

Ricky Sanchez  
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Samuel (S): My project generally? I'm trying to understand the influence of Americans institutions in Cuba in the 1950s. That's kind of the question that I'm grappling with and I'm looking at this community of Americans and I think by the end of the '50s it was around 12,000 Americans were living there and you see that they're seeping beyond economic institutions. There are all these cultural institutions that...

Ricky (R): Well there were many companies that were either owned by U.S. companies or had ties to a U.S. company.

S: Yeah. What did your family do in Cuba?

R: My dad was a doctor and my mother a nurse.

S: Where were they trained? In Cuba?

R: In Cuba. Both. My mother... my father had some kind of tie with the American College of Physicians. And my mother had done a course in the United States a long, long time... it might have even been before I was born and she always had this insistence that I obtain a bilingual education and I started in other schools that were the same before going to Ruston.

S: Which schools?

R: I went to Saint George before. There is a big Saint George community here too. That was a decent sized school.

S: I was looking through one of the yearbooks because it was at the Cuban Heritage Collection, just the other day actually.

R: From Saint George.

S: I think so yeah.

R: They were technically our biggest rival, if you want to say that, in sports. There wasn't a...

S: More than Lafayette?

R:... Cuban American league, a sports league. That was founded when I was in... after sixth grade, around seventh or eighth grade that was created.

S: And that was just for baseball or that was for everything?

R: That was for almost every sport. I mean we had track and field, we had baseball, basketball, and one time they were trying their hand at football but there wasn't

enough and girls had kicking ball and it was a little bit of everything. There was an intercollegiate league. Of course, our schools were smaller than the average Latin or Cuban schools and so this league was formed of all the Cuban-American schools. It was Ruston, St George, Lafayette, Cathedral.

S: But not Candler right?

R: Candler.

S: It wasn't in that league?

R: No Candler was in the other league.

S: What was the other league?

R: Because... in the intercollegiate league.

S: With Belen and...

R: With Belen and they split. There was a big fight at one point and then they split. But Candler and what was interesting probably the best facility for basketball of all intercollegiate sports in Cuba was Candler's. Candler's was an old school. Episcopal or...?

S: Methodist.

R: Methodist. One of those. Very well established. Bigger than Ruston. It was a big school. But when we started our league they were already part of the other La Sal, Belen and...

S: Was your family involved in starting this league or no?

R: No.

S: Just you were...

R: I played. I really don't know who started it and who organized it. I have no idea.

S: Well tell me a little bit more about Saint George. I haven't met very many people who went there. How large was it?

R: I just went a year. I would probably say that Saint George... what was the student body at Ruston? 700 or something like that?

S: It depends how we count but something like that yeah.

R: There were probably 400.

S: And did it go all the way to high school?

R: Yeah.

S: Why did your family change you from Saint George to Ruston?

R: They wanted me to go to Ruston all the time. There wasn't a spot. As soon as a spot came up... I only went to Saint George for one year.

S: And Saint George was significantly more Cuban than Ruston. Is that right?

R: No I don't think so. I think it was about the same. Ruston was much more fashioned if you want. The directorship was more American. Saint George had a lot of Cuban influence. But I only went there in second grade so I don't know. And my exposure to them was that they were our rivals in sports, the strongest rival.

S: Were you in bachillerato?

R: Both.

S: So the combined program.

R: Bachillerato and high school.

S: Yeah, what kind of...

R: And in science, which is something that perhaps you've not discussed. It had nothing to do with Ruston but it was something that I have always not understood and been against of education in Cuba. Which I think, in my opinion, was a lot more fundamentally sound than education here. When I came here to college, people were blown out with statistics and to me it was a breeze. I tell you I had it in Cuba in high school and it was a breeze. So fundamentally it was very... however, when you got to senior year in bachillerato, not in high school but in bachillerato, you had to make a choice whether you would take a university education in science or in liberal arts, letters they would call it, liberal arts. So in senior year in bachillerato you were split between science and what they call letters, which is liberal arts. And I became aware... I went into science. We did have aptitude tests that we took and they told me I would do better being an electrical engineer or a math teacher and once they mentioned the word teacher it sort of gave me a... and I ended up teaching and I enjoyed it enormously. But anyway, at that point in time it was the rebel in me that just the word teacher was... I had a reaction to it but anyway, the one thing I learned that I thought was wrong and it probably came from Spain was there was one course that I took in college that I did not take in high school. That was given in bachillerato in liberal arts but not given in science, which was logic. And when I took logic I said, "How is it possible that our education limited the study of logic to liberal arts and said if you're in science you don't need this?" Well it's the subject that teaches you how to think. So what are you saying, if you're in science you don't think? You just follow certain theories. It blew my mind and I have always insisted that when I taught, I insisted with my children as they've gone into college. That is a very important subject. That was the one thing that I... because really, high school and bachillerato were parallel. The ones that were taking high school both, we took science classes and certain classes in Spanish. We took physics and we took

chemistry, math, in Spanish. But we did have a curriculum of English composition, of literature, of certain things-history- that complicated- well we had history also in Spanish, history and geography- but certain things that complimented your education that were basically in Spanish but this was in English to make sure that you kept up with the English language.

S: So were there more requirements for people who were doing both programs?

R: Yes.

S: Because I know the curriculums were extremely different.

R: Yes. They were different and the same way I mentioned logic that I would've appreciated getting. There was a course taught by Jim Baker, it was the only course that I think he taught, in senior year of high school if you took high school, bachillerato you took it also, which was I learned through the years and people here in my business always kid me about it because I'm very careful of words and I'm in a conversation and I sort of stop for a second and try to make sure I'm using the correct word. We took a course based on a book called *Language and Thought in Action*, Hiyakawa.

S: Harry Skilton showed me the book. Yeah.

R: Which is excellent. I flunked it but through the years I learned the value of that. The value of making sure that your words are correctly, as you can, as correctly used and you mean what you're saying because there is so much that people just jump at a word. I found that but we took it in bachillerato. Now if you were in bachillerato and did not take high school you would not take that course. And if you were in high school and did not take bachillerato, you did not take the same courses we took in Spanish. They were parallel but not the same.

S: Who else was in this mixed program your year?

R: Actually the graduates who graduated in '59 from the dual program, most of us meet monthly. It's about ten of us. But it was more. It was... I would say that we had about 15, 20.

S: So somebody like... cause I'm trying to wrap my head around it so somebody like Michael Sanchez he would've been in high school.

R: High school. Period. Chris Baker was high school.

S: Right. So all of the Americans.

R: The Americans, I don't think any American, well I don't think many Americans took... well we had one. George Adams.

S: George Adams. His family had been there a long time too.

R: Yes. George was with us in high school and bachillerato but not too many other Americans if I remember correctly would take the dual program.

S: And the Cubans that knew that they were going to school in the United States?

R: They took the dual.

S: They took the dual, they wouldn't take just the high school?

R: Mostly. There were some in plain high school. There were some but I would say that half and half. Like Mitch? Mitch studied high school. Mitch did not study in the mixed program.

S: And I wonder if that's about his mother being American right?

R: I really don't know. Mitch is a very interesting person, a friend. He's a very interesting person. His father was involved in politics and had a very tragic ending so I don't know if his mother being American influenced him on anything because he's a smart guy. He was ticketed for the MIT gang. By the way, another thing that you might not know, Ruston was very, very, strict in the application of curriculum. If you were, and I would have to do math now, if you went to bachillerato you took k-6, when you finished 6<sup>th</sup>, then you would go choose bachillerato or high school. I guess, and I never focused on it, if you're in bachillerato and high school and I guess, totally guess and I would have to go back and look at the year books, there was a 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Bachillerato on the other hand you went 6<sup>th</sup> grade and then you went into a course called ingreso. Ingreso sort of means entrance if you may. In other words, it was entrance to bachillerato. One year, the equivalent of 7<sup>th</sup> grade. And then bachillerato was five years.

S: Wow.

R: 1-5. If you went to high school you probably went 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and then freshman, junior or whatever, through 12<sup>th</sup> like we have here. But we had the parallel numbers and why do I say this and Mitch comes to mind because he was in a group of very smart guys. There were two people that I know in the history of Ruston. I've heard people say that there were more, I went to Ruston in second, third grade and graduated from Ruston. In all my years, I only met two guys that were friends and Ruston allowed them to skip ingreso. Therefore, they had one year less of education and they both went to MIT, by the way. Brilliant.

S: Who was the other one?

R: Augustine Rios and Arturo, who is by the way extremely well to do in life, Arturo... I can't remember. They both went to Boston. I'll get you the name and send it to you. He was involved in real estate in Boston. Very well to do.

S: Did you always know that you were going to school in the United States? Was that something that was determined before?

R: Well my mother knew, whether in a sense I accepted it or not or just went along with it. However, once they told me engineering, you know, the University of Havana had a ton of problems. They closed in '56 and then they closed again later on. So by the time it was close for us to graduate, the only choice for us was coming to the United States.

S: Not Villanova though?

R: I don't... Villanova I think was a lot more popular amongst, there was a very large Catholic group of schools and I mentioned to you the league, the sports league that split. Well the Catholics split Belen. The one that provoked the whole thing was Belen. With Belen went La Sal and Marris Brothers and another school and split. I think Villanova was a lot more popular amongst the Catholic graduates, the graduates from Catholic schools like my brother in law. By the way, extremely interesting, my brother in law and a group of people who had gone to Villanova in Cuba, were led to believe that if they came to the U.S. and went to Villanova in Philly, they were going to be helped to further their studies. And unfortunately it did not happen. I was not in that group because I was in prison in Cuba. I went in the Bay of Pigs invasion and so but then when I came out of the Bay of Pigs I went to Philly because my wife was there with her brother. But my brother-in-law and this group went to Villanova in Philly, "We went to Villanova in Havana and they told us you would help us here."

S: Nothing.

R: Nothing.

S: I did hear of somebody getting credits transferred.

R: Well the interesting thing is they all got very annoyed and very dejected and got on a bus and they all go by a Jesuit school, Saint Josephs. I graduated from St Josephs. But this group got off the bus and talked to the counselor at St Joes and St Joes got them all loans, you know, student loans and everything. Paul Betts was the gentleman. But the only reason I'm mentioning it to you, Villanova lost its link to Villanova in Cuba. By the way, later on they opened a Villanova here, which is St Thomas. Which is currently St Thomas. With some of the teachers from Villanova in Cuba, which might have been different for these people but Villanova in Cuba sort of lost its ability or its desire to link to Villanova in the United States but that wasn't in the, I think, in the American schools, like in Ruston. In Ruston there was a concerted effort for you to take the SATs, which by the way, I took my SATs at St George. There was a concerted effort for you to prepare yourself to come to the United States. My list of schools that I started applications and everything was electrical engineering Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy New York. If you were to mention RPI anywhere in Cuba but Ruston, everyone would say, "What? What the hell is that dump?" RPI, Texas A and M, Georgia Tech, you know, that was my... once the University of Havana was not an alternative because it was closed. Once it opened, there was this, as this was in all Cuba unfortunately, there was this, I don't want to

say patriotic but this first to be part of the change that was happening in Cuba in 1959. And so most of our group decided that we would be going to the University of Miami, I'm sorry, the University of Havana, which by the way in its history had a tremendous reputation. The medical school at the University of Havana was super. The law school was super. It had a reputation elsewhere. I remember going to Berlin in Germany and going by the University of Berlin and there was this statue of a gentleman who had taught there by the name of Humbolt. I said, "Whoa wait a minute there's a street in Cuba named Humbolt." And then in the writing of that statue it was whoever it was and they taught at the university and they also taught at the university of Havana. So the University of Havana had an excellent reputation. So anyway, a lot of us decided to stay at the University of Havana but most had already started the process of coming to the United States and I got involved in all this political shit. I'm sorry. This political wave, lets put it that way. Hiyakawa tells me to use the word wave. Political wave and ended up opposing the government and ended up spending some time as the guest in a palace, a former palace without visits.

S: I've heard some of that story. I want to get to that story. I am interested. So in 1959 in the fall semester you started at the University of Havana. Okay. And you thought you were...

R: And by the way, what an experience. One of my classes, I think it was vectors. The classes were so crowded there were people, if you didn't get there early enough, you stood out on the balcony just watching through the windows and there was this one guy who played basketball with me but played basketball for the University of Havana. I didn't. I friend of mine who had just got here and he had hip surgery and recommended by me the same doctor, three weeks before me. That would show up with a, they were doing some repairs at the university and there were stairs that opened like that and smaller stairs but we called him mustacho stairs because they... And he would come in two minutes late after classes had started, right through the middle of class with his ladder, would go up the ladder and sit on the ladder because there was no seating. It was packed. It had been closed for two or three years so not only those who had graduated from high school or bachillerato in '59 but in '58, '57, they were all packed in there. So it was quite an experience. In hindsight, probably and my parents would probably say that they would've loved for me to come to the United States and stay away from ending up in prison for two years and then when I came out all my friends that had gone with me to high school were already getting ready to graduate so it was very, it became very important to me to graduate as quickly as possible. Number one I didn't have a penny so I had to... I was offered a scholarship at U Penn but I would've had to work. I wanted to get married. I would've had to not work, I wanted to get married. So I went to work for the bank and I studied at night and I did my requirements in four years including the summers. So I graduated in four years. I started in '63 and graduated in '67. With, and this dovetails to a question that you had, I went to see Paul Betts and the graduating requirement, I think it was 128 credits and based on my last semester's... the classes I got into which was six classes which was absolutely absurd. I was

overloaded. And I lost, unfortunately, I lost my cum laude because of the schedule. It was just too tough for that. But I went to see Paul Betts and I said, "Do I have an alternative with some of my electives?" Then with a two credit elective I could take a three credit elective because I'm short one credit for graduation. I would have to come up another semester. And Bets looked at my whole curriculum there, transcript and he said, "Hmm it's interesting, you never chose languages as an elective." Of course you speak Spanish very well." Yep. "You took Spanish in Cuba?" Yep. "I'll give you credit for Spanish so you won't have to come." So I did get two credits. But there were a lot of people who did apply for credits. I never, when I got involved in all this effort to fight the government there... too early. So most of the courses I took my first year was a waste.

S: Just very quickly, so the graduates from Belen, would they come over with the same levels of English that you would?

R: No. We used to, going back to the SAT... the SAT just for coincidence, just location. Ruston was on the outskirts, at one point was in the middle of town in Havana and then they moved it to the outskirts. Way out. St George was sort of relatively close to the center. So at the time of giving the SATs where other schools would come, St George was much more convenient. So we took the SATs at St George. With us, I remember distinctively because there were three guys from La Sal, which was the other big Catholic School. There were three: Belen, La Sal and the Marris Brothers were huge and they were rivals in everything. There were three guys from La Sal who played basketball with me in a club. And they show up at the SATs in St George. We get the papers. They looked like they were totally lost and we laughed and laughed and laughed because their level of English was not even close to ours.

S: So when they went to schools like St George that must've been a transition for them that you didn't face.

R: Well St George...

S: Not St George, St Joes. Sorry.

R: St Joes yes. The University of Miami. Well even St Joes. St Joes was a joke and sometimes because there was a group that wasn't doing very well in their studies and traditionally we would go to the teacher and they would give them all this history about them being exiles and blah blah blah and we would just... we were waiting for the, when they got to the new course for the first test for them to come and you know, our language barrier and blah blah blah.

S: I bet you were thanking your mother for your English education.

R: I was thanking my mother that's correct.

S: So were you involved in anything before... so it's clear in '59 you were being patriotic, you were going to the University of Havana so there was a part of you initially that...

R: That thought there was going to be a change for the better.

S: So were you involved with any political stuff before '59?

R: Not super active. You know, Ruston's and this is very personal when I say it, I cannot say what the official view political view of Ruston but in my mind, Ruston stressed democratic values as much or more than any school that I've heard of. We were exposed to lectures from ambassadors from the United States. They would come to talk to us about democracy. So I could not fathom supporting neither the previous government before Castro, nor Castro later on. I had very powerful family in the Castro government. Very, very powerful. But still there was one defining moment and I've always said it, which I said this thing when to pot, which was he gave a speech in which his theme was in Spanish "Elecciones para que." Why should we have elections? And in my background of Ruston, that was what I had been taught that was bad about the other government, that it was a "dictatorship" without elections. And here the guy bringing hope, the first thing he says, it wasn't right off the bat. It was probably about six months into his... that he made that speech. It blew my mind. It completely blew my mind and from then on progressively I decided to get a little more involved in things, and then I decided to leave and come here and join the invasion. But...

S: So you were trained in Nicaragua with everybody?

R: In Guatemala. I would have to credit, give partial credit to what I took out of Ruston education for my firm support of democracy, whether it was, and of course it became even more evident when Jim Baker after our graduation started Peter Pan. My mother had developed an excellent relationship with Jim Baker. My relationship whether it was strengthened by the fact that I spent so much time in detention that included having dinner with Jim Baker and his family.

S: While you were in prison? Oh detention. Different form.

R: Different form of detention. I was not the quietest person.

S: I was like Castro invited Jim Baker to...

R: No, no, no. It was detention. They would call it study hall after school. I was a frequent...

S: Guest.

R: ... guest of study hall so I don't know if out of that and the fact that Chris was my co-student. We were in the same class. But Jim Baker and I developed a very good relationship and my mother would talk to him all the time trying to make him understand that I was a rebel without a cause. Anyway, when I decided to leave, I needed my transcripts and I went to see Jim and I was over the age that I could lead as part of Peter Pan but Jim Baker said to me, "I'm going to be in Miami in a short time, when you get there stop by to see me." And then to my surprise he called me

one day and said, "I'm doing a favor for your mother and I got you a fully paid scholarship at the University of Miami." And have you ever known James Dean and his movie *Rebel without a Cause*. And I said, "Mr. Baker, I'm so appreciative of your efforts but I've decided to go join the Bay of Pigs."

S: This is when you were in Miami that you had this conversation?

R: When I got to Miami. I'm going to join the, it wasn't the Bay of Pigs, we were the Invasion Forces. He said, "Well I'm very proud of you but I think your mother will be heartbroken but I'm very proud." When I came out of prison, and I think this is important and I will always... when I came out of prison, we came back in airplanes and were taken to a place here called Dinner Key Auditorium. At Dinner Key Auditorium waiting for me was my girlfriend, which is still my wife, Chris Baker and Dennis Baker. They were waiting for me. And the message was, two years after, the message was, "Dad wants you to know that the scholarship is waiting for you."

S: At the University of Havana. Or Miami. Right, right, right.

R: Then I went to visit him like three weeks later and I said, "Mr. Baker, I know it's not three strikes but I have to go to Philadelphia. My girlfriend is there and we have to get married and I can't do it here. I have to go." So I never took that but Jim Baker and I, after having a confrontational high school became very good friends and I respect the man enormously. Enormously. And appreciate him instilling in me first Hiyakawa because he was a teacher of Hiyakawa, which later on became an interesting subject for me. And the second was I give him credit for instilling in me the democratic principles that I saw in the school. Very steep. By the way he was very, very discouraged by, as I was, by the shift in the Castro because he had seen it as something positive. I remember, I can't remember who it was from the American embassy coming to talk to us about the change and all that. Of course the American embassy was very much behind the toppling of Batista before. And he sort of promoted, I don't know if he did it himself but the idea came out there was an effort by the original effort of Castro of an agrarian reform. And the symbol of that was that they needed tractors and things.

S: I heard you raised money for it.

R: We raised money for this little green, horrible tractor. Well I guess green was John Deere or Caterpillar at that time. That was the color and it was this little horrible, horrible little tractor parked at school that we all contributed to. Even being American, he was, I think he was very much instilling democracy and love for Cuba. Absolutely nothing to do with this conversation.

S: Actually everything to do with this conversation. What is the influence of these U.S. institutions, if part of it is...

R: I was going to say and it sort of reflects Jim Baker's philosophy and his life. Many years later I was here at a club, and it's called Big 5 Club, which was an organization in Cuba?

S: Which one were you a member of?

R: There were five, it was the Big 5. The Havana Biltmore and the Vedado Tennis, Havana Yacht Club. Anyway, here, since those individually those club individuals did not have the wherewithal to get organized, here they did one, the Big 5. There was a party at the Big 5 Club and I was there with my wife and I hear, "Will Mr. Ronald Klein please come to the stage." Shit. Ronald Klein. Ronny Klein. Can there be two Ronald Kleins in the world? Although the one that studied with me whom I have never seen since we graduated. So I darted toward the stage and here was jolly Ronny coming very heavy guy, big guy. He had had the first Edsel that I know of in Cuba, Edsel Convertible. He had it and Ronald was coming. "Hey Ronny, how are you?" I had never seen him again and we had a very emotional meeting and then he looked at me and said, "Ricky, when are we going back home?" And it made me feel so bad. The issue of Cuba had been brought by an American and not by me the patriot.

S: What did Ronnie's family do?

R: I can't remember. But he said to me, we finished the conversation by saying, "Ricky, I am involved in selling to all the American bases throughout the world. I visit them all. I sell them the goods. There is nothing like Cuba." That's the type of feeling that I think was developed with many... by the way, my wife, and I think it's important for you in understanding all of this, my wife gets a kick every time we go to Ruston meetings and especially when I talk to Chris and I'm in the alumni association so I talk a lot with Chris. And she gets a kick, starts laughing the minute she sees Chris because I speak to Chris in English. Chris speaks to me in Spanish. And it happens with many others. Rocky Harper. And she told me from the beginning, I don't understand. They are so attached or they want to prove to you even though you're being courteous and talking to you in English, they want to prove to you that they studied in Cuba. They didn't study in Italy. They studied in Cuba. By the way, in high school I have no clue what kind of Spanish they were taught in high school. In little Ruston up through sixth grade, I had a clue because we took Spanish at the same time. But in high school I have no clue if their Spanish was Mary's a boy and Tom is a girl. I don't know. But the fact is, the vast majority of them, the Harpers, the Maddox, the Sanjenis, all of those speak Spanish and if they're around Spanish people they sort of refuse to speak English. It's part of their pride that they are bilingual.

S: And all the people you just mentioned were either mixed households or long term, very long term.

R: Very long term in Cuba.

S: And so I think the level of commitment of...

R: There was a club, talking about clubs in Cuba, there was a club that was called the Mother's Club.

S: Were you a part of it or no?

R: No it was mostly Americans and they went there and had sports and shows and dances and everything. But I went there in my social life.

S: Were you friends with this group? I mean, were your friends mostly Cuban or mostly American?

R: Mostly Cuban but I hung around with a lot of Americans.

S: So would you go to their houses?

R: I would. It was no...

S: So you functioned in a very bilingual world.

R: Very bilingual world and I have stressed that. What can I say that does not violate... I have always stressed, let's put it this way, we have discussed many times the role of Ruston in the future of Cuba and I have always stressed, other than, let me go back for second. We were always very proud of the curriculum of Ruston. And how prepared we were. We had by law everybody studying bachillerato in Ruston had to take yearly exams with the public school systems, Instituto. We had to take exams with them. Well sufficient enough to tell you as an example that my grades were not the best except in math. In math I was very high but when we went to the public school system, to the Instituto, it was straight A's. If you didn't ace those exams you were looked at as what school are you going to, you know? So we were very proud of the Cuban, we are, of the Ruston education and I think that most of the people that knew of Ruston in Cuba accepted that Ruston's education was amongst the best in Cuba. And I don't know if it is my mother's insistence that sort of filtered into me even though I rebelled against everything, or whatever it was, I have always been the standard bearer in the alumni of the value of bilingual education. To me it's super important. It goes beyond politics. It goes beyond everything just the fact that you are a bilingual I think helps you develop into a much more, you know, comprehensive education. And I've always stressed that and I always stressed whatever happens in Cuba... let me give you another example, when Castro came in Ruston had a very, was well known and it was well known amongst different people. And I one time, Batista's son was...

S: I've heard this story yeah.

R: While at the same time...

S: Prio's niece. Yeah.

R: Prio's niece was there. Monte's son was there.

S: Lopez Fresquet.

R: I don't know. Perhaps Lopez Fresquet but Phillippe Pasos, Tom Roe who was the ambassador to...

S: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

R: And then Castro takes over and they create within the department of state, the equivalent, they created a department, of course the secretary of state, and his son had been there. And using his son, he created a group, I believe it was Protocol, the Department of Protocol, which was a group of people that would take care of green ambassadors and the first protocol group was 100 percent Ruston. Manuel Gieppe who was the head, Carlos Martinez, Sardinias and... They were all, that group was the first group and that's how much Ruston was...

S: Wow. Were there any other Ruston folks in the Bay of Pigs?

R: Yes. With me went Ronald Rodriguez who was a classmate and Raul Martinez, classmate. Three from '59 that I know of.

S: Wow.

R: We were all in the same class.

S: Now, and I get that you were becoming disillusioned at this point, but kind of the rise in anti American rhetoric throughout '59 and into '60 that you were surrounded by. How did you receive that? Given that your background was... how did you explain it? How did you... was this something that...

R: I was very defensive about it because, you know, that's a very interesting question because I have always been proud of being not ridiculously nationalistic but nationalistic. You have to be proud of your origin. So I have always supported the fact that I'm Cuban to the point in which, amongst brigade people, I'm sort of an outsider, I'm not an outsider. I'm very much in but in one thing, I've never blamed the United States for the failure of Bay of Pigs because I view it as it was our problem. We should've solved it. The United States came to help us. At one point it was not convenient to them because of their own interest to support the whole thing in a certain way, and we failed. It's our problem. Not their problem. So I have never felt an inch of my body being accepting other than respect for the United States. And I still do. Right now with the current elections, there are many Cuban Americans who weigh whichever way they're going to vote by the issue of Cuba and I said, "No this is the elections of the United States and whoever is elected, the first thing they have to do is take care of the United States." Whatever happens to Cuba is our problem. If they want to help us, that's their problem. But it's our problem. You know...

S: I find it interesting that whole Bay of Pigs conversation, it is very much...

R: I need to excuse myself for one second. There is a closing going on there and I want to make sure.

S: Go for it. You're allowed to work too. So just...

R: We were talking about that. You know I have mixed feelings as to Castro's anti-U.S. rhetoric. Being anti-U.S. is chic amongst rebels. If you sort of wave the flag of being independent and you are pro-American, you don't get too much of a crowd to listen to you. But if you wave the flag of being independent and you wave the anti-American slogan, that gets you a long way. It's par for the course.

S: So what made it a useful unifying tool then in Cuba?

R: A unifying tool? Being anti-American?

S: Because I agree with you.

R: The movement to get rid of Batista took so much force, and by the way I'm being very careful in my use of words. I'm not saying the pro-Castro movement. There were a lot of people involved in there. I'm not 100 percent sure that if Castro had presented his whole plan the first day he got there that he would have been universally approved. I think it would've been a little bit different. I have always, and this has nothing to do with this interview, I've always thought that Castro pulled a coup at one point in time when he felt he was strong enough. And that happened about five months after he was in power. He went to the television and he said, "I've not been able to do what I wanted to do and these people have been against me," including then president Manuel Urrutia. So he sort of urged or promoted or whatever the word is a popular dissatisfaction with the government that he had helped put in there that was not 100 percent Castro people. I just think that people became enamored that much with the figure of Castro that accepted his anti-American, because I do not think that the Cuban people were anti-American.

S: So you didn't see the seeds of discontent beforehand?

R: No, no, no. No, no. Look, as you went into the non-Havana, to the farmers' places of Cuba, the main staple, the sugar, and the majority of the capital behind the sugar crop in Cuba was American. So a ton of people worked for Americans. The electricity company was American. The telephone company was American. Esso was there. So you had the nickel company, Nicaro Nickel. You had so many people who had jobs dependent on the United States and other than if you really wanted to look at the influence of the organized crime in gambling, other than that there was nothing other than positive that the Americans were doing in Cuba. They had always been without having... there was always comments, again, my age, I was 18 years old, 17. I don't think there was comments probably in political circles. Grau San Martin had been a president that had been fiercely nationalistic, anti the laws that were left by the Americans during the independence wars. There had always been at political levels positions that espoused independence versus dependence on the United States like they are in Puerto Rico, which is not true. But as you left that particular field and went to the people, you had so many people that benefitted from American companies that were not involved in anything other than having business there and giving employment. Why would you react against them if not inflamed with

“Americans are behind this, Americans are this...” you know, which is what, if you have never seen it the first movie during Vietnam, or the first that attempted to study or to focus on Americans naivety in international politics was called *The Ugly American* in which one of the scenes I will never forget, I saw it in Cuba I think, was there was aid coming in from the United States and here were the Russians taking away the tags and putting Russian things on it. So being anti-American has always been a popular stance for they call them third world countries but actually it goes way up because Europeans are not third world. But it becomes, you know, a modus operandi for publicity versus and I’m not going to say one part of it but I have one friend of mine who was with me for the Bay of Pigs who was well connected in Mexico. One of the very few people. Mexico is fiercely nationalistic supposedly and he is very well connected with power in Mexico. And we broached this subject and he said, “Ricky, the whole Mexican business of being anti-American is bullshit.” How come? “What’s the biggest product Mexico has?” Oil. “Who handles the oil in Mexico?” Pemex. That’s part of it. Pemex distributes. There is another company and that is drillers something or another. It is not a popular name nor a known name that looks for oil and takes it out. All that Pemex does is distribute. That company, you know who the owners are? Fifty percent Mexican, fifty percent American. You know, the interests of both countries are very well intertwined but it is a popular stance and when we had this chat still the... had total control of politics in Mexico, it’s a very popular stance to be anti-American. So if you’re a politician why would you be anything other than anti-American? So I think that whether you agree or disagree with Obama’s policies towards Cuba, one of the very positive things that I think is coming out is that you see that the people of Cuba are very open to welcoming Americans.

S: Sure.

R: On a personal level. Forget about the public image, forget about if I have to say that you’re using the people, and look at photographs and see Yankee caps.

S: Miami t-shirts.

R: And Miami t-shirts. Yeah. You know you sort of get the impression... you’re talking about people with 50 years of being told and raised that these are, I think, again, regardless of if you long-range approve or disapprove of the policy, I think the biggest loser in all of this is Raul Castro because how can I stand up every day and spew improprieties of the United States and then all of a sudden I’m sitting there and signing... I think that it was just circumstances. It was just the theory in my book, the theory of the masses. The masses are there and they are manipulated to whatever, and that’s a popular, you have to have a culprit. You have to put blame on somebody and people are not satisfied so who is the ogre?

S: Just a few quick questions and then I’m almost done. I’m sorry I kept you so long. I meant to keep it to an hour but you have interesting stories. But Marta Ferrer? Did you have her as a math teacher?

R: I sort of remember her. I think at the tail end. The problem was the math teacher that was closest to us ended up being... declaring himself communist. After leaving school to teach at the university, which was a problem Jim Baker had. He admitted to me and my mother, "I'm having trouble retaining," when the university reopened, "retaining good teachers." Because one of the things they did was looked towards high schools that had good teachers. So that's when she came in if I remember her correctly. But this guy, his name was Carlos Alvarez was, he and I and another person were as close as can be. So my recollection of math was Alvarez.

S: Did you ever leave Havana?

R: I visited outside of Havana.

S: Like where? Where would you go?

R: My parents are from Oriente. So I did go there a couple of times.

S: Where in Oriente?

R: Santiago but my parents were from Mayari.

S: Okay. So you knew Mayari?

R: Of course.

S: So you knew Preston as well or no?

R: My grandfather, my paternal grandfather, worked at Preston.

S: Really? Wow.

R: He participated in the independence, the war of independence in Cuba but then he went to work at Preston. Another one. Here is a man that was part of the revolutionary independence movement of Cuba and then went to work for an American company.

S: For United Fruit?

R: He went to work for Preston.

S: That's crazy. Wow. I mean that's a very different experience. That shifts... I'm sorry do you need to...

R: No. No. My son is picking me up for our luncheon but its not that time and I'm just wondering if he was cancelling.

S: So culturally that's a whole different world that sort of I'm studying because of...

R: How did you know about Preston?

S: So part of my project is looking at, since I'm doing the whole island rather than just Havana, I'm looking at U.S. corporations but more of the information has come from the Methodist archive. I did a month at Drew University and the Methodists had an agricultural school out there and the Mayari circuit was the network of preachers that were based out of Mayari and went to Preston and went to the agricultural school.

R: Just for the heck of it because I've never known my dad studied at a school that was called Colegios Internacionales del Cristo.

S: Yep. That was an American Baptist School.

R: Baptist. I thought it was Methodists. Well when you mentioned Methodists... but I knew it was a Protestant school but I don't particularly... my dad and my uncle studied there and I think one of the very well known political leaders here that passed away, well you know Lincoln Diaz-Balart, his father. I think he went to Colegios Internacionales.

S: I haven't heard him but I think Huber Matos went to a school that was out there, a Baptist school. It makes sense.

R: I want to come back to this for one thing when we finish the conversation but something interesting.

S: Well I do have a question. So did your father learn any English at El Cristo or no?

R: No. Very little. And that is also interesting. My father was born in the year 5 and then he went to Havana from Mayari when he graduated from Colegio Internacionales del Cristo. He went to University of Havana and studied medicine. One day I find this shelf in his bookcase that was full of German books. And "Wow, do you read German? Why do you have these books?" And he said to me, "Well when we were studying, the better theory books in medicine were in German and I had somebody teach me German that would come..." evidently German subs stopped in Cuba and taught him for I don't know what the hell. He said to me, and to me it was always very interesting, he came to the United States later on in '74 and he had enormous difficulty with English and I would tell him, you know, "It just blows my mind that you could learn German and that you couldn't learn English. It just blows my mind." My mother on the other hand spoke little English but she was fearless. She would just use whatever word came to her mind and made it English.

S: Right. The book that Baker taught you wouldn't have been so happy about that.

R: I remember going to a pharmacy and she wanted 'corn pads' and corn in Spanish is called 'callos' and she kept asking the guy for calle pads. Do you have calle pads? I looked at her like what the hell is she asking for? Until she got to the Dr. Scholl's thing and could show the guy what she meant.

S: What were their names? What were your parent's names?

R: My father's name was exactly like mine, Ricardo. And my mother's name was Leonor. She was a very hardheaded lady and she directed a clinic for the underprivileged in Marianao which was part of Havana. Very tough. By the way, my maternal grandfather whom I've never met, her father, had a school in Cuba in Havana and I have had people that after knowing me and talking about the family, "Your grandfather was Domingo... Wow. If your grandfather would've known you, you wouldn't have reached the age of four. He would've killed you." His school was for problem kids, disciplinary kids.

S: Wow. Your James Dean character wouldn't have...

R: Right. My James Dean character wouldn't have flown very well with my maternal grandfather.

S: Were your parents religious at all?

R: My mother.

S: Your mother was Catholic.

R: My father was, he was... I'm drawing a blank.

S: Did he identify as a Protestant or no?

R: No. He identified as a... what are they called?

S: Atheist, agnostic?

R: No, no, no. It'll come.

S: Alright, no worries.

R: They have... What do they call it? Dang.

S: What hospital was he working at in Cuba?

R: He was director of Sanatorio la Esperanza and then he was assistant director of Tope de Collante, TB.

S: At the University hospital or which?

R: ... dang. Mason.

S: Oh yeah. There we go.

R: Now you got it. He identified himself as a mason.

S: Okay. Which is like a deist... yeah.

R: Which was very... the Masons were an important factor in the independence of Cuba.

S: Sure. I've seen their building.

R: Very much so. They were a very important factor and it sort of grouped people that prided themselves as intellectuals, whether they were or not. But it was fun.

S: And is that the group that made up your family's social network?

R: Nope. Whatever he did in that group, my mother had much more influence on my religious life. Again, I rejected it but later on when I went to the invasion part of my decision was based on a personal conversation I had with whoever's up on top and I've very much been involved in the Catholic church for a long time and consider it part of my structure. But it was my mom.

S: Did your father ever talk to you about Colegio Internacionales or no?

R: My cousins did more than him.

S: Why would they go there? Why would they go to that school? You don't know. Alright.

R: It was a good school.

S: I know but it's interesting...

R: And they were active, my cousins were active in the alumni. The alumni here meets...

S: Really? I should check it out.

R: You should check it out. If I find some information, my cousins have passed but I'll find from the one that's still alive when they meet and if they continue meeting.

S: Because I...

R: It was a big group.

S: I know and the American Baptists, that was their territory. I did some time at Mercer University that has their archive so I was there looking at that so I didn't know how much it would've carried over here just because yeah...

R: No, no, no, no they were at one time, especially with the Diaz-Balart. He would be their guest speaker every time. He's passed now but he would be their guest speaker.

S: His sons are...

R: His sons are still alive. Which I really don't understand. There is something I'm missing in that. Cause I had heard that he had been at one point in time the seminarian in the Catholic Church or maybe he had been a seminarian...

S: In Matanzas at the Union.

R: I don't know. I just heard the term seminarian and then when they talked to me that he had gone to the Colegio Internacionales del Cristo I said wait a minute, there is something that doesn't add up there. But I've never found out.

S: I'm going to look that up.

R: They meet in one of my cousins was one of the directors and they were super active and they had frequent meetings. They're older now.

S: Well I can't thank you enough for doing this and taking the time to sit down with me and share these stories. This is really helpful. I mean obviously you gave me a lot of really good stuff. I can't tell you how much I appreciate you letting me use this in my dissertation.

R: I'm very happy that I could help you and wish you a lot of luck. I'm very proud about having been to Ruston and after being the James Dean of the school. I was chairman of the James Dean society.

S: Wow. I'm sure that served you very well.

R: Chris will attest to that. I developed a bond with the Bakers that I really cherish. I really, really respected Jim Baker. He, I think he respected me and I think there was mutual respect. Me for him of course but him for me, I don't know why.

S: I mean I think having enough passion to sacrifice, no matter what that passion is for, I think is something that it seems to me he would respect.

R: But see, and you can't use this one, there was one time in which somebody broke a shower in our locker rooms and Baker was incensed. He was pissed to no end. So he went there and he said, "everybody to the baseball..." everybody that was in PE was there. He stood us there and, "nobody is going home until I find out who did this." Well of course I knew who had done it but time passed and the guys who had done it were not stepping ahead and I looked at my watch. I stepped forward. "I did it Mr. Baker." He had already been told who it was. He wanted to get them to admit it. "You sure you did this?" "Man I did it." "Okay. Everybody go home and you are punished and blah blah blah." Well we started leaving and "I know you didn't do it. Why did you do it?" And I said, "I'm so used to getting punished that I don't give a shit." And much later there was something that I was accused of and he came and said, "I'm being told, I'm being assured that you did this. You know what? I know you wouldn't lie to me because you took blame for something you didn't have to and this is much less so why would you be not admitting it." He and I developed a good bond. I really appreciated him. And people don't recognize. I've always fought for him to get the recognition he deserves with the ...

S: That's happening. Slowly. People are talking about it.

R: It has. In part because...