

Mary Casas Knapp
9/23/16

Samuel (S): Alright are you there?

Mary (M): Yeah.

S: Alright I think it's happening but I'm not sure. This is my first time trying this. Alright go ahead. Ms. Nichols had been a missionary and how did the school get founded? Do you know?

M: No.

S: Okay. And you went to school there through 8th grade?

M: Yes. I started in what was called pre-primary. Then they had primary, which would be like our kindergarten, and then first grade.

S: Okay. How many students were in the school?

M: In the low 200s.

S: And was it mostly Cubans?

M: Mostly Americans. There were some Cuban kids. I'm guessing maybe 10 percent. And my mother made sure that there were scholarships for Cuban kids. All the Americans except maybe one family paid their own way. They were all expats.

S: Right. Working for the business community mostly?

M: Right or owning their own businesses in Cuba, as you'll talk with Anita Ogden...

S: I've spoken to her, yeah.

M: Yeah they had their own business. A lot of them did. Have you seen the directory?

S: Yeah. It has been very helpful. I scanned it from Duke and then realized the 1960 version was online.

M: But there is also, diverging a little bit here, there is also the congressional record of the filing for, you know, for payment from the government. All the Cuban families and corporations made a claim against Cuba. So you've probably got that too. Alright back to... I have ADD.

S: I do too. So tell me a little bit more about how your mother ended up in Cuba.

M: She was born and raised in Morris Hill North Carolina, north of Ashville. And my father wound up in the United States. He has a very interesting story but the gist of it is that he came to New York on a boat, sold his return ticket, found another Cuban kid who was going to go to Brevard College but was clueless as to how to get there.

My father was extremely enterprising and told this Cuban kid that he would get him to Brevard. Not knowing where it was. So they got to Brevard. At the time it was Brevard Institute.

S: And where is Brevard?

M: It's in North Carolina near Hendersonville. It's up in that resort area. Where are you from?

S: I'm from New Jersey but I'm going to UNC now so I know the Ashville area a little bit.

M: It's all resort. If you can fund a trip to Saluda you ought to go.

S: Alright. That's where Anita Moore lives? Yeah.

M: So my father and this boy ended up at Brevard Institute in North Carolina. Brevard Institute at the time was this very small institution. So the kid got registered, the headmaster turned to my father and my father said, "I have no tuition but I brought you a paying student." This is in 1933 and, "I have no means to go anywhere else so you need to let me stay." So my father, his life is a whole story. So he was a student at Brevard Institute, scrambling and doing everything in the world to earn his keep. And you don't need to know all the details of what he did but the important one was he traded Spanish lessons for English lessons or food or something. He bartered Spanish with my mother's sister and her husband, Ralph and Anita Osborne. Ralph came from that area and I believe they had a dairy farm. They might have supplied the institute. That might have been how they knew each other. Anyway, he was bartering something with Anita, my mother's sister and her husband Ralph. My mother at that time was living in Raleigh and went to visit Anita, met my father, and they fell in love.

S: Wow what a story. How did he learn English?

M: Every way he could.

S: But did he speak English before arriving in the United States?

M: I doubt it.

S: Okay. Did he go to school at all in Cuba?

M: He was from an upper class Cuban family where he was expected to become a doctor or a lawyer, neither of which he could abide so they were trying to make him be an architect. And in the meantime he was working at a sugar mill, you know, family friend and he saved every penny he had and bought a ticket to New York.

S: Was he from Havana or another part of Cuba?

M: He lived in Havana. He was... I don't know if he was born in Havana or in Matanzas Province. His grandfather had been governor of Matanzas Province, where

Varadero is, but they lived in Havana. So probably he was born in Havana. He was one of six children. His father was a very tough military commander. His father was... I knew him. He was just a tough, tough man. He was an army commander. There was a time when he was trying to make his soldiers mount a wild horse and all the soldiers were afraid so he called his eldest son and made him mount the horse. And the other brothers were screaming, "No he's going to die!" And my grandfather made him do it and my uncle rode the horse. It was that kind of upbringing and my father was a very gentle man.

S: You said he was the sixth child?

M: One of six. He was not the eldest. He was second down I think.

S: Was part of the reason he went to the United States, did that have anything to do with Machado when he fell? Cause '33 you said right?

M: I don't think so. He was a young man. He was born in 1907 and he was... you know, he wanted to escape his family's requirement because they were forcing him to be an architect. As a side note, when we lived in Coral Gables, we lived in the home that was once the home of my father.

S: Really? Wow.

M: So anyway, they fell in love and in the meantime my father, do you want to hear any of why my father left Brevard and went to UNC?

S: Sure yeah.

M: Well my father was very much a bon vivant and a nightlife guy. He didn't like being stuck in Brevard. So one of his duties was to drive the college truck and whatever. So he would take the truck and sneak into town at night. And the only thing was this place where the men gathered. I don't think it was a bar. And he was very likable and sociable and he made friends with the town lawyer who had a great admiration for him and wrote to the dean at UNC and said, "You've got to give this young Cuban guy a scholarship." So my father left Brevard institute and went to Chapel Hill. So my mother, at that time, my mother's parents had moved to Raleigh. So the relationship continued.

S: Were your grandparents on your mother's side ambivalent about her dating a Cuban?

M: Yes. This was in the '30s. The attitudes were very different. My father told me that he was asked by people in the country in North Carolina whether they had refrigerators in Cuba. I think her parents like him because he was so likeable but she was engaged to a medical student, a very wonderful boring guy. And as my mother said she chose heavenly hash over ham and eggs. So in the depths of the Depression, I don't know how this order came down but my father could no longer stay at UNC. There could be no scholarships for foreign students. Everything had to go for

Americans. So daddy went to New York where he scrambled a lot of different things to make money. I don't know exactly what he did for work. He actually shared a bed at a rooming house with somebody who worked nights and the guy slept in the bed in the daytime and daddy slept in the bed at night.

S: Did your mother go with him to New York?

M: No she was a schoolteacher in North Carolina. She had gone to college. Morris Hill at that point was a Junior College and her family was very involved with Morris Hill. Her grandfather Leroy Samms had given a lot of the land for Morris Hill College.

S: What did your grandparents do in the Ashville area?

M: My grandfather, Charles Leroy Samms, I think he farmed. But he became, or he was a bee expert. So eventually the reason they moved to Raleigh is he became this state extension bee expert. He was out of NC State. So he was an academic agronomist. I don't know where he went to college. He probably went to Morris Hill College and I don't know where he went after that. So he traveled the state teaching farmers and my mother traveled with him.

S: We could use him today.

M: Oh my gosh. I'm dying to have a hive but my husband won't hear of it.

S: My girlfriend's mother just invested in one and it got eaten by a bear. They're hoping it can be rehabilitated.

M: Anyway daddy was kicked out of Chapel Hill, went to New York, and my mother went up over Christmas break to visit him. This must've been a very passionate affair. And my mother, North Carolina country girl, brought up Baptist. I'm sure that they did the deed over that time and I'm sure my father had to make an honest woman of her. They got married at the little church around the corner on December 23rd. She never confided any of this but I can just picture the whole scenario. I invented the scenario. And the church sent the notice to the Raleigh newspaper.

S: So they got married in New York?

M: They got married in New York. Little church around the corner. An Episcopal Church around 10th Street off of the...

S: I'm sorry what denomination did you say?

M: Episcopal.

S: Episcopalian. Okay.

M: So the church sent the notice to the Raleigh newspaper unbeknownst to my parents. Her parents read in the newspaper that their daughter had married this Cuban in New York and she came home. You know it was a tense confrontation I'm sure.

S: I can imagine. What year was this?

M: 1933.

S: This is excellent for me. I'm trying to understand... one of the big parts of my project is... and I should've realized with the last name Casas but one of the questions that I keep asking is what does it take for Cubans to kind of be integrated into this Anglo-American community and I'm noticing that a lot of these intermarriages, which seems like actually quite a bit, there were quite a few of them in Cuba, this whole background story is just something I haven't tapped into at all. So it is very interesting for me. But anyway, continue. I'm sorry.

M: I can give you a lot more names of Cuban kids who went to Cathedral and Ruston that were well integrated.

S: Yeah I'm trying to understand the process of this. And we can get to this after we finish the background story. But that is one of the questions I'm asking. What does it take for a Cuban to be kind of accepted and become a part of this American community? But anyway, go ahead.

M: This is the '50s and it might be hard for you to imagine, but people were nice. They were predisposed to like you until you proved otherwise. And any American who was in Cuba was prima facie, you know, an adventurer or open of sorts. So...

S: Does that include the Esso folks? It seems like... the community of which your parents belonged, of which the Bakers belonged, the Harpers, the Skiltons. It seems like that was very distinct from the people from Esso who came down for two years or who had their own club. Was there division between those groups or no?

M: Yeah well... yes to a degree because there were those of us who were permanent. And I was a kid. I left when I was 15. It seemed to me that the newcomers were welcomed. I remember one question was, "Are they horsey or boatsy?" And society did not divide sharply along those lines because there were also golfy people.

S: Right.

M: But I heard that question more than once. "Are they horsey or boatsy?" So there was not a dyed in the wool snobbish old guard. Or if there was, my mother who was the most hospitable, welcoming person I've ever seen either did not participate, I know she did not participate in it, but she probably fluffed over it so thoroughly that I was never aware. But I did have a little awareness of a certain, it wasn't an us versus they, but... just a strong feeling of community among the long-term people. They didn't exclude newcomers and certainly my impression was that newcomers were welcome. I remember one case, a Mrs. Wood who was widowed recently. They were from Michigan I think.

S: Not the mother of Doug Wood?

M: Yes. Have you talked to Doug?

S: I think I'm going to. Harry Skilton kind of insisted on it.

M: The Wood boys, Doug wasn't there. Doug was at boarding school. His younger brother Jeff, and I have a story about that because Jeff was my first kiss. So Mrs. Wood was well taken in the society and she was a very attractive woman but a widow. An American widow was a rarity. Certainly she fit into the adventurous feeling that a lot of us had. She was well accepted. She became friendly with Jack Hemingway. The Woods, and Doug came home, spent Christmas and maybe Thanksgiving at our house. Because they were newcomers, you know, and recently widowed.

S: What year was this?

M: I was in 8th grade. I would've been class of '62 in high school. So that would've been 1958.

S: What did Mrs. Wood do?

M: Socialize.

S: So there was money...

M: She had an income. To my knowledge there was only one poor member of the ABC community.

S: Who was that?

M: I'm not sure I want to tell you. Let me think about it. The father was English and he was an alcoholic and the mother was a teacher and they were wonderful people and I'm still in touch with the son. Everybody loved them and they were fully accepted.

S: So everybody else was at least... cause it sounds like everybody that I've talked to had in house help, had... or at least was living what would've been upper middleclass lives in the states even if their incomes weren't that in Cuba.

M: There were two families that I knew of that did not have in-house help. They were both military families. One was the Stewards and he was a colonel or Lieutenant colonel. Had a very nice apartment. She may have had a day maid come in and clean but you know everybody seemed well off. We kids never thought about who had money and who didn't. I know there were some little girls who were jealous of me because I had a horse.

S: Where was your family home?

M: My Cuban family or my American?

S: Where did you guys live?

M: We lived in Havana. We lived in three places that I remember. The last place was on 20th Street. I don't remember the house number but...

S: In Vedado?

M: In Miramar. It was on the 1st avenue which was on the ocean and we were once house in from the avenue that ran by the ocean.

S: Wow.

M: I could hear the ocean from my bedroom and see it. And you will probably encounter many if not all of us who feel incredibly privileged to have been a part of that life. It was wonderful. It was everything good about a small American town plus you got to be in a foreign country.

S: And in a major city.

M: Our third home was a house. It was a complex of seven houses. You can see it on Google Earth. And three of the houses were occupied by Americans and four of the houses were occupied by Cubans and everybody was very friendly. In fact my boyfriend was a Cuban kid in one of the houses. My mother's best friend and secretary was in another house. I should tell you about them. I'm rambling.

S: No, no. Lets go back to... I normally just let but lets give this a little structure...

M: The house before the 20th street house...

S: So lets go back to your mother if we can... we'll take a step back and work our way forward if that's okay. So she moved to Cuba in 1938. Did she know that she was going to be working for the Cathedral School?

M: No and no. They went for a visit and they wound up staying. She had been a teacher in North Carolina and she got a job teaching at Cathedral School.

S: I was just curious how did they get connected... your father didn't know the Americans who lived in Cuba I'm guessing right?

M: No.

S: So how did they find this community?

M: See I'm a little surprised at your question. It was not like looking at it from here and being like oh there was a big community. My mother found an American school. I guess she asked around or asked at the embassy. My father, extremely entrepreneurial, he got work right away. He worked for Gillette Razor Company. His boss was a wonderful, exceptional American guy named Mr. Lee and I don't know his first name. So daddy got a job working for Gillette as an accountant and my mother went to work as a teacher at the Cathedral School.

S: When they went to visit was it just to visit your father's family?

M: Yep.

S: And that family was located in Havana at that point?

M: Yes.

S: What did your... you said your grandfather was a military officer so was he retired and just kind of in Havana?

M: He was a comandante. A very mercurial person. Made and lost a number of fortunes. My father... do you know the old Spanish houses where there is an arched entrance that the horses can go through and then a very big courtyard inside? It's a European model of wealthy housing. They lived in one of those and there was time when there was very, very little. And his mother absolutely fought her husband for the sake of the children to force him to provide for the children. She dressed them beautifully. They dressed as if every day were Sunday. It was a cycle of... I don't think poverty looks like poverty but they went through cycles of... And the siblings, the six children, the eldest, the one who had been forced to ride that horse became an extremely successful lawyer. His name was Alberto Casas. He was the president of the Biltmore Country Club for my whole lifetime. I never remember a time when uncle Albert was not president. And he married the wealthiest woman in Cuba. It sounds sketchy but it was not. Her father had been the biggest landowner in Cuba and it was true that people have rapacious attitudes towards widows and orphans so when her father died, everybody was after his property, the lands. She engaged my uncle Alberto to protect her and through this process, and he was married at the time, they fell in love and married.

S: What was her last name?

M: Evangelina Aulet. A-u-l-e-t.

S: And so your family... And uncle Alberto, he was in charge of the Biltmore when they built it in '38 or you don't know?

M: I don't know. It was my lifetime. I was born in '45.

S: Now your family's social network, was it comprised mainly of Cubans or Americans or a mix?

M: My family in Cuba were all Cubans.

S: No your family social networks. I'm sorry.

M: Our social network? Oh it was everything. Cubans, Americans, Hungarians, or one Hungarian. I mean yeah. Yes. I don't recall a lot of dinner parties but I think mostly we did not entertain Cuban friends at home. That was more at the club or restaurants.

S: And the club being the Biltmore?

M: Probably. Hold on a second. Okay.

S: So you were born then in the late '40s.

M: 1945. My mother, they had a stillbirth three years before I was born.

S: Okay. Sorry I'm just trying to organize this.

M: I'm a coach and a consultant and I'm just thinking about how you're ever going to put this together and I'm just thinking if I were coaching I would tell you to use tags.

S: Tags? What do you mean tags?

M: Do you ever use Facebook?

S: Sure.

M: Okay, do you know how you can tag somebody?

S: Sure.

M: You can tag ideas, you can tag words.

S: Sure. Is there something to do through Microsoft Word or... I mean what I'm doing, I have multiple documents going on the way I'm organizing this because I've just begun organizing the dissertation.

M: You would tag. So say you would tag Biltmore Club, you would tag Cathedral School, you would tag "dinner parties." You would have multiple tags and in your document you would tag a word or two for that. So when you pick that tag, everything that you had tagged with that would come up.

S: Do you know how to do that? Is that something you do or you just search within the document?

M: I don't do it because I work one client at a time and I don't have to compile wildly intersecting things but I like to think about organizing stuff. When I read about tags I thought oh this is the way to organize...

S: I have a document where I have people, institutions and work. And so any time that I'm reading a document, and all of this is organized on my computer obviously, I will scan it and put it into where I think it will fit into the dissertation outline and then put it onto the institution or individual it is applicable for because otherwise I would go insane I think.

M: Hearing what I'm giving you and knowing how my other friends are... look into tags Sam. It might save your life. I can't believe an old lady is telling you this.

S: You're the daughter of educators. Right. Okay so you were born in '45. What was your first language? Do you remember?

M: Oh that was interesting. My actual first language was Spanish because the maid spoke Spanish and the kids at the park spoke Spanish. We spoke English at home even though my father's English was fluent but accented and my mother spoke only English. My father spoke to me in English and Spanish and I had a number of vivid pre-verbal memories or early memories. One of them was we were in the states when I was about one and a half. I went to Raleigh to visit an aunt and I remember being on the floor and looking up at all these grownup faces that were laughing at me. And I think, see they would talk to me in English and I would answer in Spanish.

S: Wow. So it was almost the same language.

M: Yes. I did not realize they were two. So I'm guessing that maybe in North Carolina in the '40s and here was this baby speaking this foreign language. But I remember sorting out the two languages. That happened about the age of three. I remember figuring it out. I was going to tell you about the other family that didn't have live-in help. They were also a military family and he was a sergeant.

S: In the U.S. army?

M: In the U.S. army.

S: So they were stationed there or something?

M: Yes. The military base was quite big. They were Polish. Their name was Michnowitz and they were... I was friends with their daughter Mickey. Polish American sergeant. They did not fit in. That was my first ever personal acquaintance with middleclass Americans.

S: They did not fit in because it was a class thing?

M: I think it was a class thing. I ate tuna casserole at their house, which I fell in love with. First time I ever tasted tuna casserole. So a kid growing up in the 50s who never tasted tuna casserole. That could tell you something.

S: I'm sorry what was their name one more time?

M: M-i-c-h-n-o-w-i-t-z. And the daughter's name was Mickey. Like Mickey Mouse.

S: So what would they do... who were their social networks? Or were they just very isolated?

M: I have no idea.

S: Were they... they wouldn't have been members of clubs then either?

M: No.

S: But they went to your mother's school?

M: Yes. Cathedral School might have been a little bit of a melting pot. There was a Danish family.

S: Connected to the embassy or no?

M: No they had a jewelry business. And I'm in touch with the daughter. Her name is Sys, S-y-s, Strands. You may have gotten her name because she went on to Ruston. You should talk to her because there were a number of Europeans.

S: Does she live in the states?

M: She lives in Colorado.

S: Wow.

M: There was another European family at Cathedral. They were Norwegians. The last name was Kalseth. K-a-l-s-e-t-h.

S: Now would those people kind of embraced by the Anglo-American community or would they have been in institutions like the Mother's Club?

M: I don't recall either Sys or Carrie Kalseth going to the Mother's Club.

S: What about Mickey?

M: No. I'm guessing maybe the Mother's Club was maybe a little bit exclusive. I didn't get that vibe at all because I was in it, you know, it was the air I breathed. And it never occurred to me why these people were not in the Mother's Club. The Mother's Club might have been a little old guardish.

S: Got it. Batista's kids were in the Mother's Club is that right?

M: Were they?

S: Somebody told me... who was it? Jim Benson's wife, blanking on her name right now. But I interviewed the Bensons because they live in North Carolina and she remembers the youngest Batista son going down the slide at the Mother's Club and getting stuck because he was fat. And the whatever their version of the secret service came over and had to pick him up and move him. That was the only reference I have to it so far so I'm hoping that somebody else can confirm it just to make sure.

M: You know who you ought to get in touch with? The Kepners. I haven't been in touch with them in years but Bob Kepner was in Chapel Hill last I heard. K-e-p-n-e-r.

S: Alright.

M: His dad was head of United Fruit and his mother was the secretary at the Cathedral School.

S: They lived in Havana?

M: Yeah they lived in... When they first moved to Cuba they lived in a town in Oriente...

S: Preston.

M: No there was a nickel mine. Nicaro? Yeah. Nicaro. They were in Oriente and I think United Fruit had a lot of mine interests and then I think he was general manager of United Fruit. And then they came to Havana. The Kepners were there.

S: What did your family... being that you guys were really there and definitely more long term capacity and your goal, certainly your mother's goal, was not to profit but certainly to create more educational opportunities in this Anglo-American community. That feels very different from the goals of people who were maybe more associated with U.S. corporations. Was... how did those difference play out? And I mean I know you said that there was a closeness and a unity of people who were there a longer time but the reason for being in Cuba, did that matter in terms of the relationships between members of the American or Anglo-American community?

M: Remember when I left when I was 15. So the adult world was kind of different. Not that I'm aware of Sam. My mother certainly didn't need to work and as she said, "The Episcopal Church works you to death and pays you a nickel." I think she made \$125 a month. I'm pretty sure that's what she made. It was all deposited in the state. They never touched that money. And she also had an easy life. She never worked in the afternoon. She was principal at the school and she went home at noon and from 12 to 3 the school just ran very well thank you.

S: Wow. Now why would students... why would parents send their children to the Cathedral School as opposed to one of the other schools?

M: I think number one to learn English.

S: You said it was mostly Americans?

M: It was mostly Americans. All classes were taught in English and Spanish was a subject. We all took Spanish.

S: Were you all fluent in the same way that Ruston pushed people to be or was the curriculum different than that?

M: The Ruston curriculum was different because they had the high school and the bachillerato. I'm sure Jim has explained that to you.

S: Sure. And Chris Baker.

M: So the high school, I went to the high school, only for two years.

S: At Cathedral?

M: Cathedral until 8th and then Ruston for freshman and sophomore. By the way, this is a side note, when I left Cuba, I was at a party in Cold Spring Harbor in New York, Long Island, which is a wealthy New York suburb. And some guest there asked me if I had gone to Ruston Academy and I asked how she knew and she said, "You have a Ruston accent."

S: Wow. That's really interesting. What does that mean?

M: And she had met other people from Ruston.

S: Yeah I know a few people who went to Long Island, like Molanphy, afterwards. That's really interesting.

M: So I think the question you're trying to get at was evidence of any real stratification or, you know, how the society organized itself.

S: I'm just trying to complicate it because I feel like the story is always told emphasizing the role of U.S. corporations like United Fruit and I just... the existence of people like your mother and people like the Bakers I think changed the dynamics of that community.

M: Oh yes. The corporations didn't feel like the majority. There was a man that worked for the Cuban power company. Harry Klovekorn, K-l-o-v-e-k-o-r-n. The Gianelonis worked for or had sugar interests. Have you heard of the Gianelonis? G-i-a-n-e-l-o-n-i. They were quite wealthy. I think they had an airplane. There were also American families who were with the mafia.

S: Do you know any of them? I know the Wynnes. That's the only one I've interviewed.

M: I can't remember the last name. One of the friends at Cathedral School lived in the same building as Joanne Stewart, the army colonel and I remember having my first home cooked Italian food at their house. It was a big deal. She invited a bunch of us girls over for spaghetti and meatballs and her dad was a watcher.

S: What does that mean?

M: Well there are watchers who watch the dealers.

S: Oh at the casinos.

M: And then there are watchers who watch the watchers. My mother knew, I think she knew George Raft and Henry Meyer.

S: What was your awareness of the mafia stuff?

M: Well I had watched movies. I knew it was not a good thing but I liked going to the casinos. I didn't associate it with murder. I associated it with gambling. It was sort of like the gambling corporation.

S: Were you aware of their relationships with the Batista government or not really?

M: No. Totally unaware.

S: When did you realize a revolution was happening?

M: Oh Sam that's a whole other interesting event and if you want any photographs I can send them.

S: I would love some photographs absolutely.

M: Photographs of me and my family and our servants at home with armed barbudos. Okay let me go back to Batista. We hated Batista. I knew... I remember driving by the police station where I knew the torture was going on and I would just get this horrible nasty goosebumpy feel. So we all hated Batista. We all, our family and people that we knew. I don't know anybody who liked Batista. So when Castro came or we knew of Castro forming the revolution, many of us, my parents included, were fooled and thought that it would be a benevolent, democratic revolution. My uncle Albert was not. I remember the family argument. No he's communist. But a lot of us were fooled. We didn't stay fooled for long. I can tell you the exact moment when I knew that Castro was evil.

S: I'm sorry I do want to hear this but just because you mentioned uncle Albert, he married this woman and he was a successful lawyer right?

M: Yes a brilliant man. And good.

S: And what type of law?

M: Probably corporate. But she had this enormous wealth and he insisted on never living off of her. So they had a big three-story house on the Malecón, which he could not have afforded for her but he paid rent. The son of this tough military commander with a good heart.

S: So the moment you grew disillusioned with the revolution...

M: I had admired him. We had all admired him. Loved to listen to him speak and one evening I was lying on the living room couch listening to the radio while he spoke to an audience of 100,000, you know, one of these big rallies. And he incited the people and I'm adding an aside, I'm reminded of this during the Donald Trump rallies. He incited the people to be screaming, "paredón," which is of reference to the firing wall. And the evil was palpable.

S: So this was early.

M: This was early.

S: Maybe February?

M: Not that soon. Maybe by March. There were a couple of months. It was exciting. Revolution is addicting and wonderful. It was just wonderful. It was heady. It was the most glorious feeling of newness and release from...

S: Yeah. Wow. When the revolution was going on I know some people like Walter Arensberg's mother and some of the missionaries and Jaime Allen, they actively supported the anti-Batista resistance. Was your family at all involved in that?

M: I don't know how actively but yes we supported the anti-Batista. We supported the revolution. Either way I remember Mrs. Arensberg. She was just a wonderful, brilliant lady.

S: She is going to be a key character in this dissertation. Walter was very helpful in giving me some great stories about waking up or going home after a date and Lopez Fresquett was lying in a bed in his bedroom with a .45 on the table because he was hiding from SIM. So it sounds like she was a very interesting, very bold, courageous woman.

M: Yeah. My mother after Castro showed his colors, my mother hid anti-Castro students and this is early on. This is in the fall of 1960. My mother hid anti-Castro resistance in the home.

S: This was in '59 or '60?

M: This was in '60. After Castro had taken over. After his true colors emerged. There was an immediate resistance of the people who felt betrayed.

S: Were you connected to Gary Anderson at all or no?

M: I didn't know him. I knew of him.

S: Okay but not in that way... I know he was eventually executed.

M: I don't know anybody who lost their life.

S: So Gary Anderson, Bonnie Anderson's father, people have said it was a big moment for the Anglo-American community when he was executed by the Castro government for supporting counter-revolutionary efforts. Your mother is very bold is my point.

M: Yeah and that was instrumental in their leaving because in the fall of 1960, my father came to the states to move me from living with an aunt in North Carolina to living with an aunt in Long Island. And during that time was when my mother was hiding this dude, while he was gone. He was just an extremely nonviolent person. And he owned furniture stores also and some of his employees were in the anti-Castro resistance and he came back from the states having had a different perspective, you know, hearing things. Just being outside the water we were swimming in and learned that my mother had been hiding students. One of his employees had been caught by the Castro forces, had his legs broken and was

dumped in the back of a car and driven to my father's business where they showed him to my father and they said, "This is what is going to happen if you or any of your employees opposes us." So those two things happened, my mother hiding the students and the employee with the broken legs. My father, they took a nap every day, he was lying on the bed and he just reached over to the phone and called the travel agent, made reservations and they were gone within two days. So yes it was that scary.

S: Alright if we could take a step backwards, I'd like to learn more about this school. I know a bit of it because a lot of the people who ended up at Ruston, it seems to have been a magnet school for Ruston. But what was the goal of this school?

M: My mother was such a simple person and she was the personality, heart and soul. So she would never have articulated a goal. Her goal that I can see and I think other people can agree, was just to provide a very loving, good education. I'll get back to Ms. Nichols who hired my mother. She must've been elderly and very quickly collected her to be the next principal, handed the baton on to her and made a number of these teachers very angry and jealous because they had been teaching there for years hoping that Ms. Nichols would retire and they could take over. Here's this young woman who, you know, waltzes into town and is immediately tapped as this successor. So this gives you an idea of my mother's... I have to call it low-key charisma. She was a very humble, self-effacing person.

S: What subject did she teach before she was principal?

M: Probably science. I really don't know and I don't know if she was a teacher more than a couple of years. In the U.S. she taught science. She taught biology. Her name was Bessie Samms. Born Elizabeth but even the name on her passport was Bessie. They're from Beaufort. If you go to Beaufort, Samms is everywhere.

S: How did you identify growing up? Did you identify as an American?

M: Yes.

S: Yeah?

M: Yes.

S: What do you think instilled that?

M: My mother, my school, my church and my father loved the United States. I mean I felt and feel Cuban to a degree but I really always knew I was American.

S: Did you ever feel different from other Americans whose both parents were American?

M: No.

S: No. Always felt kind of accepted by that community?

M: Yeah.

S: Did you feel accepted by Cubans as Cuban?

M: Not so much.

S: Really?

M: Yeah. I had a Cuban boyfriend and I was sort of between two cultures. Like if I went out with him, I'd have a chaperone but if I went out with an American... well there was no going out. We were really young and had no cars. But chaperones were not required with American social events. You've probably seen pictures. There were lots of little dancing parties and the parents were there but there was no real chaperonage. The Mother's Club had dances. There were mother's there but it was not like the Cuban chaperones.

S: Right. And this was your... your boyfriend was your neighbor?

M: Yes.

S: And would he go to institutions like the Biltmore Country Club or the Mother's Club?

M: Well no because his father was a Spaniard and his mother was Cuban and he went to the Las Salle School. But they were members of the Biltmore. The Biltmore, I think it was primarily a Cuban club. They had a huge room, well it looked huge to me, upstairs where the men played dominoes. Beautiful second story room overlooking the ocean and the pool. The Biltmore was predominantly a Cuban club. It was where the Cuban girls came out. A lot of Americans belonged. But it was not ever identified as an American club.

S: Of the country clubs, was the Biltmore the most American?

M: We didn't... we only belonged to the Biltmore and the Comador which was like a nothing club. It was a hotel where you could join the club. We did not belong to other clubs. The Vedado Club was big for tennis.

S: Right the Big Five I've heard a lot about.

M: And there is a horrible Big Five in Miami.

S: I hear on the radio about events at the Biltmore, which always makes me laugh.

M: El Big Five. Have you heard about the Rovers Club?

S: Yeah the British Club.

M: Yes. We belonged to that. There were Americans in the Rovers Club.

S: Why? Because of your connection to the Episcopal Church?

M: No. I think church had nothing to do with it. My mother was, you know to me she was just my mother, but I think she was very well regarded and a unifying person who... she was friends with the British. She had a lot of close relationships at the embassy. So maybe it was because of my mother that we belonged to the Rovers Club. People mainly went to the Rovers Club on Sunday afternoons and I don't think my father much liked it because he didn't like to play golf and that was mainly a golf club.

S: Did you know the Watson family? They had a daughter about your age, Allyan, but they were also members of the Rovers Club so I was just curious.

M: No I don't remember her at all. The Wakefords. She was a teacher at the Cathedral School and they were British.

S: What was the composition of the staff at Cathedral?

M: I could go through the grades. Want me to do that?

S: Sure.

M: Miss Hussisian was Armenian.

S: What was the last name?

M: Miss Hussisian and I was too little to spell. First grade was Ms. Moré, a Cuban spinster, close friend of my mother who later became a very strong Castro ally. Estella Moré. I'm not positive on her first name.

S: But she remained in Cuba after the revolution?

M: She remained in Cuba. Second grade was Dulcie Wakeford, an English lady, Dulcie.

S: And it's Mrs. or Ms.?

M: Mrs. She was married.

S: A lot of Brits, the English folks, went to Cathedral school?

M: Oh yes. I remember a little British boy on the first day of school sobbing because he missed India.

S: Oh wow. That's so interesting.

M: We were so privileged then.

S: Did a lot of the English folks come... it's interesting a lot of the American folks would work for these international corporations and would bounce around Latin American countries I feel like. Was that the same thing with English folks in the larger British Empire?

M: I don't know because I was a kid and father just disappeared into this place called work.

S: Sure. The kids who were coming from British background were they mostly coming from England? Or was this India a common experience?

M: I don't remember a lot of British kids at all. And obviously the kid who missed India was a corporate kid. I think British American Tobacco had a big interest there.

S: Right. Alright, second grade Mrs. Wakeford.

M: Third grade Mrs. Harper. She was beloved. Rocky and Jeannie's mother.

S: Yeah Rocky was very helpful and Jeannie actually lives in Raleigh so I'm going to see her when I'm back.

M: Oh good. Fourth grade was Mrs. Eliza Soto-Navarro. She was American. She was from upper New York State. She was a formidable and widely dreaded and hated teacher and she was my godmother. She was a good friend of my mother's. She was older than my mother. She was one of the ladies with the very straight back and...

S: Was she... so she married a Cuban?

M: She married a Cuban. I have no idea how she got to Cuba. None. She was from Oneonta New York and I don't know her maiden name.

S: Did you hang out with her and her husband socially? Your family?

M: It was mainly Eliza and my mother. The families did not. She was widowed.

S: And Navarro is a pretty common name but not connected to the...

M: Soto-Navarro. She was widowed but she stayed in Cuba.

S: Did you know the Hedges?

M: Not familiar to me.

S: Burke Hedges, Dayton Hedges, Avis and Helen Hedges. No?

M: No.

S: Okay cool. Just because she married a Navarro.

M: This is Soto-Navarro. It's different.

S: Alright. Fifth grade.

M: Fifth grade was... Mrs. Echols. E-c-h-o-l-s.

S: And she was American?

M: American married to an American. Might have been a corporate family because I think I remember when they came. Her son was Paul Echols. He was in my grade.

S: Did you hang out socially with him at all or no?

M: I detested him. He would pick his nose in chapel and eat it. He was a red headed, freckle faced kid. A little awkward. We might think he had Aspergers today but I hated him.

S: Alright sixth grade.

M: Mrs. Cresbo. She was Cuban and I can't remember her name right offhand and she ended up moving to Mexico. Perfect English. I don't know what her background was. She was a young teacher.

S: Everything was taught in English correct?

M: Yes. Everything was taught in English. All the teachers, you know, if they were Cuban like Mrs. Cresbo, they had flawless American accents.

S: So they had probably spent some time in the United States?

M: Or been educated here. Who knows? The year I was in sixth grade Mrs. Cresbo took maternity leave and I had... oh she was wonderful. The substitute was named Mrs. Curry. Her husband was with AID. They had spent many, many years in India so she didn't teach us any of the stuff we probably needed to know and didn't care about. We learned about India. It must've been a full semester.

S: So that kid stopped crying finally about missing India because of Mrs. Curry.

M: You know, seventh grade... I can't remember who seventh grade was. If I remember I'll give you a...

S: No worries. You gave me a substitute so that's just as good.

M: Eighth grade... and it might've been seventh grade actually.

S: Just really quick, Mrs. Curry was American?

M: Yes. American. AID. Seventh or eighth grade, I might have these two mixed up because by then my mind was on boys, Mrs. Francis Williams. And I'll tell you, she was the one whose husband was the British alcoholic.

S: Did they have kids as well?

M: Yes. Her husband's name was Eric Williams. I have no idea what company he worked for if he did. And her kids' names, my age was Enid and she's in California, and her younger brother was Joe.

S: Both of them are British, not just the husband?

M: No. Mrs. Williams was American.

S: Okay but she married a British person.

M: Yes. And my mother used to say, "Never marry an Englishman." Joe goes by Eric now and he lives in Miami and he is a wonderful person. He would probably just be a wealth of information. Eric Williams.

S: That would be very interesting. Are you in contact with him?

M: Yes. I can send you an email. I'll ask him.

S: Yeah ask him and make sure he's comfortable speaking with me.

M: And I can connect you with a number of Cuban women who attended Cathedral.

S: That would be great. I would love to hear from them why they thought their family sent them there and lots of questions. And then you went to Ruston?

M: And then I went to Ruston. I can tell you some of the teacher's names if you don't already know.

S: I've got a whole list. Newendorf, Goldenberg, Iglesia, Ferrer.

M: Do you want anecdotes?

S: Sure. If something is relevant or interesting yeah.

M: Goldenberg was wonderful. He was Russian and he called us little pet names.

S: I'm reading his book right now actually.

M: Goldenberg wrote a book?

S: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was right after the revolution and I just opened it. Actually I was doing that right before I had planned to call you and then I realized I didn't have your number. But I can tell you about it in another week.

M: Okay Midlash, Arnold Midlash, he came I think in the late '50s and two interesting things about him. There was a senior, maybe she was a junior when he came, a lovely, lovely young woman named Nora Ostrovski and I think I was aware of something between them but they wound up marrying and last I heard they lived in Chicago. And the other thing about Mr. Midlash is that he just started a music appreciation class. He had the huge reels of music and we would gather on one of the porches and he would play music for us and teach us about classical music.

S: Wow.

M: Klinkenberg. Do you have him?

S: That's a name I've heard but go ahead.

M: He taught American history. The teachers at Ruston were just fabulous. My mother hired expat women, you know, Cuban teachers. Basically people who were sweet, smart and good enough teachers and we got an outstanding education. But the teachers at Ruston were on a different level. So much so that when I came to high school in the states...

S: In Coral Gables?

M: No I came first I went to Meyers Park High School in Charlotte. Then I went to Walt Whitman High School in New York. Both of them top public schools in high net worth areas and I was bored silly.

S: That's an experience a lot of people had I bet.

M: It was terrible.

S: We've spoken for an hour and a half. Are you doing okay on time?

M: I need to get doing other stuff.

S: I can understand that.

M: I think this is long enough. In terms of my pool of awareness, I don't know how far you want to go but we're probably at like 30 or 40 percent.

S: What do you mean?

M: Of stuff that I know and remember.

S: Oh yeah right. It feels like we're just beginning. So would you like to do this again sometime? Would that be okay with you?

M: Sure.

S: What if we did next week sometime?

M: Okay.

S: Let me look at my schedule really quick and then I can tell you more about Goldenberg's book.

M: I need to write... My kids are bugging me. I need to write my memoirs.

S: I would love to read them.

M: Sam we were all so fortunate. I mean we heard Nat King Cole sing in a living room.

S: Wow. Whose living room?

M: I don't remember whose. It was the Episcopal Youth Group. It was a family that I didn't know that well but they had a grand piano in their living room. Americans. We were just so fortunate. I'm glad you're documenting it.

S: No it has been really fun for me and what we could get into maybe a little more next time is the dynamics between this community and the Cuban population because I think that's another aspect to it that I need to...

M: Before we hang up can you tell me quickly whatever inspired you to pick this topic?

S: So I wanted to study U.S. Foreign Policy and I tried to learn Arabic and it was impossible. So I, you know, was applying to graduate schools and Cuba, obviously for historical reasons is just such an anomaly, became something I was very interested in and then I got in to UNC where Lou Perez teaches and he's a big time Cuban historian. When I was thinking about projects I was just reading around and I went to the library and picked up a book by Ruby Hart Philips. Is that a name you know?

M: What's the name?

S: Ruby Hart Philips. She was a *New York Times* reporter. She lived in the colony dating back to the '30s when her husband was a New York Times reporter as well.

M: Oh okay.

S: So I kind of realized this community existed and then I started looking for it in the literature and then I found a little bit of it in the Cuban historiography but almost nothing other than bits and pieces on missionaries in American scholarship. Then I found Ruston and started speaking to Chris Baker and he made my life and my project possible in ways that otherwise I don't think this would've been a possible project. He's been a real hero. I've done 35-40 interviews and this point and I would say about 30 of them were recommendations of Chris Baker. So he is co-researcher in ways that I can't even express to him. Every time I try to write him an email on how thankful I am I always feel underwhelming. But yeah. He's been a real hero. Anyway, so I'm looking at my schedule right now and today is Friday the 23rd. I'm meeting with Plinio Montalván on Monday. I could... what if we did Wednesday next week? Is that doable for you?

M: Yes. Can you send me a calendar invite? Do you use...

S: I don't but I can figure out how to do that and do that.

M: No I'll make it.

S: Any time Wednesday I'm good. I'm going to be in the archive all day and then I just sneak upstairs and do interviews. So whenever works for me.

M: Okay I'll figure out mine and send you a calendar invite.

S: Wonderful. Alright and then I will talk to you on Wednesday.

M: Okay. Thank you.

S: Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.