Guillermo Martinez

11/4/2016

Samuel (S): Yeah so I’ve always been interested in U.S. foreign policy generally and, you know, Cuba really stands out in terms of Latin America. I started reading the books of Ruby Hart Phillips when I got interested in Cuba.

Guillermo (G): From the New York Times.

S: Yeah and I realized there was this community of Americans that seemed to go beyond typical what I think of as privileged outsiders right? They had all of these cultural institutions. I had read both of her works written in ’59 and ’60 about what was going on and just how completely her viewpoint on events had shifted and she seemed attached to them. She seemed like she cared about the outcome in a way that I don’t always imagine U.S. citizens abroad do.

G: Well this is what happened. It wasn’t common but to my knowledge there were at least two main and three or four bilingual schools in Havana. Ruston was the most prominent of them. There was also one that came up in the latter years called Lafayette. I don’t know whether Candler College gave lessons in English or not.

S: They had an American high school.

G: They called it Candler College. We used to play basketball there. They had one of the few indoor, the only indoor basketball court in Havana.

S: You weren’t in their league though? You would just play your games there?

G: No we were not in their league because there was a regular league for all the high schools in Havana. There was another league of Catholic schools and there was a third league of American schools and that was I think Ruston, Lafayette, St Georges, and I think maybe even Candler College. I don’t know. I know that when we won the under 15 championship in 1955 we went and celebrated and one of my classmates who had been a classmate since we were 8 years old and I got dropped the first time in our lives and I can tell you the date. It was December 7th, 1955 and I can tell you that date because in Cuba, my father who was a journalist had written an article saying that doctors should not only be rewarded in pay, they should be honored one day a year. So Cuba created a Doctor’s Day and that was December 7th and every December 7th. And my classmate’s parents were a doctor and a nurse and he was laying on the backseat… and I couldn’t get him to get up. I would shake him and say, “Your mother.” And he would say, “La tuya” in Spanish and it’s almost like… it’s that way but let me start from the beginning. I had an uncle, my father’s brother, who was a Jesuit priest named Eduardo Martinez Marquez, sociedad de Jesuita. He was one of the most prominent Jesuit priests in Cuba and later became one of the most prominent Jesuit priests in Argentina. And I was five and all my cousins who were 6, 5, and 4, were going to Belen. And I had a fit because I was being sent to Ruston. And my father told me, “I’m going to give you a gift that someday you’ll thank me for.” And the gift was, I am absolutely fluent in both English and Spanish, both orally and in writing. I was the first Latin American to ever graduate from the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications and I was first in my class fifty years ago. Reason: my English was perfect.

S: But you’re the only one in your family who went to Ruston, is that right?

G: No. My sister went to Ruston.

S: Is she younger?

G: Seven years older.

S: Seven years older.

G: She graduated in 1952. I was supposed to have graduated in 1959 but I couldn’t because in April of 1958 I organized a school strike against Batista. And my father got a message from a colonel in Batista’s army saying, “If you want your son to not get into any trouble, get him out of the country.” And so my father took me out of the country and put me in Cheshire Academy in Connecticut, 22 miles north of New Haven.

S: A colonel called? Who was that?

G: Colonel Rojas.

S: Rojas whose child went to Ruston as well?

G: His son went to Ruston, a year older than I was.

S: What did your parents do?

G: Journalists. My father was editor of the largest circulating newspaper in Havana. El Pais. He was the president of the Inter American Press Association and he was a founding member. He was quite… being his son has not been easy. My mother was a journalist. She did the first women’s radio program in Cuba in the 1930s but my mother was very sickly and she died in 1956 when I was 14. I still had not turned 15. My mother was a better writer than my father and that has always been… in the family, who do I write like? Do I write like my father or do I write like my mother? And I tend to think I write more like my mother than I do my father. My father was very, very formal and very political in his views and he kept speaking of terms, ideological terms. And I am much more of a people writer. I’ve been a journalist now since 1960. I had my first byline in April of 1960 when I was 19.

S: For what publication?

G: The Miami Herald. And it was published under the name Bill Martinez because the Bay of Pigs invasion came and they didn’t have anybody who wrote in Spanish. They asked me if I could find out why it was Brigade 2506 and I started calling around and I found out that the brigade began counting its members as from the number 2500 to make people believe that they had more people recruited. So there was 2501, 2502, 2503, 2504, 2505, 2506 and the man who had the number 2506 fell off a cliff in Guatemala and died. He died in Retalhuleu, Guatemala. So I wrote that and it came as a four paragraph under Bill Martinez.

S: When was this?

G: April, 1960.

S: Before the Bay of Pigs?

G: No after.

S: So ’61.

G: ’61. Right. I was a copy boy at the Miami Herald.

S: Had you already graduated from Florida?

G: No. I hadn’t even completed one year of college.

S: Got it. Is Bill a name that people named Guillermo go for?

G: It’s… Guillermo translates into English as William. So Bill was… people who couldn’t pronounce Guillermo, they turned around and called me Bill.

S: What have you been in your professional life?

G: Guillermo. I’m forcing people to do that. But for example, at the Miami Herald, I met some of the most brilliant journalists I’ve ever had the privilege of working with. One of them was Gene Miller who won two Pulitzer prizes. On a Sunday, I quit the Herald to join the Bay of Pigs and Gene and a city editor and another assistant city editor took me into the library and just gave me such a thorough tongue lashing that I didn’t resign and I stayed. And one of my cousins spent two years in jail because he joined. I didn’t. So Ruston is very important because from Kindergarten through sixth grade, all of my classes were in English except two periods a day in Spanish. I took math in English. I took science in English. Everything. Geography, history, both American history and Cuban history. So when you finished sixth grade you had to choose a way. You had three options. You could study to become an accountant, comercio. You could study to enter high school. You could study to enter bachillerato in Spanish. Or a few of us decided we were going to do both bachillerato and high school.

S: That’s like you and Ricky Sanchez.

G: Me and Ricky and Modesto Maidique, or “my dick.”

S: You knew him when he was younger. I met him when he was president of FIU. We met him at different times in our lives.

G: I wrote about him at the Miami Herald, about how we used to make fun of him because he was a lousy basketball player and he would go out at recess in moccasins to play basketball. He was atrocious. But we pushed and Ricky Sanchez, Vicky Samson…

S: Vicky Samson?

G: Yes. She is now Vicky Brown. She’s in Orlando. She was a classmate of mine since we were five years old in Kindergarten.

S: Did she have two American parents?

G: No.

S: Okay. Was it one and one?

G: No.

S: So where did the last name Samson…? Just curious. So everyone in the dual program was Cuban?

G: Yeah. Americans went to high school. Cubans went to bachillerato and a few of us chose both.

S: Now what I’ve been told is two things about you. One, that you’re an immaculate dresser, which clearly loafing around in a button-up shirt and right…

G: I just came back from doing a TV show.

S: But I’ve heard of you wearing this anyway. And the second thing was that there was not another Cuban more integrated into the American community than you.

G: True.

S: How did that happen?

G: How did that happen? Through friends. One of my very, very best friends since eighth grade was a young woman named Tony Thomas.

S: I interviewed her.

G: Tony has two brothers, Terry, younger, and Michael who had an accident and is paralyzed from the waist down. To this day, Tony and I keep in touch and we’re good friends. She taught me to drink Coca Cola because I would go to her house for lunch.

S: And they would force it on you?

G: They’d give us a half liter bottle of coke in front of us.

S: Those kids must’ve had terrible teeth.

G: I’ve never had a cavity. That was Tony. But then there was a young man who played basketball with us who became tremendously good friends with me. His name was Billy Skilton. And Bilito and I, Bill has become a bishop in the Episcopalian church.

S: South Carolina.

G: South Carolina and the Dominican Republic. There was another young man, James Benson. Jimmy Benson.

S: I interviewed him as well.

G: North Carolina.

S: Yeah. Married to another Ruston graduate.

G: Margaret Morrison. She didn’t graduate. None of them did.

S: That’s right.

G: Yeah Jim married Margaret. She never graduated. Never got there. But she was a Rustonian too. I used to date her older sister Susan. So in fact Susan was probably my first woman or girl that I was interested in. Never became anything. Then there was just, I don’t know. My classes in Spanish were harder for me. Our English teacher was a man who I will never forget named Hal Newendorf.

S: He was your basketball coach as well right?

G: Right. Hal Newendorf had some very unique practices. We were very, very loud and obnoxious. Our class was on probation the day school started and probation was lifted the day school ended. I mean we were always one step away from being kicked out because of the way we behaved. And Hal Newendorf was doing the class and we started talking and doing this and when he started talking, instead of yelling and telling us to shut up, he would start to lower his voice and lower his voice and soon you saw the class just go down, and go down and just listen quietly to what he was saying. Then he would say, “Now we can continue.” He married a woman who was one or two years younger than my sister who graduated from Ruston.

S: His wife graduated from Ruston?

G: Yes.

S: He lived on campus before right?

G: No. There was no campus. Ruston did not have a campus. Ruston had two places. I was one of the few who were in two locations. Originally Ruston was a series of houses within a three-block radius in Vedado. There was a house for physics and sciences on Avenida del Presidentes, so G Street. There was a high school building on Calsada. There was primary and intermediate, that is Kindergarten, first, second and third grade, and next to it was intermediate which was fourth, fifth and sixth grade across the street from the high school building. And on the other street before La Avenida del Presidentes was the place where the Spanish language high school classes were, bachillerato. And we were there… I would say, I would say that I was there until my freshman year in high school. And then we moved to a new building out at Biltmore or Country Club. Baker had his house built across the street from the school. But then there was no other, nobody else had… there were no living quarters.

S: But I thought Goldenberg lived on campus?

G: In the original place. In the original Ruston there was an internship that was in the science department on Avenida del Presidentes there were several. But that was before my time, way before my time. And Goldenberg, who became a famous Cuban scholar.

S: I’ve read his book, yeah.

G: We were privileged more than anything else by the quality of our teachers. Just absolutely amazing. Just absolutely amazing.

S: Those two, Marta Ferrer, Iglesias I’ve heard those were…

G: Dr. Mario Iglesias. There was another guy named… not Goldenberg, not Newendorf. There was another German-American who taught math and who would walk into the classroom and say, “7 plus 2 times 3 divided by 2 plus 5 equals…” And you had to do this all in your mind and I do math in my mind. It’s that way. I can’t do it anymore. I’m losing that.

S: Right. You became a journalist. So I have some questions.

G: Please.

S: It’s interesting to me that your parents would choose Ruston and I get that you’re saying that English was definitely the motivation for that. Were there other things that your parents thought that you could get out of an American education?

G: My father said English was the international language and I needed to learn English.

S: Now did your parents speak English?

G: No. My father did not and my mother very poorly.

S: Did they have any American friends?

G: None.

S: None. So you lived in two worlds in some ways?

G: No. I lived in one world.

S: In one world. Those worlds were the same.

G: The only world I knew was in Cuba at that point was my… I came into another world after Ruston and after I graduated from high school. But until April 1958 my life was Ruston. I didn’t have any friends outside of Ruston. Everybody and everything that I did had to do with Ruston.

S: Were you in the Mother’s Club?

G: Of course. My mother wasn’t but I was. We played spin the bottle. Please. Those were the first times I kissed girls. I used to go to dances. Oh boy. Those were great.

S: Were there other Cubans in the Mother’s Club whose both parents were Cuban? Or were you the only one?

G: I don’t know.

S: Cause I know other people had one parent.

G: Yeah. George Maddox. I don’t know if you’ve met him.

S: Yeah. Mary Casas.

G: Who else? I don’t remember.

S: Lopez Fresquet.

G: Yeah. And Cathy and Bill… what was his name? I can see him dancing. He was very sharp. He had a younger sister. But it just… my mother wasn’t a member but I went and I don’t know how I went or why I went or whatever but I was at the Mother’s Club every Thursday and then on weekends. On Saturday we had games and we had competitions and three legged races and all sorts of fun things.

S: That’s so interesting because you were invested with these centers, I’m looking at the names Thomas, Skilton, Benson, these are the centers of the American colony so you really entered right into the long term community in some ways.

G: Rankin.

S: Did you ever go to the Rankin ranch?

G: No. I’ll tell you another one. Hamilton.

S: Sure.

G: Bernie, Butch, who became president of American Express.

S: Oh.

G: And he was a batboy in 1954 for the visiting clubs in the international league. And he was sent to Mississippi in 1954 and so in April when the season started he was in Mississippi so they asked me if I would be a batboy for the visiting teams. And my father had the seats right on top of the first base dugout. My mother hated baseball but when I was, well when her little baby boy at 14 years old was working for the… she went to every game and I was so embarrassed because she would go like this and I would blush and she died a month later and I regretted that all my life, that I was embarrassed by her because she was waving at me. The thing that I hated the most was when I had to take one of those big botallones of water. I had to carry it. I had to bring it in through the dugout from the third base, which was the home club dugout behind the umpire while the game was going on behind home plate. I was afraid there was going to be a foul ball or it was going to hit the bottle or I’d spill it all over the place.

S: I have a question actually just based on what we’re talking… the Sugarcanes. Who owned them?

G: Bobby Maduro. He used to own a baseball stadium here and in Miami.

S: What was his background? You don’t know. He was a Cuban?

G: He was a Cuban. Not anything else. He just got… and the Cuban Sugarcanes started as a class B team in the Florida International League and then he bought the club and brought it up to Triple A and the ball players, many of them played there right before going into the major leagues. Baseball in Cuba in the winter was very, very, very high class. Pitching for Almendares which was my team was Tommy Lasorda.

S: Really?

G: Pitching for Havana was Vinegar Bend Mizell who then went on to become a star pitcher for the St Louis Cardinals. Cienfuegos had Camilo Pasqual.

S: Wow.

G: Marianao had Orestes Miñoso. Shortstop was… there were a dozen Cuban ball players back then. Camilo Pasqual, his brother Patato Pasqual, Pedro Ramos, just a whole bunch, Angeles…

S: Was that during the years of the Cuban Giants or was that a little later?

G: There is no Cuban Giants.

S: I know but when the Giants were very heavily Cuban.

G: No. The biggest affiliation of a major league club in Cuba was with the Saint Louis Cardinals.

S: And who was affiliated with them?

G: The manager was Mike Gonzalez who was most famous because he was a third base coach in a World Series game where on a hit to the outfield, he sent Enos Slaughter from first base and he gave him the go ahead signal to go home on a hit from first base and he slid in safe and he won the world series.

S: Wow.

G: So that was the link between these two…

S: Wait so was it Double A for them or you don’t know?

G: Triple A level. High school one day, must’ve been my sophomore or junior year, we were taking serious English classes. We had to memorize parts of Shakespeare's plays, all of Julius Cesar, Lincoln’s farewell, the Gettysburg Address. Then one day they decided we needed to memorize a poem called *Ode to the Grecian Urn* and we sat for dinner and home I told my father, “You know dad, I’m going to get a failing grade in English this month because we have to memorize this fifty line poem called *Ode to the Grecian Urn* and I have a lousy memory and I’m not going to be able to memorize it. So please will you please allow me to fail English this month?” He said, “Yeah. Not a problem. Don’t worry.” The conversation kept going and he said, “Guillermo, what is Ted Williams hitting?” Ted Williams is hitting 402 with 32 home runs, 128… “Okay what is Walt Drupal doing?” By the time he went through the third or fourth, I knew the lineup of the Boston Red Sox, which was my team, from top to bottom, order, average, everything else. And by the third or fourth I said, “Don’t worry dad. I’ll memorize *Ode to a Grecian Urn*.” Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness, thou foster-child of silence and slow time, Sylvan historian, who canst thus express a flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme… So, you know, fifty some years later.

S: What did your parents do?

G: Journalists.

S: Oh yeah, journalists, sorry. When the guys like Tommy Lasorda are coming down for the winter league, are they involved with the Anglo-American community at all? What… where are they?

G: They were isolated. They were ball players.

S: They lived their own lives?

G: They lived their own lives. The American community in Havana was, I don’t know the history which is… I wrote a column in the Miami… Oh, more things. I was the only Spanish-speaking reporter at the *Miami Herald* city desk when Mariel started in 1980.

S: What?

G: *The Miami Herald* was very divided. The business side of the newspaper was heavily Cubanized because they needed subscriptions, they needed advertising and they had Cubans running these departments. But the news department despised Cubans speaking Spanish and all this. And so I was… I worked 27 straight days and had 30 straight page one bylines.

S: Were you accepted because of your English and your…

G: I was… and they found problems with everything. The management of the *Miami Herald* in that year, except for the executive editor and assistant city editor, all the rest were bigots, first rate bigots. They accused me of not being able to write. They accused me of, you know, just… and then they decided that they needed a Latin on the *Miami Herald’s* editorial board so they held open interviews and they offered the job to a Mexican American woman who was a professor of Spanish at the University of Texas. They kept the job open for her for two months until she didn’t come and she wasn’t answering their correspondence anymore or anything else. So one day, the editor Jim Hampton comes to my desk and says, “Lets go downstairs to the cafeteria to have a cup of coffee.” So we went down there and he said, “So and so hasn’t accepted our offer. Would you come work with us?” I said yeah. So I was the first Cuban on the editorial board of the *Miami Herald*.

S: Wow.

G: Twice nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.

S: For what articles?

G: I’ll show you. I think I may have some. I knew that man that you’re seeing on the screen on the right side.

S: Giuliani?

G: When he had a press conference and he was assistant attorney general, when there was an immigration press conference in Washington, I would go and I would sit very quiet at the press conference and ask no questions. Then after the conference, Doris Meissner who was commissioner of immigration and Rudy Giuliani who was associate attorney general would take me to his office and say, “Okay. What do you want to know?” And gave me personal interviews and personal…

S: Wow. How did you build that relationship with Giuliani?

G: Well first of all, he had a crush on a Channel 10 anchor. There were three Cuban women who were very important in the public affairs and department of Channel 10, which was ABC and they were close friends with me and through that I met Giuliani. But then I also met Myles Frechette who was the head of the Cuban desk at the State Department. I talked to him every day. I had met the head of the refugee department, Victor Palmieri.

S: I don’t know that name.

G: The man who fixed the Grand Central Station when it went bankrupt, millionaire New Yorker. His assistant, I forgot his name, and then he had another assistant named Phil Checkola who is now living in Tallahassee and we still keep in touch. I would talk to Myles Frechette, Phil Checkola, Victor Palmeiri, every single day to the extent that when the Sunday… Easter Sunday, when Cubans crashed the Peruvian Embassy, before the Mariel boat lift. I got a call from Myles Frechette and he said, “I can’t tell you anything Guillermo but if I were you I’d take an airplane and go to Costa Rica today.” So I went to my boss and said, “Don’t ask me why but I’ve been told to go to Costa Rica by the State Department.” Got the ticket, got the money, and went to Costa Rica. People started to arrive in Costa Rica from Havana the next day.

S: Oh wow.

G: And the Presidential Palace had just been built and the old Presidential Palace was vacant. There was no furniture there, nothing. And that’s where they put the Cubans in when they arrived from Cuba.

S: In San Jose?

G: In San Jose, and then part of them were chosen and sent to Peru where they kept up the Túpac Amaru part for awhile and part of them were allowed to come to the United States and that’s where the International Rescue Committee took over and decided… But I was the only reporter there and my best friend during those reporting days in the Caribbean- I had also covered Hurricane David in the Dominican Republic before that- was the New York Times Reporter named Joan Thomas. Joan Thomas is supposed to have been the woman who was linked to the man who was the gangster that was buried and never found in Detroit.

S: Which one?

G: The big, famous gangster. Whatever. But Joan and I became more than friends, we were like this. We were inseparable. We both covered the Caribbean. She was there first for one story and I was there next for the next story and we just continued. So the day after my first day I get a slip of paper underneath my door saying, “You beat me this time. I’m in the room next to yours. Joan.” So that was the… I got nominated because after that, after Mariel, in December of that year, there were a bunch of Cubans who were sent to Spain and who landed on the day before Christmas at New York’s Kennedy Airport from Spain. And there was no Cuban Adjustment Act, there was nothing so they picked them up because they were coming from a third country and sent them to El Paso, put the man in a jail for immigration violation, put the mother, son and an eight year old girl named Leisy in a motel surrounded by barbed wire. I was at that point either meeting to create the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, or I was already present as the second president of the association and we had a meeting in El Paso and I asked Jim Hampton, my boss, if I could stay an extra day to do an interview with these people and he said sure. So then I did a series of articles based on this little eight year old girl who at the end of the press conference raised her hand timidly and said, “Me puede decir usted cuando voy a poder salir de acá, cuando puedo ver a mi papa y cuando puedo ir a colegio?” And, you know, then sent it to Doris Meissner and… And I became… I was an editor on the editorial board so I started writing editorials and a column and Meissner felt the heat so she finally said, “Well what do you want us to do?” And I said, “Well, give me a date when you’re going to deport her or let her go.” And they let them go. So I was responsible for freeing that family and that girl. Still in contact with her. She lives in Hialeah. So basically helped change American immigration law so they cannot keep you indefinitely detained if they can’t deport you. Spain would not take them. Cuba would not take them back at that point. So they can’t keep you unless you’ve committed a crime in the United States or unless you’re a convicted felon someplace else and they can prove it, they can’t keep you in jail indefinitely. That law came up as a result of the work that I did.

S: Sure. Are people being kept indefinitely now or no?

G: No. You can’t do that. That was part of the change. And so I was influential in changing immigration law in the United States. And that was worth… and there was, I’ll show you some of the things that happened. *The Herald* decided to put in a Pulitzer application for the coverage of Mariel, which I was a part of but not in my name alone. My editor had a shit fit because he said, “You would’ve won.” *The Herald* got an honorable mention and honorable mentions don’t count for shit. But I won the Daily Gleaner Award from the Inter American Press Association for the same work but that time it was in my name only.

S: Is Inter American Press Association the same people invited Castro in ’59? Is that the same agency or no?

G: No. I think in ’59 it was the Associated Press or the Association of Managing Editors, AME.

S: Got it. That’s what it was. Sorry. I didn’t mean to cut you off.

G: No. The IAPA was founded in the early 1940s in Cuba but it doesn’t count really until 1950. They refused to count all the sessions and my father had a raging fight with them and everything else and in 1950 there was a fight between the Americans in the Inter American Press Association, the American editors and the Cuban editors.

S: Was it just Cubans and Americans or were there other countries as well?

G: Latin American countries in general against the Americans. The reason for the fight was that Life Magazine wanted to come out with a magazine called *Life en Español*. And all Latin American news organizations and the news magazines were petrified that that was going to be the end of Spanish language magazines because none of them could compete with *Life’*s resources. So in 1950 in the October meeting of the IAPA in New York at the Waldorf Astoria, there was a meeting to discuss this and they were fighting like crazy. And John S. Knight, owner of the *Akron Beacon Journal*, *The Miami Herald*, the *Charlotte Observer*, etc, etc. at that point it was the Knight Newspapers, got the people involved in the fight including my father, invited them to breakfast at this suite. They served breakfast, they brought the breakfast in, he went to the door and said, “I’m now closing this door and I will not open it until you reach an agreement.” Closed the door and walked out. They reached an agreement and nothing happened. The magazines had nothing to fear. The editor of *Life en Español* was a very… the younger brother of the best sports broadcast, radio broadcast announcer in the history of Latin American sports named Buck Canel. And he goes, “Amigos, no se vayan. Que estes poniendo bueno.” James Canel was the general manager of the IAPA and since my father had been president and a good friend, at that time you could not get direct Miami, direct Havana-New York flights like now or like it used to be. You could get a flight say three days before you had to be in New York or three days… so all the times that I had free in New York before I had to go back to Cheshire, I would stay with Jimmy Canel, I would stay with Buck’s younger brother. He took me to see one of the games and I was absolutely just flabbergasted. Here was Buck Canel drinking like a son of a bitch narrating… perfect narration, absolutely perfect. “Now at the end of the third inning the score is three to two the Yankees favored, we’ll come back after these messages from our sponsors.” Blah blah blah. Close. He would go into a tirade of swear words like I had never heard before in my life. You’re on. “Y como es deseas amigos, no se vayan.” There was nothing. He was amazing. Just amazing.

S: Is he the father of Denny Canel? Or Danny Canel?

G: I don’t know who that is.

S: Oh he’s a sportscaster now. He’s an announcer.

G: Where?

S: I think he’s on ESPN Radio.

G: Find out if it’s C-a-n-e-l.

S: C-a-n-e-l.

G: And find out if he was related to either Jimmy or Buck. But I’m telling you Buck was old…

S: So I have a few just sort of questions that I’ve been writing down while we’ve been going is that okay if we jump back?

G: Please. It’s your interview.

S: Alright. So in terms of you were talking about the bigotry in the *Miami Herald*, I’m curious, I mean you have all of these people coming from Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas to work in oil, to work in sugar, whatever, to join this Anglo-American colony, did you ever face bigotry while you were in Cuba from Americans?

G: Never.

S: Never. So what happens…

G: I was Americanized. I was… Chris, Billy, Jimmy, they were my best friends. There was a group of us. Ricky, Eddie Martinez. I don’t know if you’ve met Eddie. There was a group of us, a very small group. I used to play toy soldiers in English when I was five years old. It didn’t exist. That’s what made me so angry when I came here at The Miami Herald. We’re probably not… the person who wrote the book with me and I started plans to do another book about the history between the *Miami Herald* and the Cuban community here. And we interviewed John McMullen who died recently and we interviewed Larry Jenks who was the executive editor who hired me and who said something that just left me flabbergasted. He said, “You don’t understand this Guillermo but I made the decision to publish *El Miami Herald* in 1976. A 24 page full section, 24 pages in a language in which I did not understand a word and yet I was responsible for everything that we published.” So it really shook me up hearing that. And then the last publisher of… then came… I left, I went to Univision and then the last two editors of the *Miami Herald* and the presidents of the *Miami Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald* were first Roberto Suarez and then the head of the Knight Foundation, what’s his name? He was named president of *El Miami Herald* and he made it into *El Nuevo Herald* and then he became publisher of the *Miami Herald*. And the assistant managing editor and my former city editor named Doug Clifton who was a really bigoted human being went to him and said, “You know if you want me to resign I will because I don’t know if I can work for a Puerto Rican supervisor.” He left. Doug Clifton. I can see the man. A whole bunch of people. Really, really bigoted.

S: That’s so interesting. So I…

G: But remember the two things, and this is what Sam would come in very nicely for this. The newspaper had two sides and I as a journalist thought that the most important people in the newspaper were the journalists. Boy was I ever wrong. The people who made the money were the people who worked in circulation and the people who worked in advertising and who worked on the business side. I got up to about $88,000 working for the *Miami Herald*. They were making $250,000, $200,000. All of these things. And I’ve got to come up with a name because this is just bothering the hell out of me.

S: To other Cubans, other than your small little cadre that was kind of accepted, did you ever experience those sorts of sentiments or hear those types of things that… cause I’m just trying to get a feel for, it just seems so weird to me that…

G: I was the most prevalent, remember, I was the first Spanish-speaking member of the editorial board.

S: Right, no but I mean in Cuba, in the Anglo-American community, it seems interesting to me that you had all of these people coming down and I get that maybe the ones who were most intimate, the Cubans who were most intimate with that community wouldn’t have faced any of that sort of bigotry but was it around you at all or no?

G: I’m sorry. I’m trying… and I can’t find his fucking name. This bothers me. Well I’ll think of his name. He’s chairman of the Knight Foundation here now in Miami.

S: I could look that up also.

G: I never worked for him because finally in 1987, Joaquin Blaya of Channel 23 called me and said, “You know I’ve had my eye on you for a long time. I hired somebody from El Herald named Ivan Castro thinking that he would be a good news director but… he wrote so well for *El Herald* and later on I find out that you were writing the things for him. You were city editor of *El Miami Herald* first. So I was wondering if you want to come over and become news director of Channel 23.” I was making about $80,000 and he offered me $100,000 so I went. Five months later he took a man from operations and me and flew us over to California and appointed him operations manager of Univision and appointed me executive vice president of Univision news in charge of the national newscast and all of the Spanish language stations that they owned throughout the nation.

S: Wow. That was ’87?

G: January or February of ’88. I came to Univision August 9th, 1987 but I went to Univision in January of ’88. You know who Jorge Ramos is?

S: Of course.

(Audio playing)

S: Wow and that was yesterday?

G: That was yesterday.

S: And that was him that sent it to you?

G: He sent it to my son.

S: Wow. And is your son at Univision now?

G: He’s national assignment manager at Univision.

S: Sorry I’ve gotten…

G: So I left the Herald and never bothered anymore with that and went to Univision. Worked for eight years at Univision and then I became a… I started doing… I got laid off, not laid off, I got fired from Univision even though I had a contract for two years, they just paid me off. Then I went and became a consultant for all sorts of stations, lived in Chile. I went to work for Gustavo Cisneros in Venezuela and did quite a job with their newscast. Then he sent me to Chile and I handled the newscast in Chile.

S: What year was that?

G: From 1994 through the year 2000.

S: So it was after Pinochet?

G: After Pinochet yes. But it was a very small station and I just turned it around completely and made it into a professional news operation. And the day I got there was the day that they had intervened the Banco Latino and it was a huge… I don’t know if you know all the things that happened. This was… and Ricardo Cisneros was accused of being part of the board of directors who had jipped the bank out of the money and blah, blah, blah, blah. And I went to Gustavo and I said, “You understand that you brought me here to make this into a first rate news operation and that means that I have to name your brother as one of the people who has been indicted.” He said, “Go right ahead.” The stories are just unbelievable. I go in April of ’88 to the Inter American Press Association mid-year meeting in Antigua, Guatemala and I meet a man who wrote editorials for the *Wall Street Journal*. A month later, I was coming back to Venezuela from Miami. I would live in Venezuela where I had an apartment and my wife and I traveled on weekends to Miami. So we had a Monday through Friday stint in Venezuela and Saturdays and Sundays in Miami. So I got to Venezuela on Sunday at 5 o’clock in the afternoon and Gustavo’s secretary called me saying, “Señor Martinez…” “Si, dime. Me acabo de bajar del avion.” “Señor Martinez, el señor Cisnero quiere ver tu. Lo voy a mandar su chauffeur.” So they sent a chauffeur and I went to Gustavo’s house and he shows me the opposite editorial page of the Wall Street Journal where there was an article by a man named… what was…

S: Has he always worn a bowtie? That’s new right?

G: I think so. I don’t remember him with a bow tie. But in any event, one of Gustavo’s enemies, a gentleman named Carlos Ball had written an obscenely obscene article about Gustavo accusing him of being corrupt and all sorts of things and Gustavo said, “Guillermo, I want to respond to this man and I want it to appear in the *Wall Street Journal*’s edition tomorrow.” Sunday. 4 o’clock in the afternoon. I had just obtained three or four months before a telephone number for a guy that worked for the editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal*. Located him at a Latin restaurant in New York Sunday evening.

S: You flew there?

G: No. By phone. And said, “We will have a story for you in response to Carlos Ball. If we can get it to you by 9 o’clock tonight will you make sure it runs tomorrow in the same spot?” He said okay. So we had an answer to that the next day in the Wall Street Journal. I mean those are coincidences. Those are the things. Another time Gustavo calls me and he says, “Guillermo, we have a problem here and I’m going to send my plane to pick you and Beatrice…”

S: Beatrice is your wife?

G: No Beatrice was one of his personal assistants in Venezuela. …”and I want the two of you to come over to the Dominican Republic.” And we get to the Dominican Republic and there were three houses. One was for lunch and dinner. That was one house. Another house for is office. A third house was where he lived and a fourth house was where he had guests, that was his guesthouse. And then Ricardo comes after me and says, “Tu me estas tratando con mi propio estación de televisión de joder mi nombre.” And Gustavo says, “Ricardo, no jodas mas. Que vas a van aqui. Deja de aqui.” So you knew who was who back then. Shortly after that, President Caldera released Hugo Chavez from jail and Buenavision had morning public affairs programs and evening public affairs programs and I was in charge of them also. One of them was by Alfredo Peña who later on was… And Alfredo had a program called Los Peñenasos de Peña. President came, this, that, nothing happened. People took it as… they would come to the network and they would be there and nothing would happen. The day that Hugo Chavez… So where was I?

S: Yeah. Peña’s program.

G: Peña’s program, he invites Chavez.

S: This was ’94? ’95?

G: When he got just released from jail.

S: Cause the coup attempt was ’92 right?

G: Right. And he was… this was ’94. And I got to the station and I started getting phone calls from Gustavo’s personal secretary. Crowds down the halls of the network were running to see the comandante to touch the comandante. I called Gustavo and I said, “Gustavo, te quiero ver.” And he said, “Yo me voy a Nueva York mañana. Si quieres hablar conmigo tienes que venir a desayunar a mi casa a las cinco de la mañana.” Five o’clock n the morning I was with Gustavo in his house.

Just don’t include this please because it makes me look good and makes him look bad and that’s not my intent but I told Gustavo, “I had never seen anybody that had this type of effect on people since I saw what Fidel Castro did in Cuba in 1959.” This man is dangerous. Gustavo said, “Ustedes los cubanos siempre extrajeran, siempre comunistas que van de abajo de todos las camas. El movimiento socialista es la causa ere lo van a observar y lo van a destruyir.” Guess what’s happened? Just things like that.

Another time there was a story that was going to run by a friend of mine at the *Wall Street Journal*. The reporter was Jose de Cordoba. And Gustavo demanded to see the editors of the *Wall Street Journal* and of the Dow Jones Company. You know who he hired to go with us? Vernon Jordan who was a member of the board of directors of Dow Jones. Vernon Jordan, six foot four, huge, humungous, beautiful black man told me, “Your job is every time your friend Jose de Cordoba asks a question, you have to tell him ‘who told you that? Where is your source?’” Jose de Cordoba and I have never talked again since then. But it was a kind of crazy life and it was marvelous and it was just…

S: Just cause I have to get out of here at 7…

G: When are you leaving? Tomorrow?

S: My brother comes… he just turned 21 so we’re going to the Jets game because that’s what he wants to do for his birthday. They’re playing Miami this weekend so we’re doing that and then I leave on Monday.

G: You can after the Jets game, you’re welcome to come back with your brother and we’ll talk and I’ll give you drinks if you want.

S: No worries. Maybe. I might take you up on that. Just a few questions that I had written down. And I got caught up in these stories… Clarence Moore? Was he somebody that you knew?

G: Yes, Clarence Moore had an English language newspaper in Havana.

S: Yeah the *Times of Havana*.

G: There were two, the *Times of Havana* and the *Havana Post*. Claudita, his wife I think eventually ran one of the papers. They had limited circulation and no influence.

S: Did you read his paper though?

G: No.

S: You didn’t get the *Times of Havana* or the *Havana Post*?

G: No. I knew of their existence but I didn’t read newspapers. I left Cuba at 17.

S: You didn’t read *El Pais*?

G: No. I read *El Mu*ñ*ecuitos de Pais*. They had the funny strips. I read those. Shit. I didn’t pay attention to…

S: I’ve been told your father was very brave in a lot of the things he did.

G: You know what he did?

S: During Batista and during Castro.

G: My father, every time Batista imposed censorship, my father would resign the newspaper. He would quit. And the owner who was a very good friend of my father, he loved my father, would continue paying him but my father did not go to work. Then…

S: Who owned the newspaper?

G: Alfredo Hornado Sandberg of the Republic El Cristobal Diaz.

S: Alfredo…

G: Hornado. H-o-r-n-a-d-o. El Cristobal Diaz. So he would go to the IAPA and denounce Batista.

S: So when I’m reading these notes it’s your father who is doing this? Because it says the IAPA denounces Batista’s censorship.

G: Yes, yes. That’s my dad. I was, in 1957, I was at the April conference in Montego Bay Jamaica, Montego Beach Jamaica. I went scuba diving with Andrew Heiskell, publisher of *Life Magazine*. You know, the things that happen. Then comes Castro. And we were pretty close to one of the first early people who realized where Castro was going.

S: Who was that?

G: My uncle always believed, not the Jesuit but an architect, and my father we came… and I actually turned against Castro on January 11th when Castro passed a law called La Ley Once and La Ley Once said that anybody who had gone to a private university or a private school while the University of Havana was closed their studies were null and void. That’s a stupid thing to turn around and say…

S: That was just Villanova right?

G: La Universidad Villanueva, la Universidad Jose Marti, and the Institutos, the public high schools that were run by the government. So anybody who went to school during those times, their studies were null and void. It was atrocious. Then in 1960, one day Fidel Castro says, “Por que la prensa en Cuba, bajo Batista, estaba corrompida.” Was corrupt and people were accepting money from Batista. “Guillermo Martinez Marquez es uno de esas personas que recibia dinero del gobierno de Batista.” My father got up and went to the TV station that Sunday while Castro was still on and demanded to be given equal time to respond to him. Raul Castro stopped my father. It turned out that when I was a very young kid, Castro’s oldest sister rented the house next to us and Raul and Fidel used to live there. So they lived next door to me. I didn’t know. I was five years old. In fact, Raul was in love with my sister and there is a book that I can show you that says that. And Raul grabs my father and says, “Guillermo, no objeta por favor. No venga hoy y el derecho… de repita el semana que viene.” So the next week, we go, eight, ten people from the family went. Nobody else would help us. We went to the same TV station and my father said, “Where is the evidence? I’ve never taken any…”

S: Had he already written critical arguments about what was happening?

G: No. Not yet. And then Fidel came… *Revolución* the newspaper came out the next day with a huge article that said Martinez Marquez… evidence. There was a check made to Jose Perez who was endorsed by Juan Perez, perforated on the front but not perforated on the back. It was just a sham, the whole thing was a sham. So my father went back again to the TV station the next time and said, “Yo estoy depuesto…” because Fidel Castro asked him if my father could swear that he had never stolen money or accepted money from Batista. He said, “Yo estoy dispuesto con la mano de la corazon y jurar que nunca aceptada dinero de Batista o dinero de ningun politico. Si Fidel Castro esta dispuestose lo mi… (1:13:30)” Only person who ever responded to Castro. The only person in Cuba who responded against Castro. That was in early March 1960. My father’s birthday was March 9th and on the 10th of March he had an acute attack of diverticulitis and a doctor named Rodriguez Diaz who was one of Cuba’s best surgeons took him into the hospital and did for the first time in Cuba, operated in his intestine and took out the part that was full of diverticulitis, took part of that, joined the two parts of the intestine and left no artificial anus to drain. It was the first time that that operation had been made in Cuba. He was operated on March 10th, on April 10th he was on a plane bound for New York. My sister was next and I was the last one to leave on August 20th after I published the first anti Castro pamphlet at the University of Havana and we were expelled from the University on Mother’s Day 1960.

S: What did they say the reason you were expelled was?

G: Actividades antirevolucionarios. Mother’s Day.

S: You were living on your own cause you were 18?

G: I wasn’t living on my own. I had money that they’d left me and I had a car and I had the house and I went to live with my sister’s in laws parents and we printed the first anti Castro pamphlet. We printed that on a mimeograph machine at a nun school and the nuns would come up and raise their sultanas and say, “Muchacho, dejame…” We published about 3,000. I put them in a bag in the back of my car. Almost ran into a cop trying to enter the university. I had a gun and the glove compartment was broken and the police officer saw the gun, saw the magazines and I was about… I said, “I’m either going to have to shoot my way out of this or they’re going to take me to jail and I’m never going to get out.” And the police officer looked at my drivers license and registration and said, “Was your mother’s name Berta Rosena?” And I said, “Yes.” And he said, “Young man, you’re very lucky. Many years ago, my son was dying and your mother got him into a private hospital where they saved his life. I’m paying your mother back today. Just be careful.”

S: Wow. It’s just so interesting to me and this is kind of… the part of my project that I’m most excited about is the idea that people like you and people like Walter Arensburg’s mom and the Bakers and all of…

G: Mariata Arensburg who then became part of the freedom for Cuba with Arturo Miles who was the father of my wife’s best friend.

S: So it’s interesting to me… and Ed Gonzalez and the list goes on but you guys within this community and a lot of these people were not Cuban, would risk their lives doing activities both against the Batista government in the name of justice and later in the name of justice against the Castro government, it seems rare to me that foreigners would kind of put themselves out there in that way.

G: They didn’t.

S: They didn’t? Well I know like Mrs. Arensburg hid…

G: No Mariata Arensburg is an exception. She’s… And James Baker was responsible for creating the Pedro Pan foundation. So yeah. That case yes. But these were humanitarian issues and they were issues to save people’s lives. They were not issues to confront the Castro regime. That is an interesting distinction.

S: Now when you were passing out these pamphlets at Ruston, or organizing a strike, I apologize. Were you contacting Americans to be involved in that strike?

G: Yeah.

S: Were they going to be involved?

G: The school closed for over a month.

S: Because of the strike?

G: I closed the school for over a month.

S: So students just stopped going?

G: No. They couldn’t. The schools in Cuba were going to go on strike and Ruston could not do anything less and my father sent me to Cheshire and the next thing I know is my classmates were given homework for more than a month and they cussed me out forever and ever because they had been given so much work while the school was closed. The school was closed for over a month.

S: Wow. Were you planning this activity with people? How did you…

G: I decided that I had to close the school. I was 16 years old, not yet 17.

S: How does one go about closing a school?

G: I went around Ruston, you had to have seen the layout for Ruston.

S: I’ve seen it yeah.

G: Comercio was on the first floor, bachillerato was on the second floor, the second set of classrooms was high school and next to that was a patio a huge patio at the end of that between the baseball field and sports fields and there was a coke machine and I went here and started giving speeches saying, “You can’t come here. We have to close this school.”

S: In English or in Spanish?

G: Both. And they did.

S: So the American students were responsive to this?

G: I don’t know. I have no idea why… I had no idea that I had that power. I just did it and they closed it but I don’t know why. You’d have to ask some of these other people because I don’t know. The two people that were involved in that at that point was me and another Cuban who was in my class named Raul Martinez. Raul Martinez, his father had been arrested by Ventura.

S: Who is Ventura?

G: One of the biggest torturers under the Batista regime. And his wife called my father and my father got him out of Ventura’s jail, so saved his life. But Raul was also very involved in that. Raul was mainly in bachillerato… I just went and started haranguing people and harassing people and saying… then I got thrown out and the next thing I know the school strikes. I really did not know.

S: Was this in response to the call for a general strike?

G: Yes. That was in response to the general strike and I said, “We can’t do anything else.”

S: Was your father proud of you, ambivalent about what had happened? How did he respond to this? And how did James Baker respond to it as well?

G: Got no response from Baker at all. My father was just… just saved me. He went out with me to New York and took me to Saks Fifth Avenue and presented a lady to me at Saks Fifth Avenue and said, “He’s going to join the prep school at Cheshire Academy. Any time you see he might need something from Saks, some clothes, some pants, some shirts, send it to him and bill me.” So I was sent to Cheshire where I went from April to June. Then we had ten days vacation and I went back to Cuba but I wasn’t allowed to be in touch with anybody or do anything. Ten days in Cuba, went back to summer school. So because I had been sent to summer school, I got my father to promise me that if Batista was ousted I could stay in Cuba after Batista. So went to summer school, went to the fall, Ruston had 20, 25 students per class. Cheshire had 8. I was flunking all my classes at Ruston because I was involved in such vast conspiracies and other things.

S: Were you involved in other…

G: I was involved in that, loved the little girls, loved the girls and loved the Mother’s Club and all sorts of shit. I was flunking. I get to Cheshire and there were 8… and girls were not allowed. We weren’t allowed to see girls or talk to girls and then 8 students per class and all of a sudden I start getting A’s in physics and chemistry and math and English. I do my college boards and I get 800 in English, 800 in math and 650 in English.

S: Wow. So you weren’t really trying on the English.

G: And the headmaster of Cheshire calls me and says, “You should apply to Yale. This was once considered a prep school for Yale and we have not had graduates accepted at Yale.” I said, “Yale is a queer school. I don’t want to go to Yale. I want to go to Cornell.” So I went to Cornell.

S: But first you went to the University of Havana?

G: No. I went back to Cuba in September of ’59. My promise was that I had to go back to school in the United States. So my father… he bribed me. He said, “If you go to school and study at an American university, I’ll pay for your school, I’ll give you money, you’ll have a car when you come to Cuba. I’ll let you do whatever you want to do when you get vacations. If you decide to stay here at the University of Havana, you’re going to have to do it on your own.” He bribed me. So I went to Cornell. Wasn’t used to Cornell. Wasn’t used to… very prepared. My English was very good but I wasn’t aware of Eugene McCarthy. Didn’t know what Eugene McCarthy was or what he represented. The teachers at Cornell were very much involved in the anti McCarthy-ism. Then we had to read a book called *The Chicago Hay Market Ride*. I didn’t know what that was and it didn’t make any sense to me why all of this was going on. Had a physics exam, there were 300 students and I got 26 points and I said, “Shit. I’m flunking, I’m going to flunk out of the school.” And I go see my teacher and he says, “No you got the third highest grade in the class of 300 and we grade on a curve so you have either an A, an A minus or a B plus.” I said shit. But still I couldn’t understand that. So I went back to Cuba for Christmas, came back to Cornell. Then before the mid semester break in February I went to my advisor who was Professor Smith and told him that I had to go back to Cuba to fight Castro.

S: Wow. So this was…

G: February of 1960.

S: So then you went to the University of Havana.

G: So I went to Cuba. Got to Cuba. My father was in bed because he had just had a diverticulitis attack and he started this whole process. Meanwhile I was going to the University of Havana and started getting in trouble. He left. My sister left. My brother in law and their three oldest children and I stayed behind until… the first time they wouldn’t give me, Cuba would not give me a departure permit and it became very difficult to get but I finally got one. I got one on August 20th and we went to the American embassy in the morning, got my visa, put it in the passport and came out August 20th, 1960 at 4 o’clock in the afternoon. Since then I’ve been to Cuba twice. The first time was to interview Fidel Castro in 1978. Then I went into a jail to see a cousin of mine without permission, got scolded, reprimanded severely by the government for that. A month later I was invited again to go in before anybody else and I was the first journalist to go and I interviewed a whole bunch of Cubans who I conspired with who had been my colleagues for all this time. And that was when they released 3,800 political prisoners.

S: Including your cousin or no?

G: My cousin was included. Alfredo Hornado was included. That was one of the top ones. Tomas Fernandez Javieso who was under 18 when he was first arrested was included. A whole lot of people. A bunch of people were out.

S: Just sort of a random question, were you in the Episcopalian youth group?

G: No. I was Catholic.

S: Okay. But I know there were Jews in it and other… no? Okay. We’ve jumped around quite a bit, sorry.

G: Not a problem.

S: If you had to tell me what lessons or how you would have been different had you not gone to Ruston…

G: I would not love democracy so much. I would not be so proud of being an American. I would not take the election process so seriously.

S: What about Ruston imbued those things in you?

G: It was imbued in us through the example. I didn’t get to the last year in which James Baker taught a class called English and Thought in Action. It was Hiyakawa. I never took that.

S: Did you ever read the book?

G: No. But basically I absorbed all of it without my having to have been there and I’ve been this way… I don’t see a person and realize if he’s Cuban or American.

S: Do you think that the American colony as a whole imbued these values as well or do you think it was Ruston specific?

G: I don’t think it is Ruston specific. Let me go to the restroom for a second.

S: I gotta get out of here anyway. I’m going to shake your hand and thank you so much for doing this. This is such a good opportunity for me.

G: If you want to meet tomorrow just give a call…

S: Yeah, yeah I’ll let you know and certainly next time I’m back in Miami. But…