

George Plinio Montalván  
9/26/16

Samuel (S): I did. I'm going to see him next time I'm back there. I wasn't able to see him that time. I know. I'm very excited about it and then I had a few other people recommend him as well.

George (G): Yeah. He is very exceptional.

S: Yeah. But I spoke with Walter Arensberg.

G: Oh sure.

S: And I have a phone interview with Elizabeth Newhouse coming up pretty soon.

G: Sure that's Teddy Landreth. She was Elizabeth Landreth.

S: I interviewed her sister Anne Landreth in Boston also.

G: Yes Anne.

S: Then Sylvia Upmann Munero.

G: Sure.

S: It was a productive week.

G: She married a dentist.

S: Yeah he's a nice guy. Frank.

G: Very nice guy. Frank Munero.

S: Yeah there was a little community there.

G: Incidentally I'll just tell you something now that I'm signing my name. I sign George P. Montalván. As you have seen I'm George Plinio Montalván. In Cuba nobody knew that my first name was George. I was Plinio Mantalván to everybody.

S: Wow.

G: When I came here in 1960 I went to California and I decided it would be too tough to go around at that time... today people are more cosmopolitan so it wouldn't be a problem or it would've been less of a problem. So I said well my first name is George so I'll introduce myself to everybody as George, which is what I did. The result of that was a lot of confusion because when I came to Washington from the west coast I introduced myself as George Montalván and I quickly found some friends who I'd had in Cuba who were living in Washington. And they said, "You're not George. You're Plinio."

S: It's interesting. My grandparents were Ellis Island and their names got changed to Yankle Yanklevitz to Jake Fine. I don't know how you get from one to the other but this process of assimilation takes many forms I feel like. Yeah so tell me about your family if we could start there. How do you end up with a name like George Montalván?

G: Okay well my parents right? My mother was American. She was born in Richmond Virginia in 1913. Passed away around 2004 or '05. My father was Cuban, born in Cienfuegos in 1905 and he passed away in Havana in January 1950 at age 44.

S: So you were very young.

G: Yeah I was 7 and a half. Due to coronary heart disease. He was a doctor. He was chief resident at the Wilmer Eye Clinic at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. And you know Baltimore and Washington, they're kind of twin cities. So he met my mother who was a nurse in the 1930s. I think around 1935 or '36 in Baltimore Washington and they married and he became director of postgraduate study at Manhattan Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat in New York. And my sister was born in 1941 and I was born in 1942 in New York. But shortly after I was born he had a first heart attack and at that time there was really nothing to be done about heart disease. Very, very little could be done except for diet and things like that. And so the recommended path for him was to go back down to Cuba. So we went back down to Cuba in very early 1943 and by the way he registered me as a Cuban citizen once we got down there so I had dual citizenship by birth.

S: And that was allowed?

G: Yeah. And so I lived in Cuba from the time I was six or seven months old until I was 18. I left in September 1960.

S: Did your father go to school in the United States?

G: Well he was a graduate of the medical school at the University of Havana in 1926 and then he did his residency. He was chief resident at the Wilmer Eye Institute at Johns Hopkins University. Now he was born in Cienfuegos in Cuba and he came from a pretty large family. Both his parents died in Cienfuegos. I'm not sure exactly where they were born. Actually I'm doing genealogical research but the Cuban part is still very sparse because I've been trying to work without using a Cuban researcher. Now I've gotten in touch with a Cuban researcher and she's going to help me get the documents and names and things like that. But anyhow, he was the youngest of a very large family. They had, lets put it this way, more than six kids. I don't know how many but he was the youngest and he was born in 1905.

S: What was the family business?

G: Well his father had a pharmacy in Cienfuegos. I can't tell you that he was a pharmacist. I don't know. But I know the pharmacy was his.

S: It's just interesting that he ended up in the United States. Was that a common path for a doctor?

G: Well he, you know, he graduated from the medical school at the University of Havana in 1926. And at that time, a good option was to join the medical corps of the Cuban army, which he did. And then he heard about fellowships being offered in aviation medicine. That's what it was called at the time. Aviation medicine at a school in MacCallen Field in Texas. And he won the scholarship or fellowship and aviation medicine is what is today called ophthalmology. Although if you Google that, Wikipedia will say that that now is Aerospace medicine but not really. They jumped. Aviation medicine at that time was really ophthalmology. So from there he went to the Wilmer Eye Institute in Baltimore. His picture is on the wall at Hopkins in Baltimore.

S: Were you close with the rest of your Cuban family when you returned?

G: Yes. Although one aunt lived in Cienfuegos and she had two children, first cousins of mine, and they were also in Cienfuegos. So saw them at Christmas, saw them at assorted times through the year but not as frequently as our relatives in Havana.

S: So most of them had moved to Havana?

G: Yes.

S: Were they, I'm trying to figure out what it took to be in this Anglo-American community. So your father having lived in the United States for a long time, having married an American woman, would've been included in this Anglo-American colony/community whatever. Were other members of your family considered a part of this community or not really?

G: My sister.

S: And why?

G: Well prior to my father dying I don't really remember the people that populated their social circle. I suspect that they were mainly Cubans, not Americans. When my father died in January 1950, then my mother I know really developed her American friends. I mean the option for her at that time was well do we stay in Cuba or do we move to the states? My grandparents were in Washington DC so she had that option and that option remained open I would say for about two or three years because with my father's life insurance she bought a house in Arlington where my grandparents lived in Arlington Virginia. We would come and visit them in Arlington Virginia. But both my sister and I wanted to stay in Cuba and so we stayed in Cuba I suppose because we had friends and so on. So she really developed a lot of friends in the American community in Cuba and she and my sister really knew that colony backwards and forwards. They could give you, and my sister lives in Sarasota, they could give you a lot of information about that colony. I on the other hand had mainly

Cuban friends. I began to play tennis and, modesty aside, got quite good at it and that was the circle that I ran in.

S: At Vedado?

G: No at Villanova University in Havana but a lot of the tournaments were at the Vedado Tennis Club.

S: Was there any question that you would go to an American school?

G: I don't think so.

S: So even if your father had lived?

G: That's a very good question. My father wanted to put me in a Cuban school. This is what I recall. But my mother... and he was thinking about Baldor but my father had renounced the Catholic Church. I really don't know the reason but my mother told me that he was very disappointed in them in the way priests in Cuba handled poverty. But I can't even say any more than that. And Baldor was a Catholic school. So when he asked whether religion would be part of the report card and they said yes, that was the end of that and so they put me in Columbus School which was nondenominational kind of Cuban-American school in Havana. Then after my father died my mother put me at Ruston Academy.

S: There were other Americans in Columbus?

G: I don't know.

S: Was it all boys?

G: No. It was co-ed.

S: And your sister went there as well?

G: No I think she went to St George.

S: Okay. Why do you think it is that you... was tennis really the primary factor in you finding a home in the Cuban community more than the Anglo-American community?

G: Yes. Probably. I was also very close to my Cuban relatives and I really didn't find much interesting about the American... I mean this is justified or not, you know, I didn't have anything that really attracted me to the American community whereas there was a community house, an American Community house that did plays and stuff like that. My mother and my sister liked to be in those plays and I was never really interested in that.

S: Did you ever feel like you weren't completely accepted by this community or no?

G: By the Americans? Oh yeah because my mother was an accepted member of the community and my sister and all they knew was that I was off playing tennis while they were doing their thing in the American community.

S: What language was spoken in your home?

G: Well both. With my sister to this day we speak Spanish to each other.

S: Really?

G: With my mother we always spoke English.

S: How was her Spanish?

G: My mother's? Well very good. Well a strong accent...

S: Who were your mother's friends in the community?

G: Well they were essentially American executives of companies. Like for example the Edgecombes. Ralph and...

S: I have the Anglo-American directory. I can look it up.

G: Ralph and... Edgecombe. He was I think the general manager of Texaco in Cuba.

S: So they were close friends with your mother?

G: Yes. And Bennett. Carlisle Bennett and his wife Laurel or Laura. And Coster until she died. Susie Coster. And very good friends were the Crosby, Kenneth Crosby who became vice president of Merrill Lynch. He was the general manager of Merrill Lynch in Havana. And his wife, I don't know what her real name was. Everybody called her Cricket. His first wife. She died of cancer in Cuba and my mother who had been a nurse... in Cuba she was not so much a nurse as an English teacher. She took care of her. Her last two weeks she was at her bedside all the time. And Ken Crosby later became vice president of Merrill Lynch and was in Washington DC. I believe he was the head of Merrill Lynch in Washington DC. He has since passed away. They were my mother's age.

S: His name keeps coming up because I think he was pretty influential in terms of organizing investment and business.

G: And he also had CIA connections and so on.

S: And CIA connections?

G: Yeah he had CIA connections. Very definitely. He told me this many years later in DC. He and I had lunch when I was working... I originally worked at the Brookings Institution in Washington and from there I went to the OAS. And when I was at the OAS he would invite me to have lunch at different places and I know that it was to discuss Cuba because I was following Cuba very closely.

S: What year was this?

G: Well this was all prior to '88 because I left the OAS in like December of '88. So Ken Crosby liked to invite me to lunch and pump me. And I don't know whether he told me flat out that he was with the CIA but I had met with some CIA guys at a conference in the State Department at the Bureau of Intelligence Research and I told him about that and he said, "You know I know..." And so on. So I mean, you know.

S: What was their project? What were they trying to accomplish at that time?

G: It seemed to me that their big concern, their major concern was that Raul would die before Fidel because they had a better opinion of Raul than Fidel. They considered Fidel a bit crazy whereas Raul was more rational. And I say this because I was invited about seven or eight times to participate in conferences. Well they weren't conferences. They were just meetings by the Bureau of Intelligence Research at the State Department which is a CIA funded outfit. Essentially they would invite eight or ten academics mainly. All of us weren't academics. I wasn't considered an academic even though I was doing a lot of academic research at the time. And the technique that they used was they had developed like five scenarios for Cuba and for each one they would want us to discuss it in terms of feasibility of that scenario coming about and what were the implications for the national security of the United States. And the scenario that gave people the most fits was Raul dying before Fidel.

S: Who were these other intellectuals who would come to this?

G: Well one guy was Jaime Suchlik at the University of Miami. He was there once. I was invited to, like I said, eight or ten but the group changed. There may have been one or two others that I knew but he was the only one that I really can recall at this time. And you know we weren't sworn to secrecy or anything like that and lo and behold the Spanish CIA got wind of this and they invited me to go to Madrid and debrief them.

S: Wow.

G: Which I did. They were very interested in the technique and they were very interested in the type of discussion that was taking place at that time. I think I was in Madrid in 1990. That's my recollection. 1990, 1991. So the Soviet block had crumbled.

S: The beginning of the Special Period.

G: Yeah. And so I think... the only I guess halfway interesting thing at that time is they felt like Raul would go at any moment because he drank so much.

S: Got it. Wow.

G: I remember one of the directors of their CIA, which is CECID, or it was CECID at the time. And they said, "Well what do you know about Raul Castro's health?" And I

said, "Well I don't know anything about his health other than they're saying that he has been really an alcoholic most of his life." And she, it was a woman director, said, "I think his liver is pate." And that was '91, '92. Here we are. Imagine.

S: His liver seems okay. Wow. What did you do with the OAS?

G: I was the chief economist at OAS. I did a lot of economic studies of Latin American and Caribbean countries, mainly Venezuela.

S: Was our presence in Venezuela at its height anything like it was in Cuba?

G: Probably. You know probably. Its possible that the American colony wasn't as big and strong but look, oil and most of the oil was explored, exploited, marketed by American companies. I mean Royal Dutch Shell was not American per se but all the others were. And I know that the American-Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce was a pretty powerful outfit in Venezuela. I have a hard time comparing mainly because I left Cuba at age 18 so I really wasn't paying all that much attention to these things as I did later in Venezuela. But in Venezuela you know U.S. investment was massive. When I went to Venezuela, I would deal with Venezuelan people in the government, academics and so on. Not with Americans. But I know there was a lot of presence.

S: Sure. Sorry that we're getting sidetracked. It's just that you have all of these really interesting tidbits that I'm interested in... because I do think there was something exceptional just from what I know about Latin America, which isn't... it's learned differently certainly than yours. I know we had a ton of investment in Venezuela but I never imagined the American community as diversely formed where you have institutions, cultural institutions, semi-political...

G: Cuba was a far more developed country than Venezuela. Forgetting per capita income, which is distorted in the case of Venezuela because of the oil. So forgetting that, Cuba was a far more developed country. There were a lot more indigenous industries in Cuba than there were in Venezuela. In Venezuela, what was the most popular ketchup? Del Monte. What was the most popular... what liquor was the number one volume seller? Scotch whiskey. And in per capita terms, Venezuela was number one per capita consumer of scotch whiskey in the world. So in Venezuela there was much more a culture of foreign products are better than ours. In Cuba there was some of that but nowhere near as much. If you look at anthologies of literature, of Latin American literature, you'll see that the Venezuelan representation is much smaller than you would expect for a country of that size, even population-wise. Cuba on the other hand is super represented. It would not be wrong to say that intellectual life in Cuba was far richer than it ever was in Venezuela. One of the richest in Latin America and one of the poorest in Latin America. So it's a real contrast. It's amazing. And I know this because when I started studying the economy of Venezuela when I was at the OAS, I took it upon myself to try to really get to know a country, its literature, its history and so on. So it unfortunately is a country in Latin America with one of the poorest cultural backgrounds.

S: Wow. Sorry we can return to Cuba. This is all very helpful though. Right now I'm reading Boris Goldenberg's book. Have you read this?

G: I have.

S: It's good.

G: I have it. Boris Goldenberg was a very strange guy, very severe guy. He was a teacher at Ruston Academy. I remember him well.

S: That's why I picked it up. Everyone was very impressed with him.

G: I never took a course with him because he was in the high school part and I was in the bachillerato part.

S: So why were you in the bachillerato part?

G: Because it offered bachillerato and high school degrees and as I said I was more geared toward my Cuban friends and Cuba.

S: Were you Cuban? In your own identity, how did you identify?

G: Yeah Cuban-American, both. You know if we were speaking Spanish here, you wouldn't guess that I speak English.

S: Well yeah.

G: I grew up bilingual.

S: That's true with Harry Skilton too I think.

G: Absolutely. Same thing. Except that Harry hasn't maintained his Spanish as I have because of working at the Organization of American States and Inter American Development Bank. So I wrote a lot in Spanish you see.

S: Do you still have a Cuban accent?

G: Oh sure. And I taught a lot all over Latin America. I taught in probably every single country in Latin America.

S: What were you teaching?

G: Project design through the Inter American Development Bank.

S: So who were your friends in Cuba? Tell me about your social network.

G: They were all revolving around tennis mainly. So my best friend at that time was Jack Conill. Jack was Cuban but I think his... I think he had an English grandfather, something like that. Anyway he lives in Fort Lauderdale and he went to Las Salle by the way. He went to Las Salle. But he was a very good tennis player and he and I were big pals. We won a lot of tournaments together.

S: You played doubles?

G: We played doubles. We played singles. Oh yeah.

S: Did you play for a club as well?

G: In Cuba? Not really. Not really. I played at the Villanova University tennis courts, which were very, very good tennis courts. Clay tennis courts. But there wasn't all that much inter-club play in Cuba. We played tournaments. Not so much inter-club matches.

S: Did you belong to one of the Big Five or no?

G: Well we at one time belonged to the Club de Profesionales but then we moved out near Villanova University so we got that membership.

S: How about your mother and your sister?

G: No they dropped that membership. They were with the American colony at the Community House. The Mother's Club, there was a Mother's Club.

S: Sure. Did you go to that ever?

G: Well maybe once or twice. It's funny. You know whenever I think about it we had very separate lives. Look at that rain out there.

S: It is just so amazing. So beautiful.

G: So we had such separate lives.

S: You and your mother and your sister?

G: Yeah.

S: What was your impression of, because it sounds like you sort of divorced yourself from this community in some ways. You were a part of it, you were accepted by it, it was this safe place for you, sure. But you chose another... Did you think negatively about the American presence?

G: No not at all. Not at all. When I was smaller I'd go with my mother and my sister but once I started getting serious about tennis then I wanted to go to bed early because I wanted to get up the next day very early and play very early. Whereas my mother and my sister would be out at the community house or with some friends and so on.

S: How old were you at this time?

G: Between 11 and...

S: Through high school. Got it. Were you planning to go to the University of Havana?

G: No. I never was. If I... I'd always really planned to go to university in the U.S.

S: So then it is interesting for me that you took bachillerato.

G: Well but it was an American school, Ruston Academy, and bachillerato was tougher than high school. I'll just give you an idea. In my class, in bachillerato, I was one of the dumbest and I got a 797 in the advanced math college boards. Okay? Four got 800s. Okay? I mean it was a very, very, very demanding school but bachillerato had more subjects. We were ahead of the high school in math especially.

S: Do you count in Spanish or in English?

G: It depends on the language that I'm writing in. I guess in the last 15 or 20 years, mostly in English.

S: My impression of the bachillerato program is that it was designed to send students to the University of Havana. Is that incorrect? To get into a college...

G: I don't think so. And the reason I don't think so is the history of the University of Havana, the very difficult history politically and so on, maybe to go to the University of Villanova. But doubtful to the University of Havana. I'm guessing. I've never asked that question to anybody but my guess is that we weren't being prepared to go to the University of Havana.

S: Okay. But you graduated with both a high school and bachillerato degree?

G: Yeah.

S: Okay. And not everybody who was in the bachillerato program did that?

G: That's right.

S: There were no Americans in the bachillerato program were there?

G: Not to my knowledge.

S: And when I say Americans I mean 100 percent.

G: I don't think so.

S: When did you become aware that a revolution was happening?

G: Well probably in 1956 or '57. Probably '56 or '57. Maybe even before. There was a very well known guy in Cuba, Pelayo Cuervo was his name, and he was assassinated or killed by Batista's secret police in the lot in the back of our house. I remember hearing that shot and I don't remember when that was. It was probably '56 or '57 but we knew that things were going on. And we were an anti-Batista household. As a matter of fact, one very, very good friend of my father's, his name was Gonzalo Guell, he was Secretary of State of Cuba. And he was a very good friend of my father.

S: So during the Prio government or during the Grau government?

G: Well this was... because I think Gonzalo Guell was... he was a very high ranking diplomat for Cuba in New York and I think that's where they... it could've been Washington, New York, and that's where they made the connection. And in '56 or '57 he was either Secretary of State or Prime Minister under Batista and my mother invited him and his wife to dinner and they came and I blasted the guy. My mother was very embarrassed. I blasted him.

S: You blasted Guell?

G: I blasted him for being a Batista functionary. Lets put it that way. And a couple of times when he... cause my mother, her initial training was as a nurse and people knew that and a couple of time wounded people were taken to our house where she dressed their wounds and that kind of thing. Very hush, hush.

S: So your mother was political though even though she's inviting...

G: No she wasn't political.

S: So why would she...

G: Because she knew that my sister and I...

S: So it was about you guys.

G: Yeah. And she didn't like Batista because I think she told me that my father never liked Batista. I don't really know the history, the detailed history of when my father left Cuba on that fellowship to Texas but it may have happened right about the time the revolt of the sergeants. It might have happened right around then.

S: Do you and your sister think that you politicized your mother in some ways? Would she have been active in the same ways that she was if it wasn't for...

G: No. She was never really interested in politics.

S: So she helped these people sort of on your behalf?

G: Humanitarian.

S: But she wasn't helping SIM agents?

G: She wasn't helping what?

S: Agents of SIM.

G: No but they wouldn't have been brought to her. I think she was mainly being humanitarian concern. She was never interested in politics. Not in Cuba and not in the United States.

S: Were you interested in politics of the United States?

G: Oh yeah. Always.

S: Even when you were in Cuba?

G: Oh. Well I kind of vaguely remember Nixon's trip and how they pelted him with the eggs and so on in '58. I don't think I was really very political.

S: Got it but you had very strong opinions about Batista?

G: Yeah.

S: And your sister as well?

G: Yes.

S: Cause it's interesting. A lot of the Americans I talk to seem to have not cared. Some of them cared. But a lot of them seemed very oblivious to what was going on and is that because of your kind of mixed identity you feel that you were more invested?

G: Well there were people who played tennis who were reporting abuse and things of that nature. My sister didn't see that as much as I did but she'd pump me for stories.

S: So in some ways your isolation from the Anglo-American community gave you access to...

G: I don't know that it gave me access but I certainly dedicated my time. I rarely spent any time with Americans. I mean from time to time I'd accompany my mother to something but over 90 percent of my interactions were with Cubans.

S: Did you ever speak about political events with the Americans at school?

G: I don't recall.

S: Cause it's interesting to me that 1959, even though these people are largely apolitical I would say or they're thinking about American politics. They haven't invested themselves in the same way that I think the Cuban population had in this movement. Most of them are celebrating the ousting of Batista in '59, January 1<sup>st</sup> of '59 at least.

G: Yes.

S: And I'm trying to understand how they got to that place because he was a friend of the American community in a lot of ways.

G: Well I guess he was a friend of business but I mean the problem is that he had people working for him who were really criminals. I mean the chief of police was a criminal. I mean he enjoyed killing and torturing people. Of course pictures of this were only published after Batista left but these guys, Esteban Ventura and... they

were... I'll tell you something that's amazing and I didn't find out about this until '59. But there was a guy who played a pretty good game of tennis, much older than I. This guy was a colonel in the police force. His name was Enrique Perez Chaumont and that guy we later found out loved to torture people through their eyes. As a matter of fact he had a nickname that was something like ojos verdes or ojos lindos or something like that. And he was one of the main torturers and this guy, very distinguished, played tennis at the yacht club. I remember he gave a tremendous cocktail party at the yacht club, a club that Batista couldn't be a member of because...

S: I heard that story.

G: And Andreas Perez Chaumont gave an address. His name was Andreas, not Enrique. And he gave a tremendous cocktail party there. He was dressed in his gala uniform. This was in '58. I don't know how late but it was in '58. Didn't know until afterwards, a couple months afterwards, that he was a torturer. I had no clue.

S: Was he gone by that point?

G: Yeah I don't know what happened to him. I have no idea what happened to him. He spoke English. I think he had some part of his education in this country.

S: Did you ever do anything to support the revolution?

G: No I was too young. I really didn't do anything.

S: Do you know Ed Gonzalez? He went to school with you I think.

G: Yeah sure.

S: He lives in Pennsylvania now.

G: Yeah he lives near Philadelphia.

S: Cause he told me he was handing out flyers. His story reminds me of your story is all. A mixed-marriage where the father passed away very young.

G: Yeah it's interesting. His father, Eduardo Gonzalez, was the general manager of the largest sugar mill in Cuba.

S: Delicias? Or which one?

G: Jaronu. And I think that, just to give you an idea on size, that sugar mill in sugar season used to put out 1 million 25-pound sacks of sugar per day.

S: Wow.

G: One million 25-pound sacks of sugar. They lived in Jaronu in Camaguey Province. And about in 1952, it must've been '52, '53, Ed Senior died and Eddy's mother didn't know what to do and she came with her two girls and two boys to Havana and

somebody immediately said, "Well you have to go see Ruth Montalván." And she immediately did. I'll never forget the day they came to our house because she was crying. She was... poor thing was a wreck. So we became friends of the family. June, the oldest daughter, she lives in Coral Gables. She married a British guy, Raymond Frost. And Raymond Frost wrote a book that you might look up but I can't remember the title of the book. He was in a very good position at the World Bank in DC but he was British.

S: But he lived in Cuba as well?

G: I don't know. I don't remember.

S: So was there this community of American wives who had married Cuban men? I'm trying to understand the contours of it. Cause it's interesting that they would say go to the Montalváns because they've experienced this before.

G: Well because my mother was a young-ish widow at the time so they put her in touch with my mother because of the commonality of the situations.

S: Would your mother have recommended Ruston?

G: Well I'm sure she did. And Eddy went to Ruston and I think Billy did too. Now Nancy and June, I think they were beyond high school. I don't remember in '52 maybe not... '52 or '53 I can't remember.

S: I think the kids were already in boarding school at Candler and Buena Vista at that point.

G: Maybe yeah. Candler College.

S: At least Ed was at Candler. I don't know about the girls. Yeah. It's just... it's interesting to me because there were so many... I'm looking through the '59 Anglo-American directory. Or it was the 1960 one that I was looking at this morning. That matters I guess because after the revolution a lot of people left immediately. But of the thousand or so Americans that are listed in Havana, something like 200 of them are in mixed marriages and that's a significant number.

G: I mean Ed Gonzalez the father, I think he went to Harvard. I think he got an engineering degree from Harvard. So maybe he met Anne there. Could've been that he'd met Anne in Boston. And my father met my mother in Baltimore or Washington, probably in Washington. So there were Cubans who were studying in this country and that's probably the origin of those mixed marriages.

S: And these Cubans after the revolution, Lopez Fresquet and Pazos and...

G: But which Pazos? Filipe?

S: The one who was in the government right afterwards.

G: Filipe.

S: Filipe. They both married American women.

G: No Filipe didn't.

S: But he studied in the United States or something.

G: Not much. The thing is that he was research director at the IMF. But I don't think he studied in the U.S. If he did maybe he did a quick postgraduate or something like that. They are very good friends of ours. Super good friends.

S: They were very good friends or currently?

G: Well currently because their daughter, the youngest, they were our next door neighbors in Washington for 30 years and I knew her at Ruston. And Filipito who was in *The Old Man and the Sea*, he went to Ruston.

S: Right. It's just interesting to me because there was this comfort I think that the American colony had with the initial government of the revolution in some ways because of these connections also.

G: Well probably Rufo had most to do with that. His family was part of the American colony, was certainly considered part of the American colony. I don't think the Pazos were.

S: How about the Sanjenis?

G: Yeah sure. We used to call them Sanjenese.

S: I talked to Michael when I was in New York.

G: Yeah.

S: Very interesting guy.

G: Yeah sure.

S: When did you start to feel like I need to go someplace else? When did your family start to... After the revolution happened.

G: I was always planning to come to school in this country so...

S: But your mother left I'm guessing?

G: She left in '61. She stayed behind because she thought that that system couldn't last so she left in May of '61. She hung on until May of '61.

S: So after the Bay of Pigs.

G: Oh yeah.

S: That must've been intense for her.

G: Yeah. May of '61.

S: Did she tell you about that experience?

G: Yes. I'll tell you a funny story. She applied for a job at USIA, U.S. Information Agency. So she filled out the application and all of that. The posting she eventually got was English Teaching Consultant and they sent her throughout the world to give methodological seminars to teachers of English to speakers of other languages. TESL, she was a great TESL expert. Anyhow, she had her security interview after putting in the application she had the security interview with two guys, two FBI guys. And so one of them said, "Here on the application, you didn't fill in a reason for leaving when you were employed at the Cuban American Cultural Institute in Havana." And she said, "Well I didn't know what to write." And he said, "Well what do you mean?" She said, "Well I drove to the institute one day and I saw a militiaman standing in front of it with a machinegun and I kept on driving and never went back."

S: And that was in 1961?

G: I don't know.

S: So she taught English at the institute though?

G: Yeah.

S: Could you tell me a little bit more about this? I know it was run by...

G: Portell Vilá.

S: He was a historian right?

G: Herminio Portell Vilá was a historian and he was a history professor at the University of Havana.

S: I've read a little bit of his stuff.

G: Well he was a prolific writer and so I think he established the Instituto Cultural Cubano-Norteamericano. Now why and how he established that I don't know. It may have been part of a movement on the part of the United States government State Department, whether it is State Department, USIA or who, but you know, ex-American cultural institutes in different parts of the world, because they have them elsewhere or had them elsewhere. So I don't know the story behind the Instituto Cultural Cubano-Norteamericano I think it was called but he established it and I... Oh well she had been a student of his at the University of Havana because she took courses at the University of Havana. She took courses in linguistics and then she got a masters in linguistics at Georgetown.

S: After the revolution?

G: Yes. And so she was always throughout her life she was a very fine student so he hired her as a teacher at the Cuban American Cultural Institute in Havana. Yeah and they remained friends. I remember our little house in Arlington, I remember him coming and now we're talking well into the '60s.

S: What was he like? I would love to hear more about him.

G: A very severe but humorous at the same time guy. I don't know whether he was humorous with me and not with other people but I was always kind of a rebellious kid so I would try to, you know these adults, I'd try to pinch them here and there. And he liked it. You know he liked it. So we got along very well but he was a very severe guy and he became very, very rightwing and it's interesting because he had a hard time coming to this country. Actually my mother helped him come here and become employed. I don't know how. I don't know the details of that but you see he, because of his earlier writings, was conceived in some quarters as being anti-American. He wrote a history book that was *Historia de Cuba en sus relaciones con los Estados Unidos* or some title like that and he was very pro defense of Cuba as a republic vis-à-vis the American intervention and all of that. So there were people in the US government that... because I think that he, because my mother helped him, well one of the reasons is because my mother helped him, he had a contract with *Voice of America*, I think.

S: Do you remember him before the revolution or not really?

G: Not really.

S: Did you ever visit your mother at the institute?

G: No.

S: Okay what did she do there? She just taught English?

G: Taught English.

S: Do you know anything about what her classes were like? No?

G: But you know she was very apolitical. Always throughout her life she was very apolitical. She was interested in arts, literature, music, history. She had no interest in politics at all. I don't even recall a conversation about politics with her.

S: Was your mother the only American in her classes at the University of Havana?

G: I don't know.

S: Do you remember when she was going there or not really?

G: Yes. She went there like between '52 and '54, something like that.

S: What did you think about the tourism in Cuba? Were you aware of it?

G: Sure. One day I was near the Vedado Tennis Club. I'll give you a quick story that I'll never forget. I was near the Vedado Tennis Club walking along the street and this woman comes up to me and says, "Donde puedo tomar la wah-wah?" I said, "The wah-wah? What's the wah-wah?"

S: You said it in English.

G: And she laughed and she said, "I'd just like to know where the bus stop is around here." Because we used to call buses gua-guas, you know. But she said "wah-wah." So that's one thing that I remember very well. And I mean I never stopped to really talk to tourists or anything like that but yeah sure I remember tourism. There were hotels all around.

S: Some of the people I talk to and because this project is trying to encompass the entire community I've talked to a lot of like missionaries as well and they were in some ways very ashamed of some of the activities of the tourists.

G: Well Cuba was certainly a place where sexual tourism was certainly a part of the tourism pie. I don't know what relative size that slice was but it was certainly part of the tourism pie. And the uncomfortableness of people, well they would've had to be older than I. I'm 74. They would've had to have been older than I in order to remember that. But there was an incident that happened, I'm not sure exactly what year. It wasn't while I was alive. It was before I was born. Where some American soldiers pissed on the statue...

S: I think '44.

G: Well it was '44. I was born in '42.

S: I'm not sure about that.

G: So maybe that. And of course Meyer Lansky was the money behind the Riviera Hotel which was a hotel built in '55, '56, '57 near the American embassy in Havana. So sure there was a lot of that but I...

S: Were you aware of it? Did you guys go out to the clubs?

G: I... and there was a club relatively near my house which was the Biltmore, the Havana Biltmore Yacht and Country Club. And there were quite a few Americans that were members there but I can't say that I remember the place being swamped with tourists. It was only later when I started traveling, when I was 16, 17, 18 and I started traveling playing tennis in different places that from time to time I would on the flights I would come across tourists and sexual tourists.

S: And you could identify that?

G: Well I remember on a flight from Miami to Havana or Havana to Miami, one or the other, I remember this very vivacious young American woman sitting next to a much

older guy and we started talking and I could figure right away that a: she wasn't his wife and b: they'd had a fling.

S: Right. I think my grandmother on my father's side, a man invited her to Havana because this was a thing I think. Yeah. But then she didn't realize what was happening until... alright, was there ever a point when you felt like you didn't belong? When you were... when the last time you were in Cuba or even before the revolution... You always felt like there was a place for you?

G: Oh yeah.

S: Was there ever a time when you felt like the Americans didn't belong?

G: No.

S: Okay. Where do you think the anti-Americanism of the revolution sort of came from?

G: Well it certainly came from the lower classes. It didn't come from there. It came from Fidel and his people, Che and so on. I mean lets face it; the guy had a lot of charisma at the time. And I think he whipped it up and there were income distribution problems in Cuba. Whoever says there weren't is... it just is not reality. And so he had a ready audience that was ready and willing to listen to all of this and who backed and approved the nationalizations and there were quite a lot of people who benefitted from Americans just leaving their houses, leaving the keys, literally leaving the keys and taking over their houses, apartment buildings, you know, what have you. And there were a lot of people who came from the interior of Havana at that time who benefitted because of... even if they were living in a garage they had it better than what they had before in the countryside at the time. So there was a very serious problem of income distribution that a lot of people deny but it is simply not real and there are studies in the 1950s that shows... I mean there is plenty of evidence to show a skewed income distribution in Cuba so... and by the way I was told that this was one of the main reasons that my father and some of his sisters kind of renounced the Catholic church because they felt the Catholic church was not doing its job of protecting the downtrodden and ministering to the downtrodden and certainly that... I had four aunts, sisters of my fathers, who survived all that time. They only started passing away in the 1980s and 1990s and they were older than he was. And three of the four were very much for the revolution until they died. I mean throughout.

S: But they lived in the United States?

G: No they stayed in Cuba.

S: Have you ever been back?

G: '97. They had all died. Those four aunts had already died and I had a first cousin who had married a brigadier general in the Ministry of the Interior in Cuba and she

was left there. I mean she was still there so I visited her. It was quite a visit and as a result of that visit one of her sons made it out of Cuba and lives in Aventura Florida.

S: Wow.

G: Yeah he was an artist. By now you've run across I don't know how many incredible stories.

S: Yeah it is a fun topic. It's a tragic, fun, complicated, so many contours and these interviews help me give it texture...

G: A long time president, I'll give you two things that I don't know if anybody... probably the first one but a long time president of the Inter American Development Bank, Enrique Iglesias, what a guy. He once said to me, he said, "Cuba is a Greek tragedy. You know why I refer to it as a Greek tragedy? Because it ends badly." And the other thing that impacted me is that an Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, Pedro Meurice- he's dead. He died quite a few years ago- he said that the Castro period is an "anthropological wound."

S: Wow. Yeah. Man. I think those are all the questions I have. This is very helpful and as you can see you were very helpful. I know you don't think you were going to be but your career afterwards gives you a sort of perspective that nobody has had and that was really fascinating for me but also just you're in and out of the community. I'm trying to, and maybe you can help me think about this but I'm trying to start my dissertation I have to explain what this community was right? So was Boris Goldenberg part of this community?

G: That's a good question. That's a good question. Boris Goldenberg was a strange dude in today's word. He was a strange dude. I don't know what descriptions you have of him by people who actually were taught by him. I'm sure he was good.

S: They all loved him. They all said my parents were afraid I was going to become a communist but you know there was some of that but he seemed like a character.

G: Yeah he was... I mean he was a strange dude. He was certainly very unlike all the other teachers at Ruston. He was a special case. Have you interviewed Chris Baker?

S: Yeah, multiple times. Three times.

G: Yeah because Chris would remember Goldenberg very well and he probably would have some stories of how his father came upon Boris Goldenberg if Jim Baker was the guy who hired him. I don't know.

S: It was.

G: He was. I mean Jim Baker was a guy who certainly hired the best. I mean he hired the best. The group of teachers at Ruston were very, very top notch.

S: Did you ever have a class with the math teacher Ferrer?

G: Marta Ferrer. Sure.

S: I heard she was very...

G: Marta was a brain. She taught us math review and in that math review class of eight, four got 800s on the advanced math college boards. Marta Ferrer. I have another link with Marta Ferrer. Her father was an ophthalmologist and a colleague of my father's.

S: Were you in those, I know she would take some students Saturday mornings...

G: That was the thing. We would call it math review.

S: Yeah Skilton told me about that.

G: We'd call it math review. It was four hours.

S: Yeah and you had to take a test and answer one question every minute or something.

G: Well because she was training us for the college boards, college entrance examinations.

S: And she would distract you on purpose.

G: Sure.

S: Like put her child on the table is what Harry Skilton told me. I guess her child was older at that point.

G: Just between you and me and don't write this down, you know, but Marta Ferrer had bad breath and all she had to do to me is get close.

S: Oh man. That'll be a distraction yeah. But that really, I mean Skilton said that to this day this is the reason he could concentrate so well, you know, because of those lessons.

G: Yeah Marta.

S: Did you have Newendorf as well?

G: No he was in high school. But I remember him very well. Another strange dude.

S: John Molanphy, do you know that name?

G: Yeah.

S: He told me that the first exam he took for Newendorf he got a negative 25 or something because that was a real score that you could get.

G: There were people... Baker brought in some real brains as teachers to that school. A few of them didn't pan out. I had a guy who came in as a math teacher and clearly that guy knew his math, clearly he knew his math, but he looked like a country bumpkin and the students... and he talked like a country bumpkin. That kind of slow drawl, you know, and he'd dress in these wide stripe suits and two-tone shoes and he couldn't take it because too many students were making fun of him. But I know that the guy was excellent. I remember him in math. There was one, la doctora Esteban, but she was a communist. She was a communist through and through. I don't remember her with fondness because she knew that in bachillerato I was the best speaker of English in my class. Well sure. And so she liked to have us read certain excerpts from a book and when she'd come to an excerpt that would have an English name, she'd want me to read that excerpt so she could correct me. So if I said, "caballero de Washington." And I'd say it like that because I knew it would bother her. And she'd say "Washington, Montalván, Washington. Diga Washington." "Washington, doctora." But some very good teachers. Very fine teachers. That was a very good school.

S: What was your life after Cuba? Where did you go to school?

G: Well I went one year at Pomona College in California where I was in the 3.2 program with Cal Tech in engineering. Then I came to G.W. and I got an M.A. in Economics and an ABD in Economics, all but dissertation.

S: Yeah. I know ABD very well.

G: By that time I had a wife and kid and just had to go to work.

S: Yeah well this project is exhausting if it makes you feel any better. The D part is very difficult.

G: I took the comps.

S: Yeah that part is difficult too. Well I can't thank you enough.

G: My pleasure.

S: This has been really helpful for me. I'm going to get this transcribed.