me see.

S: How long have you been retired for?

E: Quite a few years.

S: You look young.

E: I'm not young.

S: You look very young.

E: Next year I'm going to be 80.

S: You're going to be 80? Wow.

E: And if you had x-ray vision and you look inside, you'd say he's more than 80.

S: Really? Well you look very young.

E: I have a lot of problems. I am very lucky that I have reached my age here in the United States. I was telling my grandchildren that for all my life I've never lacked a roof over my head or food on my table and living in a place of tranquility I am not afraid that at two o'clock in the morning they are going to knock on my door and say, "Come. We are taking you to La Cabaña."

S: What different lives our ancestors lived.

E: Very different. And this is why many Cubans feel that way about... they are rabid protectors of the United States in a sense, sometimes in a crazy way, you know. Like I believe that in the Cuban community Trump is going to have a landslide.

S: In South Florida, having just been there, it is going to be intense.

E: I could not vote for that man even if they painted him like a god.

S: It's a scary world we live in.

E: Very scary.

S: South Miami is in rough shape environmentally also.

E: Yeah.

S: I mean it's...

E: AOL doesn't want to come up. I have Gmail too so if AOL doesn't come up I'll go to Gmail.

S: How often do you get to use your Spanish? Do you speak it a lot?

E: Not a lot. Not a lot. No.

S: What language do you dream in?

E: Both. The real question you should ask is what language do you count in?

S: And what's the answer to that?

E: Spanish. How do you calculate exchange of if I gave him 20 and it cost me 13? I should receive siete not seven.

S: It's interesting because you were good at math when you were in English and you were bad at math when you were in Spanish.

E: Exactly. No it's not coming up.

S: Okay let me make a note of the things that I want you to send me and I'll shoot you an email for whenever it does come up. You sent me two documents already I believe.

E: I sent you two documents but I have a lot of other documents. Let me see. Lets go to Candler. Okay. All of my photos you don't care. Candler/Buena Vista reunion is this. Pictures I have a lot of pictures but I don't think you need. Well let's see what I have over here. That's pictures of... that's the bachillerato building.

S: I mean I would love those.

E: This is me.

S: Oh man. In chemistry class.

E: And this is Doctor Roman, the one who told me "Lo que natura no da, Salamanca no presta."

S: Seems to be spending extra attention for you guys. Oh so co-ed classes?

E: Yes, yes. These are the Buena Vista girls who came in in the morning. This is the... I am not there but this is all my classmates. Some from classmates and some from the boarding school. This is the second floor where the boarding students, second and third floor where the boarding students used to be there. That's me.

S: Oh man. I can see why you were playing basketball at that time.

E: That's the graduation. And that's me over here.

S: Wow.

E: That's graduation. That's basketball.

S: Who were you playing? It was Candler versus who?

E: Versus... Edison. This is Doctor Perez. This is the staff of the newspaper *Flecha*. *Flecha* was the newspaper.

S: Were there many other Jews at Candler?

E: Yes. Have you seen this document? Do you want it?

S: I have not seen it.

E: An epoch making event. This has a lot of American missionaries names from way back.

S: This is the Southern Methodist community.

E: Yeah. From 1913.

S: Yeah this would be great. What is this document? "An Epoch Making Event."

E: You have all the names in here.

S: Awesome. Yeah this will be great. Thank you so much. Cause I'm focusing mostly on the '50s but obviously I have to go back and trace the foundations of these institutions.

E: Okay this is similar to what I did for el populaje for boys, this is Berta wrote about el populaje in Buena Vista for girls. Olivia Olex is a Jewish girl. Very good friend of Virginia. So this is again about going out to the city and what to do on Saturday and Sunday.

S: Oh wow. That would be great.

E: It's sort of like the mirror image of my writing.

S: How many of your classmates are still in Cuba?

E: Two.

S: Of a class of?

E: Twenty some. Okay here is the whole class. Bachillerato 1954. He stayed in Cuba. Jorge Alfonso. He stayed too. Alberto Perez.

S: Do they work for the government?

E: Well Jorge Alfonso is a physician, a doctor. Probably retired already. Yeah everybody else is here.

S: In the United States or...

E: In the United States or dead. Felix Ampiro passed. But I saw him at this reunion which was... I hadn't seen him. So that's the... two people stayed in Cuba. A few of this group has passed, have died. Okay what else. You'll probably see a repeat.

S: Repeat from what?

E: It will probably appear in another document that you have or that I send.

S: So so far we have the photos of Candler College.

E: These pictures.

S: You can just do control c right? Or maybe, I forget this one. But I think if you left click it and click copy.

E: Yeah that's what I was going to do. I was going to do it when they were all together.

S: Even smarter. An Epoch Making Event, bachillerato class of '54, Candler College by Tony Palau and that's where we were. Brilliant. Excellent. That was so much more useful than my idea. So much for youth knowing technology. Who wrote this?

E: This was in that site that was no longer there. They took this down. Who wrote this?

S: Maybe it's at the bottom?

E: Mercy... I think that you may have a duplication. This is a nice document. You should have it anyway.

S: Yeah I can sort through that stuff. I'll know if I'm reading something... if it's not too much trouble on your end.

E: No. This one too. This one I already sent you.

S: Excellent. And you sent me the other one at the bottom too I think. What's the plan de estudios? I'm going to pause this...