

Michael Sanjenis
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Michael (M): Whatever you do write, eventually, I would love to read it.

Samuel (S): I would love to write it. I'm going to put this here... I was just struck by your conclusions because they're very close to what I...

M: I'm curious what they were since it was written so long ago. What were my conclusions?

S: Foreign dominated economy.

M: Yes, that changed. Well, Fidel tried to change it but he couldn't because when we left the Soviets stepped in and so they were kind of under their thumb. Then, when the Soviets collapsed, what's his name stepped up... the guy from...

S: Chavez.

M: Yeah. Chavez stepped up but Chavez wasn't a controlling force. Chavez worshipped Fidel and looked to him like a, you know, uncle or something. But yet that kept Fidel going with the oil deal he had with Chavez during that 'Special Period' as they call it down there in Cuba.

S: I mean, it's interesting if it could have turned out differently.

M: That's okay. Forget about it.

S: There are just so many cool things I'm knocking over. You know what I mean...

M: As I said the other day, it couldn't have turned out differently because of the relationship with the United States. The United States was used to having a relationship of dominance over Cuba and they would not tolerate anything else. And Fidel made sure that he was as independent as he could be. And of course he couldn't really be that independent because it was a poor little country. He needed the Soviet Union. He needed to sell his sugar somewhere. Nobody would take his sugar when we cancelled the sugar quota. So who stepped in? The Soviets. They would love to have a, you know, relationship with somebody so close to this country back when we had the problems, you know, between the two super powers at the time. So it was a perfect thing for them and they stepped right in and the people over here they couldn't get over it. They were frustrated. Our government people. But nothing they could do about it. And how he was able to pull this off is an amazing story in itself. A little nothing country, a little pipsqueak of a country, fending off the goliath. It's amazing really. And he did it and of course they tried to kill him several times and it didn't work. He was lucky. They could've had that. That could've happened. In fact, when they came up... here's a picture of my father when they came up that first time... They met with Eisenhower and Eisenhower had already set in motion the CIA to go ahead and get rid of him, to get rid of Fidel,

because they found out he was not going to play ball with them like everybody else did. He was independent. He says, "We have sovereignty in this country. Treat us with respect and we'll get along." Well, they didn't like that so they said, "Get rid of him." Here they are meeting with the representatives. And he wouldn't meet with Fidel.

S: I remember that. He went on a golf trip or something.

M: He wouldn't meet with Fidel. He sent Tricky Dick to meet with him. That's my dad.

S: That's your father. Wow.

M: Not the guys with the beards.

S: Him and Lopez-Fresquet, they were the guys that wore suits?

M: That's correct. And Rufo was quite a guy. Rufo Lopez-Fresquet. He was a good friend of my dad's.

S: I was thinking him and your father had very similar...

M: Well they went to school. They knew each other for a long, long time.

S: They both married Americans as well right?

M: That's exactly correct. Well my mother was... she was American. Irish-American. I think I told you that. And I told you a story about when she told her family she was going to marry this Cuban guy and they didn't know where the hell Cuba was. They were Irish Catholics you know. As I told you, it worked out. It worked out.

S: Do you think that created some bond between them? Was there...

M: No. I don't think so. They kind of thought similarly along political lines and they always had the best interests of the Cuban people at heart and so they thought that what Fidel was going to do or what he proposed to do before we... and I really don't know this... I was going to say, before we forced him into going socialist or even communist. Would he have done it on his own? Maybe. Who knows? I don't know. But we certainly pushed him. We cancelled the sugar quota. What were they going to do? They had to turn someplace and, you know, Khrushchev said, "Hey, I'll help you out." And they said, "C'mon over." And that's what happened.

S: How do you identify?

M: As what?

S: Nationality.

M: Oh. I'm an American guy. Yeah sure.

S: All right. Cool.

M: I have periods where if I hear Irish music I say I'm a mick. I have a funny story. At the club, where we were...

S: I brought clothes so I could get into the club this time. I wanted to make sure...

M: Any time you come up, please be my guest and we'll go together. I think we're pals now. I like young guys. But Anthony Quinn used to go to that club and when I first met him I said, "Jesus, he's always a hero of mine." You probably don't even know who Anthony Quinn is. He was a movie actor and you might see some old film of his. But Anthony Quinn's father was Irish and his mother was Mexican. So I don't know how I was able to do this because I didn't know the man other than having known him as a superstar, and he was changing once in the changing room. We were at the pool and I said, "You know Mr. Quinn. I think you're a spic-mick," and I said quickly, "like me." And he went like that. And you don't know this but he came out with that Anthony Quinn laugh and I explained to him, "Well my father was born in Mexico," which he was because the Sanjenis family that had settled in Cuba also settled in Mexico when they came over from Spain a long time ago. So he happened to be... So his mother happened to be visiting relatives in Mexico when he was born. So I said, "He was born in Mexico and my mother was born in Ireland so I'm a spic-mick just like you." And so we formed the spic-mick club. But anyway, that's an aside.

S: So it's interesting. When you were living in Cuba, how did you identify?

M: I was one of those rich expats living the good life.

S: That's how you thought of yourself?

M: And all of my friends. I venture to say, and you might correct me, that probably, and I don't know, but most of the people that you're going to talk to are going to be on the other side of the politics. They're all going to be kind of on the right wing.

S: Your neighbors are?

M: Everybody. All the people you're going to talk to. And everybody from down there had this sense of entitlement. Like we're better than these folks, these peons around here. And I guess they sometimes showed it. They way they would drive around in their chauffeured cars and they had their maids and they had this and that and the way they would treat everybody, to some degree. There were some that were quite normal but that was definitely a factor in expat living.

S: So it's interesting that you said that because right after I interviewed you last week, I interviewed Mr... I'm trying to find his last name. I think it was McCoffany or... His great uncle was the prime minister under Batista, the last one in '58. I'm blanking on the last name but when I asked him what did Cubans think of Americans, and he said, and I think from his elite vantage point, he said, "They didn't

know anything." What I think what he was talking about is that their withdrawing from local politics as if they weren't involved in it...

M: They weren't involved at all in local politics.

S: But clearly influencing it in some ways?

M: Well, in no ways. What was being influenced were, you know, we're the United States of America but you could also call us the United States of Corporate America. Because whatever we do in the world is whatever is good for business. And so what was being influenced down in Cuba was our government was influencing Cuban politics. Our ambassador was down there almost telling them what to do. They would go down and say, "Here Mr. President, sign this." That's how it was for the whole time of Cuban "independence." Because we gave them independence but then we had the Platt Agreement and we had everything else and we're staying in Guantanamo forever. So what kind of independence was that? We controlled them. And so it wasn't so much the business people. They were there. They were mingling with the Cuban people and they were... some of them might have thought they were doing good for Cuba, you know, getting jobs. But no, they had no influence at all, the people that lived there, in my opinion.

S: Did they live under a different set of rules than the Cubans?

M: Well they certainly lived better. Not better than the one percent, if you want to put it in today's terms, of Cubans. They had lavish lives but they all lived much better than they would've lived at home, you know. Maids, chauffeurs, this, that and the other, nice places, nice houses.

S: Now, you read the Rachel Kushner book *Telex from Cuba*?

M: No.

S: It talks about how some of these people came down, actually for exactly what you're talking about, that they jumped in social status in some way.

M: Oh they did. They never would've had servants in their houses here. They were corporate people. They were corporate employees. But like Shell would send someone down to run the operation in Cuba or to give you a good example, my uncle, who married my mother's sister, he was down. He was sent down by Sherwin Williams. Nice man, an executive. He was a top-notch guy sent down by Sherwin Williams to run Sherwin Williams in Cuba. Great life he had but he wouldn't have had the same thing here. And that was the way it was. They would send people down and they would stay for 3, 4, 5, 6 years. They would rotate and go to some other country and sometimes they would re-up and stay another term. And all those people would be members at the Country Club or at the Biltmore. You would see the same people all the time all over the place. It was a very nice life. Beautiful settings, you know, gorgeous beaches, gorgeous clubs. All the things that you could even think about. Golf, horseback riding. And none of it that was available to the Cubans

of average means or even lower means. And I guess when I say lower means I would say majority. Not in Havana per se but the whole country at that point. There couldn't have been more than 5 or 6 million people living in Cuba and I would say that maybe 4.5 million or 4 million were definitely considered probably poor and certainly uneducated. Couldn't read or write. And didn't have the... I guess, medical care was sporadic.

S: So these people, just, you've given me a lot of questions, but these people that you're describing, were a lot of them lifers in the sense that they would jump around between Latin American countries or foreign countries for these companies?

M: Yeah. They would. They would end up serving their corporation. Being sent to these places doing the corporate work. Yeah. Definitely.

S: Was there resentment by the non-elite Cubans against these that you ever noticed?

M: I never noticed it. And of course I was young. And of course the Cuban people are really, really nice people and I think liked Americans. In fact, I know they did. And I don't know that there was any resentment. I guess you always have... if you don't have and you see people who have a lot, I guess you have some sort of resentment. I remember going out. Our parents would take us to Pinar del Rio and you've got all these little places and you'd stay there a few days. And we were kids and I used to like Roy Rogers and I'd get dressed up in my cowboy outfit and this and that. I'd like to get a horse and so they'd get me a nice horse and a beautiful saddle and I was all decked out and I had the guns and stuff. And then you'd see the poor little Cuban kid on a pony, just kind of a scrawny little thing riding along, no saddle. Just that was his means of transportation to get sticks or whatever for the fire. Who knows but that's kind of the idea of what it was. Impoverished. In what they could eat and how they dressed. The basics of life, they... it was tenuous. Except for this very nice group of people from abroad who live very well and the, whatever it was, the five, the ten percent who controlled the country.

S: Did you spend a lot of time outside of Havana?

M: Not that much. No. We would go on occasional trips.

S: Other than Pinar del Rio?

M: Santa Clara a couple of times. I never went as far as the eastern end, you know. Santiago.

S: Did you ever have any familiarity with the sugar plantations?

M: Yeah sure I knew the Lobos. I knew all the owners. I knew all the owners kids. We went to school together and we attended these lavish, lavish parties. Someone would come out for like the quinceañero you know, the 15. It's like sweet 16 here. Lavish parties. Sumptuous, wonderful things. Yeah, I knew them all. We did it all the

time. But did I know any of the serfs? No. You might have glanced at them. Waiters everywhere. You know, they were very cosmopolitan. They were wealthy people. They would go to France, Europe back and forth, to the states. And of course the tragedy for Cuba is that it was a monoculture. Only sugar.

S: You used a word I hadn't heard before. Suco... now I'm blanking on it. Where it's a sugar economy exclusively and you were describing the difference.

M: But all the profits of the country, by all these wealthy people, instead of being invested in other things, it all went to Chase Manhattan and Citi Bank in New York and, you know, treasury bills. And that wasn't just in Cuba; it was all of Latin America. That's the way it was and the way it is to a large degree.

S: What did your father hope for, do you think, when he joined the government in '59?

M: My father hoped, as I told you, he was always liberal. He was on the liberal side, the leftist side. He always hoped that the country... I'm not so sure he was interested in democracy or one vote, you know, one man, one vote. But he was always interested in trying to get the people educated, the people having better homes, the people having... and he thought that the way to do that was not with the raw capitalism that exists to this day in this country. Capitalism is pretty tough in this country compared to capitalism in Europe. You know, they have a helluva good social network or safety net so it's less harsh. But in this country, we believe in harsh stuff and who's to say who is right or wrong? I don't know but a lot of people get left out and don't make it. They can't, they don't have the ability, they don't have the opportunity, whatever. And there's not much help in this country. If you're black, for instance, in this country, you got a big problem. I mean, you've heard the term, "Oh he was caught driving while black." Well, just because you're black, it's a problem. And it's the same thing for the economic level of a person.

S: What was racism like? How did you feel?

M: I didn't perceive it. I think, I've read where there was racism and thinking back now, there was racism. For example, when Batista came over and came in, became the president, he was black I think. Mulatto. They wouldn't let him in certain clubs. So there was racism by the real aristocratic snobs. The elite of the elite like the Lobos and all those kinds of people. So that did exist, although at my level I didn't see it and we would go out in the street and play with black kids or whoever was around and it was great for learning the language because that's the way you did it. You go out in the streets. And you could go anywhere in Cuba. Even though there were slums and stuff, there was never any danger of being harmed, you know, in any way. I don't think crime was a big problem against the expats or foreigners that I can recall but I don't know.

S: So how did, the Lobos for instance, I know they were initially supportive of the revolution...

M: Well, a lot of people were.

S: Right.

M: Because of the excesses of Batista and his cronies and it was just brutal stuff.

S: But their goal wasn't necessarily economic autonomy from the United States?

M: No. I don't think so.

S: Was that your father's goal?

M: Not really. No. My father would've been extremely happy, I mean, he went up there on this mission, if there had been... he would've loved having cooperation but it just didn't happen because of our side here. We didn't want it. We wanted domination not cooperation. And so did United Fruit Company and so did, at that time, Standard Oil. They didn't want cooperation. They wanted, "hey this is what we want to do, make a law that does that because this is in our interest," and Batista would be "Oh sure. Okay. We'll get that law passed." And they would give him whatever the going rate was and he would take that. And when he left, you should see, I was out at his house. I mean, I wasn't in it but you should see his place is Estoril in Portugal because of all the excess that he had was shipped off to Switzerland and that's what everybody did. That's what every dictator did back in those days and maybe today. I don't know. So that's the system. That's the way it worked. We didn't want any cooperation. We want you to do our bidding.

S: So was there hope that if people like your father, who were the U.S. educator people like Lopez-Fresquet were the negotiators that some sort of agreement would've been made? At least from your thesis and from what you're saying now it feels like it was a futile effort in some ways.

M: It was futile. Probably always futile. Maybe it was a pipe dream of my father's and other people's.

S: Or feeling like they had to try in some way.

M: Right. Well, but, I guess they wanted to give it a shot. And maybe, I don't know, maybe even Fidel thought it was possible. But it was impossible and it's sad for him to see, well, "I gave it a shot. I tried. But I can see it all unraveling now because it is impossible." It's just... I guess the odds are so overwhelmingly against it that it's difficult to do especially for a little nothing country. What've they got? Sugar, tobacco, a little bit of rum.

S: Is that why you think the revolution took on a sort of anti-American tenor?

M: It took on an anti-American tenor when they found out the United States was not going to play ball. I shouldn't say play ball... that was not going to respect them, was not going to grant them their sovereignty and treat them like an equal. In other words, they wanted to treat them the way they'd always treated them, like they

owned them. So, in other words, once Fidel saw that, cause he came up here and he tried. He tried to get things... but he saw, very quickly, "wow this is a blank wall here. We're not going to get anything done here." Then I think it was maybe because of his personality, his character, that he just his back went up and he said, "Wow. This isn't going to work so we're going to do it our way." And especially he was able to do that when he had the support of the Soviet Union because of the international politics of the time. It was... and that Bay of Pigs stuff is really... that was pretty dangerous stuff and Kenister was almost out of control wanting to, you know, hit back. And fortunately, because he was... I think he was going a little bit crazy there. In fact, we spoke about this when we had lunch down there with that senator. There's the senator's picture up there.

S: John Parkin.

M: Yeah.

S: I read your piece about the...

M: Right. So it was very interesting, his comments as to what happened, you know, during that missile crisis. Boy, it was close stuff, and fortunately, Khrushchev, he was pretty solid. You know, he would lambast and go crazy at the United Nations and throw his shoe but, fortunately, he was a peasant but he had common sense, as did Kennedy.

S: I have a better image of him than I do of Mr. Quinn.

M: Right.

S: And they negotiated that kind of separately too.

M: They did. And boy, I tell you, it was pretty close, and when people started shooting at each other, those things can get out of hand so fast.

S: And you were in Guantanamo then or you were about to be in Guantanamo?

M: I was in Guantanamo just after that which is when I told you that incident with... Scared the heck outta me.

S: I can imagine. This is the end. Could you tell me a little bit about the institutions? I've been reading about the American University, the Anglo-American Hospital, or people have been mentioning them. Could you tell me a little bit more about these institutions so I can get...

M: I don't know much about them. First of all, I was a kid, 8 or so, 9, 10, now when did I leave Cuba? Did I say I left Cuba in...

S: '54.

M: Yeah. So I would've been 14. So I didn't really know much about it. I knew about the American club because my parents went there all the time and I would go down

there and pick up my dad sometimes, and I told you, after work and we would go to the party and see people like Hemingway there. But institutions, other than Ruston and the American presence there, all the American families we knew, again parties, parties all the time, going to people's houses, very nice affairs. But institutions? The only thing that I can recall was the American Club and that was a very big thing in our social calendar cause that's where people would meet. And you'd have your Cuban friends over. They had a gorgeous dining room, nice bar, and that was like a hangout and it furthered business I think. People got to talking about all different sorts of things there. Newcomers would come in, you know, they'd get sent by their company and that's the first place they would go and they would become part of the circle of expats. And there was the *Havana Post*. Everybody read that paper and everybody knew the writers so it was like a little gossip sheet. So and so did this. So and so went to Paris. So it was that type of thing.

S: Yeah. I've read through that quite a bit actually. Yeah.

M: Okay.

S: Were you involved with the Mother's Club?

M: Of course. Yeah. My mother was involved there, as was Chris Baker's mother, they were all... The Hamilton boys. Have you interviewed a Hamilton?

S: No. Why do you think the Mother's Club... Was this a place where...

M: It was ancillary to Ruston Academy I think.

S: Really?

M: Really. I think. It was just, the same people, they formed a club. I'm not sure what they did other than get together and talk. Maybe they did something else as well. I don't know.

S: I'm thinking they raised money...

M: For charities or something. Yeah.

S: Were men in the Mother's Club?

M: I don't think so.

S: No. It was just women who gathered...

M: Yeah but they would have affairs and picnics and things like that and men would attend and go there. I don't know the structure of it. I'm just guessing. The men... this was Cuba now. You were a macho guy. You don't hang around women, back in those days. It was a macho society.

S: Sure. But it seems like a center... it knitted a community together. I keep talking to people who bring up the Mother's Club as this...

M: Yeah. It did help, you know, sure because everybody was in the same group and they would have affairs and things like that.

S: Now I'm interested because I know the way that Ruston was structured at least that it had multiple schools... and I know you left before the high school?

M: I left before they moved out to the suburbs. I went to the school in Vedado.

S: So one of the programs was comercio which was, I think, mostly just for Cubans, people learning business skills and English. And so, in your opinion, what did English afford Cubans? What did it... How did it... In what ways would it shape the experience of a Cuban living in...

M: Obviously it would introduce him to Americans. It would prepare him to work with Americans. And it would be very helpful for him because Cuba was dominated by Americans. So it was really, in a way, if you wanted to have a good future and a good job and good prospects, English was probably really important. And all of the wealthy families made sure that their kids knew English and that was why there were so many Cuban kids that attended the school. And of course it was good for us too. It was good having, knowing Cuban friends and learning Cuban culture and going over to their houses, at their parties. It was very good. It was a win-win for both sides. It was a good experience. I mean, imagine playing with Batista's kids. I don't recall, I guess they were nice kids but Christ, their father was a butcher. I don't know how you resolve that. Maybe you just don't think about it if it's your daddy, you know what I mean?

S: Sure.

M: Or you put it out of your mind.

S: Yeah. It's nuts.

M: It's nuts right? Prio's kids. We were very close to Prio. My father was a good friend of Prio.

S: And he went to Miami after...

M: He did yeah. He went to Miami and I would say he was as corrupt as the next guy. But that's the way it was. And he worked with the U.S. government no problem.

S: Could you tell me about mixed marriages in Cuba? Was it a common thing?

M: I don't think it was very common. Not at all. And there was very little, well when I say very little, black-white, in the upper echelons. Now obviously...

S: I don't mean racial. I mean nationality.

M: Oh. Nationality. I guess there was... I suppose it wasn't all that uncommon. Now that I think about it. There was Latin husbands or Latin wives, I think.

S: How did it... was it men who would go and study in the United States and come back with wives like your father did?

M: It could be.

S: I'm trying to understand how those dynamics worked.

M: I don't recall to tell you the truth. Obviously that's one way. They would come up here and go to school. And all of the... or not all, a lot of the Cuban families would send their kids up, if not to camp or some sort of schooling, again, for the English. And maybe... or they would go to college up here or something and maybe along the way they would meet somebody. That's possible.

S: And then, were there a lot of American... I mean American husbands with Cuban wives?

M: Probably not as many. I would think not. No.

S: What was... So it feels like a lot of the employees of these corporations would either send their kids to a Lafayette or a Ruston.

M: They would. Or Belen. But it was kind of an insular society to a large extent. But there was interaction with Cubans.

S: They would go to Belen though also?

M: Well I knew some people who went to Belen.

S: Americans?

M: Americans no. Although, as I told you, the first school I went to was Vilonia, which was all Cubans and boy was I... that was tough. I think I told you, what was I there for a year or two? Very rigid. Very... and of course that was only possible because I knew Spanish having come from Mexico. It wouldn't have been possible otherwise cause it was all Spanish. That was strict stuff back in that... you know not like the schools we have in this country. Those were schools. I'm so disappointed in the educational system we have in this country. It's just awful. A country that doesn't educate its kids is a country that's going downhill. And we don't put the money into it. We don't pay teachers. We don't... and again, it's awful because if you have the ability to send kids to a good school, and the damn schools cost \$40,000-\$50,000 a year for primary and secondary schools. It's madness.

S: It's producing hierarchies all over the place.

M: It's madness.

S: Yeah.

M: And then, to have the majority of the population have to go to a P.S. school that has no... it's just... it's not good for the future of the country and that's our system. It's crazy. I don't understand it. Talk about inequality. It furthers it.

S: What were public schools like in Cuba?

M: I don't know. I don't have the foggiest notion. Cause again, I don't know. I never even thought about it until you asked me this question. They probably weren't great. But you know what, after what's his name got in, every damn Cuban knows how to read and write. Now maybe what they read isn't what they want to read. It probably is but there is no question that you don't have freedom of thought. I won't say thought. Freedom of expression. You've got to be careful. But everybody is educated. Everybody, if you're sick you can go to the doctor and get fixed. There are two good things. Yeah, okay, so maybe you can't speak your mind but maybe you can in the future, if you know what I mean. Is it perfect? No it's not perfect but it's a helluva lot better than it was in my opinion.

S: When did you, sort of develop this... because you seem to have been really thoughtful looking back at Cuba and when do you think that sort of consciousness developed?

M: When I was there. I could see... I told you, I saw lousy stuff in Mexico. I saw lousy stuff in Cuba and I guess I just saw it and thought, "Hey, this isn't right." And I guess I would also notice. I remember I noticed the haughtiness of my esteemed colleagues, my friends, the parents of my friends. And I would see sometimes how they would treat servants. This arrogance, this sense of entitlement. I'm better than you are and you're my slave almost. I could see that. I didn't like it. I didn't know what it was. Maybe that's kind of when it started.

S: Do you think that somehow laid the groundwork for people to buy into this anti-Americanism that was being produced from the revolutionary government or...?

M: No I think that's propaganda. Politics. And they had to prepare their people to be... for hard times and how better to do it than to point out that some ogre, some... it's all their fault. The embargo and all that.

S: What do you think the effect of those... I mean in history we use the term "contact zones" right? Either with tourists...

M: Had we not been stupid in this country for 50 years, I think the Castro's would've fallen a long time ago. If we had had open borders and go down there and do whatever you want, just the ideas and the people flowing back and forth, they couldn't have held out I don't think.

S: Sure. So the punishment in some ways has backfired.

M: Of course it did. We kept him in power. It was a reason for them to fight. Look what they're doing to us. You know. They won't sell us bread. They won't give us

medicine. We helped them and they got everything they really needed from Europe or from Russia or from Chavez right? All we did was shoot ourselves in the foot.

S: Now the servants who worked in the houses and faced this, and maybe I'm asking you to reflect on something when you were 14 that is difficult, but... they had to have had some emotional reaction to being treated as something less than or no?

M: Well, of course they had. I guess. I wasn't in their shoes. But you see these movies where you have the southern plantation and the black slave owner and he goes to the black slave, "Are you having a good day?" "Oh yessir. Yessir we love it here master." Same type of thing. They're not going to show us. Some families treated them more fairly than others. I'd like to think that our family, we had servants, and I think my mother was fair with them. I would like to think so.

S: Did you ever hear... cause your world was mostly Americans, did they ever talk, not down to the servants themselves...

M: Who's they?

S: The Americans in Cuba. Did they ever racially belittle Latins as a group? Was that something in the conversations that was happening in the American colony or no?

M: No. I'm not sure about that. I don't know. But don't forget that there were a lot of Cuban-American interaction. For example, at the American Club, most of the time there would be a whole lot of Cubans there. You'd have Cuban businessmen, Cuban friends playing the dice like a told you. Having dinner. Having drinks with your Cuban friends. There was a good mixture there of the upper crust. That top 25 percent of society. And I'm talking about Havana. I don't know how it was in these other places. Well first of all there wouldn't be too many Americans anywhere else. They were all in Havana. Maybe there was a... out in the mines in the far east there were a few American expats that would live out in those areas but most of the time you're in the capital.

S: Did you ever hear Americans talking about the good they're doing for Cubans and what did that sound like?

M: No. Other than everybody assumed that by our being here... again you get people jobs, they learn our ways and our ways are the best and they become productive people and they're prepared for the future and...

S: Yeah.

M: I don't know. It seems like... and it wasn't our fault. It was their society and we were just down there tweaking it to benefit us but it was their society. That's the way it was and that's the way it is in all these countries. But none of it filtered down to the people who weren't getting what they needed.

S: So do you think there was a goal by elite Cubans in these contact areas to assimilate to... or to become more American in some ways?

M: No. I think in some ways, the Cubans, especially the arrogant ones or the... They might have even looked down upon some of these gringos who come down here and say, "He thinks he's a big shot. Look at him. But, boy that guy doesn't even know which fork to pick up." Because these were well educated people. Well educated. And they were very mannerly. Some of us that went down there weren't of that same caliber. So there was a little bit of that going on too I think.

S: That's interesting.

M: And they could go to Europe and anywhere else. Some of these people were quite, you know, I would say, worldly. Again, to come from a place with 5 or 6 million people in the middle of nowhere.

S: During the '52 coup then was there a sense of loss in some way?

M: Yeah I think there was because it snapped and cut short democracy in some way. You know, here we are back in the coup territory and army control. But that was really kind of common, wasn't it, in Latin America. So it was just another takeover.

S: But... Right. It's interesting because at least some of the ways it has been written about in history books, certainly my advisor, Dr. Perez, I don't know if you've read Louis Perez's books on Cuban history, he talks about this sense of there being this idea of wanting to be seen as modern by Americans. Do you think that actually mattered?

M: It might have mattered to some of the locals because for their own sense of feeling good about themselves. That they were advanced people, that they believed in the proper principles of government, that they weren't savages. I suppose. Yeah.

S: I asked you this last time but I wasn't able to write down the whole quote so I'm going to ask you again. What did you think that, and I know there are different groups of Americans when we talk about Americans down there and maybe you can address them separately, but what do you think Americans thought they were doing in Cuba?

M: I don't know that they thought they were doing anything other than they thought they were there and doing their job. They had a nice opportunity to go to a foreign country where they could live a pretty good life. I think that's as much as any American thought. I think my dad thought much more than that and certainly Rufo and people like him but the average American didn't really think too much about it. He was enjoying his life I think. I think that was about all he thought about. I don't think people are that serious really, or most people. Most people don't care about these issues I don't think. They care about making an income and educating their kids.

S: So that allowed them to stay out of local politics?

M: Oh yeah. The Americans were not involved in local politics at all. Not at all.

S: Do you think there's a sympathy?

M: Yeah. Well first there was a great sympathy for Fidel because of how brutal the former guy was.

S: So you mean amongst the Americans?

M: Oh sure. Yeah. And then that quickly evaporated when it didn't work out. Again, because of Washington's fault. And because I guess, Fidel's personality. He wasn't going to be respectful of the empire.

S: I mean, some of the people I've interviewed have mentioned this sense of betrayal that, I think, mirrors the sense of betrayal felt, at least in some of the works I've read on the Cuban exile community...

M: Now what do you mean? Sense of betrayal...

S: By Fidel. By the direction the revolution took. But I found it interesting because they thought it was going to be something...

M: Well that's why they thought it was a betrayal. That maybe it was never in Fidel's mind. I mean, it was never in Fidel's mind to come up to the United States with an outstretched hand and say, "Here. Help me out and I'll take..." that was never the way. He was always going to say, "Hey, my country is just as sovereign as your country and we're equals." Well that's just not going to fly with us here. So I don't think he betrayed anybody. He might have betrayed the people who thought that's the way it should've been, the way it always was maybe, with a little bit more, you know, democracy, not too much, but a little bit more and we'll be a little bit more like the states and we'll have elections. A little bit more like that maybe. That's where they thought maybe it was going but I don't think he ever had that in his mind. He wanted to change... I mean the Cuban Revolution was a real revolution. I mean, its, well you're studying it, this is comparable to the French Revolution in many ways. I mean the Russian Revolution. This is a complete thought process change. A complete change of course. I mean, this is radical, which is why it is interesting and amazing what these people have done. You've got people down there that haven't a clue as to how life is here. I mean, now it's opening up. But, I mean, it's amazing what he's been able to do. It's 90 miles away and it's just really is... I can't get over it.

S: Were there any hierarchies... and the way I think about it is he has really altered hierarchies that existed right?

M: I learned from my trips down there, especially with the government people, and it's very interesting, and I didn't know it existed, but it does I think, and the hierarchy that counts, now again, we're going back to military people. There's a military structure, probably because of Raul being head of the military, that kind of run things and have, what surprised me, a very large economic interest. And I didn't know that cause I've read that about other countries. But they seemed to... and that

kind of keeps them going because there is no reason to change because it's good for them. Why change something that's good for you? You're going to keep that going and make it stronger. But when we were down there trying to understand about opening Mariel and this and that and talking about changing... you had to deal with this really strong group that kind of controls the country. Controls the country's economy kind of. And that's a new... that's something new that I was kind of able to discover. And I don't know the extent of it. It was probably pretty extensive. These people kind of have it locked up. As is the case in many countries all over the world. The military, once they're in power, they start running things and they do things that benefit them. Like I think all these buses that they get... I was amazed when I first went over there and saw all these brand new, gorgeous, big buses that you see in Europe. I think the military owns them all and they lease them out. So that's kind of the business tentacle that the military gets in and they control things. So part of changing Cuba, making it capitalist or changing it or doing this or that has to kind of fly by them before there will be any change.

S: What were you... what was your role on this mission with Tom Harkin?

M: Well the role was just that he knew that we were connected to the government and my role was to introduce him, talk to these people... which we did.

S: Because your father had served?

M: And my grandfather. My grandfather was a contemporary of Martí and Maloney and fought with them in the war against Spain and really what the amazing thing was was that he was a criollo. He was Spanish. All Spanish and I don't know how in the heck or why he changed allegiance and changed... was sympathetic with the Cuban rebels and he actually, I guess, went and fought against his own background and of course they won.

S: Just the final war? '95 - 98?

M: Yeah.

S: And your grandfather was born in Spain?

M: You know what? I don't think so. I think he was born in Havana of Spanish parents. Actually it goes back even further than that. One of these days you'll go to... where is that... one of these days you'll go to Granada on a holiday and you'll go... that's where the Spanish kings are buried, Isabella and Ferdinand who financed Columbus. Well one of his sycophants, or gophers, was a guy by the name of Sanjenis and if you go to the tomb, he must've been pretty helpful because he's carved there on the tomb. And I think the story, whether or not it's true... I like to think it is. It has been handed down the family. In thanking Sanjenis for his services the king gave to one of his kids a little bit of property in this new place we found called Cuba. And that's kind of how the family got settled there over the generations.

S: Where was your family's land in Cuba?

M: Santa Clara they had some.

S: Okay. And you said it was textiles right?

M: Well yeah. He was in that business and the haberdashery and all sorts of things. Equipment that they sold. Leather goods.

S: Going all the way back?

M: Well I don't know. That's what my father did and his father. In fact, I think I have a book that was written by... where would it be? You've read this guy right?

S: Yeah of course.

M: He's got terrific stuff. He made his living really by...

S: Is this your family?

M: Well yes. That's my parents and that's my wife. You met her.

S: Your dad looks a lot like you.

M: Little bit. I told you I was in the flying business for a while?

S: Right and now you just fly for fun everywhere?

M: Right. Now where the hell is that book?

S: What year did your father pass away?

M: About... fortunately he didn't see 9/11 so that was good. Probably in the year 2000. 16 years ago. And you know the damn thing is, he was 95, walked like a regular guy, played golf, and he didn't shuffle like an old guy. And he tripped and broke his arm. That's all. Once you go into a hospital in this country... never got out. Infection this, that. Terrible. I can't find it.

S: I didn't know Al Franken was on this trip also.

M: No. No. That wasn't this trip. That was in Iowa. Another trip that we did.

S: That is the corn fest every year?

M: Yeah. There's Fidel.

S: Al Franken is one of my favorites.

M: Yeah. He's good. And he's turned serious. Every now and then he pops a joke but he's turned serious. He's a nice guy. I like him.

S: He was running that election where he won by 12 votes or whatever in Minnesota. That was my junior year in Wisconsin and Wisconsin and Minnesota have that relationship that about half of the class is from Minnesota.

M: You went to school in Wisconsin?

S: I went to University of Wisconsin for my undergraduate. So that's why I know these people.

M: Yeah my brother lived out in Waukesha for a while. I'd fly out there and see them. I like Milwaukee. It's a nice place.

S: General Mitchell is where you'd fly into?

M: No. I'd fly into Waukesha. They have an airport right out there.

S: And then Billy Mitchell is the guy...

M: I know. Another esteemed, you know, alumni of that area was MacArthur. And you know, he was such a pompous ass. He wanted to have... he went there to meet the city fathers and he was going to donate something if they'd put up a big... and they said, "No we're not going to put up anything." He had to put his monument some place else because he was a pain in the ass.

S: I can imagine.

M: What a pain he was. What a prima donna. Keep talking. I'll answer your questions while I look.

S: You said that these people kind of thought they were making a good living for themselves. That's about as far as...

M: I don't think they pondered anything more than that. I don't think.

S: In what ways did they accommodate themselves?

M: What do you mean by accommodate?

S: Re-create familiar structures. Like I've noticed that...

M: Well they would have 4th of July parties. They were trying to be as American as... I lived for a while in Saudi Arabia and, you know, in certain places you can't drink, you can't do this in Saudi Arabia, you can't do that. But they would create over there like a whole little area and you'd think you were in Wisconsin. They would do the same kind of thing in Cuba. They would try to make it as American as possible a life for their kids that were over there. And then they also had the benefit of being plugged into a Cuban society where they could see how Cubans lived and they could learn Spanish. So it was a very nice arrangement for these people while they were down there working for these companies. It was great.

S: Do you think they were...

M: Who's they now ?

S: The Americans that were down there. Sorry, I'll be better about pronouns. Were the Americans who lived down there, in the imaginations of Cubans, different from tourists who went down there?

M: Yeah.

S: In what ways?

M: Well first of all, they were more tuned into Cubans. Most of them all could speak Spanish or some degree of Spanish. In what other ways were they different?

S: Did you feel like Cubans looked at you differently?

M: No. Other than the ones who looked down on the Americans who didn't have a sense of etiquette. Cubans were very cultured and well educated. Now just because you're a corporate vice president doesn't make you cultured or well educated. You may be a good manager but maybe you don't have the same level of education and culture that some of your Cuban counterparts would. Families of long standing history and kids with the finest of education. I think there was a culture of difference among Cubans and I'm talking about the higher tier Cubans. Because there was a whole other tier. The 80 or 90 percent who were, you know, they were the farmers. What do we call them in Spanish?

S: The campesinos.

M: Right. We go out to the campo.

S: How was the Spanish of the American colony?

M: It was good. Even my mother for example, she never went to school but by the time she got out of Mexico, of course that's where she learned, she could... you knew she wasn't a Cuban. She had a terrible American accent but she could say anything she wanted to. And that was the case for most of the people down there. Especially if they were there for some time. If you're only there for six months you probably don't learn that much but when you get sent down to a... you know for a tour of duty, you were there for at least 2 or 3 years.

S: Did business happen in English or Spanish?

M: Probably both. Now contracts? Everything was in English. I would think. Again, you're talking to an 8, 9, 10 year old kid here. But I'm just kind of thinking in retrospect how it would've been. You know who else I saw in the Florida airport? Aero Flynn.

S: Oh man. I saw his video...

M: So there's another guy you wouldn't know but he's a very famous movie star.

S: I know him. Yeah. Cause he then made videos in favor of the revolution.

M: Oh he did? I didn't know that.

S: Right afterwards. And there are some stories I've heard of him and Hemingway just getting hammered.

M: They could put it away I guess. I don't know.

S: You were 14.

M: No, I mean, I was 8 when I was meeting Hemingway. I was 8, 9. I didn't know who he was. Some guy with a white beard. And how the hell he could have a white beard back then I don't know because he was younger. But anyway.

S: So, I have a copy of the, and I don't know if this is interesting to you and I could send it to you if you want it, but of the Anglo-American directory of 1958-59. So it's just a list of all of the American, Britains, Canadians who live there.

M: I recall those types of publications. Yeah.

S: Now everybody was in management. Everybody. And was there a... I'm confused about...

M: What do you mean by everybody was in management?

S: Everybody had a title that like... executive manager, vice manager...

M: Well, because they would only send down people of that caliber. I mean, if you're, you know, Standard Oil, you're not going to send down people of a lower level. You're going to send down managers. So you've got to send somebody down to run the Standard Oil operation in Havana, in Cuba. And that would be somebody, I guess, very senior. It would be, just like in any country that they send people to right?

S: Could Cubans break into that? That upper crust?

M: I suppose it's possible. I don't know how often it happened. But again when you say Cubans, Cubans of the right situation could because they would send their kids up to Wharton or to Yale or someplace. These people had money and the kids were educated and so they would go to these schools and when they graduated from there I guess they would've been attractive to a corporation that did business in Latin America. For a kid who was educated, who spoke English like an American and who spoke Spanish like a Cuban or a Mexican or a Peruvian. So I'm sure a lot of them were hired.

S: What allowed a Cuban to be selected by that circle? Was it being educated in the United States?

M: No. His level of, I guess, level of education. If you're like one of us, you're one of us. If the guy was a campesino, he wouldn't have been... they would've been like, "Boy go get me a drink" or something. So probably education, status, social status. Education and social status. And how did that happen? Because you'd be going to

the same schools. It was a very small, small place. You know, everybody knew each other.

S: You went down there in 2002 is that right?

M: I think that was the first time. No. I had flown down a couple times in an airplane that we had chartered but I didn't stay there. Then the first time we went down with Harkin was, I think, 2002.

S: What did you think of the tourists when you were growing up?

M: I didn't think anything of them. The only thing I thought of, from some of the news, was that some of the sailors that would come in were not...

S: I know the story of them peeing on Martine.

M: That's what I was going to say. They got drunk and did what sailors would do everywhere. But that was the only tourist that I kind of felt... "wow look at that. Terrible." But tourists would come down, have drinks, this, that. Of course, Havana was open and nightclubs you know, bars everywhere. It was an open city and it was the playground of the U.S. Especially so when we had prohibition up here if you can imagine that. People would come down on boats. When we came down, we came down on a boat called the Florida. That was the name of the boat. You'd get into the harbor there, the boat would come in. All the little kids that were, poor kids of course, were out there swimming and they'd want you to throw them coins. They would dive down for the coins. How's that for being superior? Throwing coins, trash to the... And there were sharks in those waters. Same place where the Maine was exploded which got us into the war. And some say, well, we did it ourselves. And even if we didn't do it we used it as an excuse to get in and we took all these countries from Spain.

S: Did you hear these stories when you were growing up?

M: Sure we heard it.

S: From Cubans?

M: Sure. And again some histories would vary from our history and their history. For example, I recall reading in their history books that Yellow Fever was wiped out by Carlos Finlay, not by Reed. And of course our history books say Walter Reed was the discoverer of the Yellow Fever but it was actually Finlay, Carlos Finlay, in a little town I guess it was, well I forget where it was but I've been to his house. I guess he was belatedly getting credit but that just shows you how history... that's done everywhere. The victor in war writes the history, not the one who loses it. And the most powerful one writes history and yet, history for local consumption is written by the local people and they'll tell you what really happened from their perspective. Then historians, like yourself, will later come along and kind of put it all together and figure it out.

S: And it's interesting getting into this and this is actually someplace where I need to go with more of my interviews, because I think this is interesting how you learned the history of relations between Cuba and the United States because...

M: I didn't learn the history of relations.

S: Because Castro in his first speech after... in 1959.

M: C. Wright Mills...

S: Yankee something.

M: Yeah. Good. How you learn relations is, well I guess they're personal right? And each side kind of puts it from his own perspective I suppose.

S: I mean, there's this story that's now in most history books about U.S. Cuban relations and if you look at Castro's speeches which are all online, in his first speech after the revolution wins he is giving a speech and the first thing he talks about is how General Sherman, maybe not that Sherman but a different Sherman, didn't allow the troops, the Cuban troops, into the city of Santiago for the victory parade.

M: They didn't. They were excluded.

S: So how did you learn that story?

M: I learned that story from the Cuban side. Cuban books. Not American books. Well, we ran the show there and we took over the country and they didn't need us. Well, maybe they did need us. Would they have prevailed against Spain? I don't know. Maybe not. But it was whooped up by Hurst and the press and Teddy Roosevelt wanted to go down there and I was down there at San Juan Hill and saw how that was. You should do that sometime. It's quite historical. The barracks and that part of the country. They went in there. Vanquished the Spanish. Kicked them out. Took Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Cuba and imposed their will on the country. We kept them, what, 2 or 3 years. Occupied it. And then gave them their independence but withheld it. In name only, but we ran the country. And it was that way until Fidel. And the only time the country was truly independent was during that Special Period. They were fairly independent when they kicked us out or when we left. But very soon thereafter, the Soviet master stepped in, or the people behind him. He couldn't have lasted without them. And then, when the Soviet Union fell, they were alone there for that special period. How long was that?

S: '91 - 98 almost.

M: Was it that long? Now that's the only time, the only time, Cuba was ever independent. Well they're independent now, but that was the beginning of their independence. Can you believe that? It's amazing. Not a very great independence but, you know, they're middling along.

S: Yeah. They were starving. It's called the Special Period for a reason...

M: There's no question about it. Some people are really proud of it. Well Fidel is really proud of it, of what he did.

S: Now in Ruston, cause everybody loves these two teachers, Newendorf...

M: Yeah Newendorf is good and I loved Dr. Iglesias.

S: Iglesias. Never heard of him.

M: Never heard of him? He taught us Spanish. He was... I will never forget Dr. Iglesias. And there was a woman teacher who taught us English. I forget her name. I shouldn't say I wouldn't forget her because I've forgotten her name. But Dr. Iglesias was someone very formidable in my mind. Nobody mentioned Dr. Iglesias?

S: No maybe he left in...

M: Well there's an example of this nuance that you're talking about cause I'm more Latin than all these Americans you're talking to. I assume you're asking questions to some Cubans too.

S: A few. Yeah.

M: Now there's a good divergence. Newendorf I've forgotten about. He was an American and there was a guy by the name of Jack Ruff that some of the other guys are going to mention. But these are all of the expat guys. But Iglesias was a Spanish guy and a Cuban guy. Cuban and proud of Cuba and of Cuban heritage and I learned, maybe some of the things I'm telling you right now, I learned from him because he had a bit of an attitude if you examined it. That would've flown by all these other guys and it flew by me of course. But in retrospect, he was Cuban, boy, and I bet he didn't much care for a lot of what was going on. I remember him.

S: And that was history that was taught at Ruston?

M: Yeah sure. He taught us Spanish and Cuban history. That's where I learned about Finlay. He also taught us...

S: Do you remember his first name or no?

M: No.

S: Iglesias?

M: Dr. Iglesias. And he also taught us the language. He was quite good. And what happened to him, I have no idea. But Newendorf, I even forget what he taught.

S: I think English and history. Then there was another one, Goldberg, and I think they were both European expats.

M: I remember Goldberg.

S: I was interviewing James Winn the other day, the guy who invented Lasik surgery and he was a Ruston Alum.

M: Was he really?

S: All of you guys are so amazing. You're such an impressive group who mostly live on the Upper East Side. No. He works at the IBM building in upstate. But he was like, "It's lucky the revolution happened. Otherwise I wouldn't have been a physicist, I would've been a historian because Newendorf...."

M: Really? Oh good. Really. Well you know what, on another strain here, its all these people who are rabidly anti-Castro and right wing Cubans, I tell you, they should get down on their knees that Fidel came and kicked them out of the country because the Cuban, in general, the Cuban community that arrived in Miami has made such a good life for themselves. They never would've had that life in Cuba and I'm not even talking about the upper crust here. I'm talking about people that got out of there and ended up doing extremely well in our society. Our society welcomes that sort of situation. It's possible here. It's not possible in too many places. The matter is with our harsh capitalism is that it's possible and it's good.

S: What do you think... do you think that's just a result of the policy towards Cuban exiles?

M: Oh yeah. First of all, any Cuban who comes here and puts his foot... is granted... you're a resident and you can stay here and go to school here and get all of the welfare that you want. Does a Haitian get that when he comes over here? No. Haitians we kick out. We don't like their color or whatever. And anybody else. Does a family or even children from Nicaragua or Central America? So the Cubans have... What a deal? There is a whole bunch of them trying to get up here now before they change the law and make them just like everybody else. So that really helped them. And not only that, but they set up a whole structure of welfare. They had a refugio building in Miami. In fact, it was the tallest building in Miami back then. And now, of course, there are so many skyscrapers there but that was the tallest building. It's still there. Go down. When you're down in Miami you'll see it. And out of that building. Every possible service for Cubans was there. So that helped them to get to where they got. No question. So they are much better off.

S: I had a few more questions. Gangsters. Is that something you saw? Thought of?

M: Well I didn't see them. I think I told you every now and then you would see someone had been killed back in this extreme period.

S: But was that because of the police or was that because of U.S. mobsters.

M: Oh not U.S. mobsters. I'm talking about Cuban gangsters.

S: Well let's do both. Let's start with Cubans.

M: Well when I say gangsters, they were the law. They were the police. There was a guy by the name of Masferrer. He was the head cop. SIM. SIM was feared and they were the ones that produced most of the bodies. And who were the bodies? Well they were against Batista. So they were fearful.

S: Now I remember in our last interview, you said when you went back and visited in the late '50s you remember seeing some bodies. Now this is...

M: This is before Fidel.

S: Right. Right. During the end of the revolutionary fighting at least. And other people I've talked to, they said they didn't, the Americans at least. Is that because of the just 'not my problem' thing?

M: Yeah. It wasn't their problem. You never saw a body in the Yacht Club. There was nobody there. But you know what? When we were kids, I would hang around with the Hamilton's and Berrault and we were all over Havana at all hours of the night running around. I remember I was too young to drive but I drove anyway. Maybe I was 12 or 13 and Berrault had an old... his family car. It was a Ford. It was a '49 Ford. It was probably a new car back then. We would drive that. But yeah. So we would get around. Now did I see a lot of bodies? No. Again, you'd see... what was it called? On every page you'd see that. You should go through that and that was common in that era. And of course, some of the guys that used to do that, when they were picked up by Fidel, they were executed because they were butchers. How much due process did they get? I don't know. They were given trials and quotes at that sports stadium. Is that due process? I don't know. I'm a lawyer and that doesn't sound like due process but some of those guys were pretty bad. Could they have gotten an innocent guy and shot him? In the heat of things? Who knows what happens in these passionate shifts you know in society.

S: Do you think that, I mean, I've read some old guidebooks. I thought that would be an interesting way to read about Americans there and they said there was almost a different set of laws for Americans.

M: Yeah you could get away with... I mean, if you ran a red light, I'm sure you know, you can get it fixed. If you hurt someone you can get it fixed. I don't know if you accidentally killed somebody... I don't know. You were able to have your way in a way many Cubans could not.

S: And that was as much about class as about nationality?

M: Yeah. And money. And I would dare say if a Cuban had money, he could get away with things too. The law wasn't all that much respected I guess.

S: Now, just the U.S. mob story because I'm in the middle of this book. I'll show you. I don't love it. He's a Cuban historian who has written some interesting stuff in the past.

M: He's my neighbor.

S: He's your neighbor?

M: Well he was. We had a house down in Miami and I would see this very dignified, elderly gentleman walk two little poodles and I'd say hello and I knew who he was. I'd say hello to his wife. Very nice people. Meyer himself. He and colleagues of his would meet on Carl's Avenue, 21st street in Wolfies. That was the name of the diner there, breakfast place, and I remember going in there and wanting to go sit but you could not sit in a certain area because that's where he and his boys would sit and talk business. And we lived up in... In fact we had the place, I just sold it not too long ago, just north of the Fountain Blue, Imperial House was the name of the place. He had a flat there and so did we. I would see him and there he was. He was the head of not just the Cuban mafia but the head of our mafia because he was the finance guy. And he was very unusual, unusual for a Jewish guy to get to the top of it but he controlled the money and he knew all the secrets and this and that. So when they ran out of Italian guys... And they ran Cuba. Cuba was open to them. They had a deal with Batista and that's why the parking meters were savaged when Castro came into Cuba because all that money went to Batista. That was part of the deal. He would get all the money collected from parking and of course he had a cut of the casinos and the prostitution and everything else that was there that was controlled by this mob. No violence or not much violence that any of us saw and I don't think they had to do anything. They had Cuban people who would work for them and whatever they wanted to have happen, happened. They had run of the city and they had an agreement with the government.

S: Did they have a relationship with the rest of the Americans down there?

M: No. None. Other than we knew who they were and we would see them. That day I told you that I saw Frank Sinatra we were there because we had a deal where we could go into the, we were members of the pool of the National Hotel and many of them were there so you could see them. And Hollywood people would come down and, I mean, it was rumored that Sinatra knew these people but who knows. No connection other than you would know who they were and you would see them and you would say, "Oh wow. That guy is a bad guy." And don't forget, I was 8 or 9 and it didn't make any impact on me. But I was amazed that I got to know this guy later in life.

S: That's crazy. Wow. And then he ended up having to flee the country right? He was in Israel. I think he got citizenship there.

M: No. Meyer?

S: I thought so. Maybe somebody told me that. I didn't read that.

M: I thought he died here in the states because his widow lived on in the same place.

S: I definitely don't know that. This has been really helpful. I don't have any other questions for you. I've burdened you for an hour and a half.

M: No. What time is it? No. We're good. Again, if you have any questions, anything comes up, you think of anything, you've got my number. Give me a call.

S: You've been such a help for me. Your book has been such a help. I think I actually might use it as a primary source somewhat in my document just because you were there and you speak to that.

M: Sure. You know what, in retrospect it was a very interesting time and it was an important event that happened and certainly worthy of study to see how these things develop and the story is unending. As I said the other day, I'm a little sad, and so is Fidel I'm sure, because a lot of what he tried to do, even though he had to force people to do it, I think his motives were always good. In addition to the motive of wanting to run things, wanting to be a dictator, wanting to be in charge, that's a flaw I guess, but maybe that's within all of us but when you're able to do it, you exercise it. But in addition to that, being the top dog, I think his motives were the kind of motives you agree with. What do you want to do? I want to make sure people have enough to eat. I want to make sure they have a roof over their head. I want to make sure they have education. Is there anything wrong with that? I don't think so. I don't think any previous fellow in his... that was running the shop had the same motives. Their motives were, "gee how much can I get out of this thing?" And that's the way it is, I think, in many, many, many places. There are very few people that do this and get away with it. To a certain extent he did, but he was forced into making it much more unpalatable. Especially to us. He was forced into it. Had we been a little more magnanimous, I think we could've coexisted with this guy and it would've been better for him, better for his country, in other words, more freedom for his people maybe. And maybe not. When you get power, who said it corrupts you absolutely? Maybe because of that, maybe no. Maybe because of that it would've been different, maybe no. It certainly would've been, Christ, I could've gone back there a lot earlier and had a few daiquiris and that wouldn't have been so terrible.

S: No not so much.

M: But anyway so I think he's sad because everything he tried to do, and he did a few good things again the medicine the education. His housing, you know people down there have almost free housing. They don't pay... the salary is only \$23-28 a month. Not too much. But I think I told you a story where I showed up at my house... It's not great housing. Well you've seen it. It's crumbling and so they need a lot of changes. They need openness. And once they allow the Internet, everything is going to collapse. Their whole structure. Maybe even the structure I told you about that I didn't know existed. The economic structure of the military. Maybe even that. I don't know. But there are some big, big changes ahead. Just like there are going to be some big changes maybe in the E.U. in Europe because of what's going on. Who knows where that is going to go but I know for certain Raul is going to try... and

they're going to try to keep the lid on it as much as they can, but once the Internet is down there and massively...

S: Do you know what's going on with the Internet right now?

M: Well I know... I think it's very, very minimal.

S: They sell these cards. But they only work in public spaces.

M: Well they're controlling it. And you can only control information if you keep it out of people but once people start getting more, again, once you have closer relationships here, they will be inundated. Once you get rid of this, if these dopes in congress can ever get rid of this embargo thing and let people... then there is going to be a flood, a tide, and they will be overwhelmed down there with enticements and opportunity to make money and this and that. All the things these poor people haven't had and they want and maybe because they've seen pirated films and it's all going to collapse on them I think. But they have their pride. All these people that have been educated a certain way. Not our way. They're going to want to keep their distance from the Miami Cubans I think. And even though some of them or most of them don't have any idea what life was like in the '50s because they're not that old, but it's been inculcated now that they're not subservient to this country. And they're going to want to have, I think, they're going to be insistent on being respected so that's going to be very interesting. We're not going to be able to go in there unless a whole bunch take over the top and all these revolutionary characters fade away and then you have more compliant leaders who want to, again, they haven't had anything and maybe they're offered, as it happens in life. I don't know how it's going to end up. Maybe it will take a generation. But it's going to be interesting and one thing I hope they do is, Havana is a beautiful city and I hope they fix it up.

S: There's a lot of money that seems to be coming in from the U.N. making it an Old Havana Heritage Site.

M: Even our home they call it a heritage site. When you go there, San Lazaro 32, that was our house. It's right downtown. It's a half a block off the Prado. Say, "Hey, the owner sent me down here and collect some rent."

S: You're the nicest face on it. The rest of those faces are very scary I think and with very strong opinions on getting it back.

M: You know, in history, upheavals cause these things and you don't get them back. When Cubana Airlines, you know, they have the agreement to start air travel between the countries and Cubana can't fly its airplanes in here because of some of the people you just talked to they're going to put a lien on the airplane. So what they're going to do, as a lawyer I would tell them, lease some airplanes and you don't have a problem. So that's what they'll have to do. Lease some airplanes and the company won't have Cubana airplanes they'll be leased by international something. So they won't be able to put a lien on them. But it's this philosophy. You know?

S: Yeah I've been offered to see deeds a few times during these interviews that people have held onto.

M: Tell them to use it as wallpaper.

S: It's interesting. I don't know what it is. It's not like these people want to move back to Cuba.

M: Well they think that they have been wronged and I guess they have been wronged if they owned it and it was taken from them. I'm sure if they were offered payment in government script. Hell we've done that in this country. I had some property down in Florida that was taken over by eminent domain and I was paid by the city. I had no choice. Governments do that. They have a right to do it. Do you like it? No.

S: It's so interesting. And it's such an interesting moment also.

M: It is. And your study is happening at a very interesting time because there are going to be major changes down there. I'd like to see how it goes. And Raul, what's Raul now, he must be 82, 84.

S: Castro is 89.

M: So he's about 84, 85. So he's not there much longer and I don't know what the next step is and who takes over.

S: Yeah he said he is going to step down in 2018 also but does that mean him passing it off to his son or somebody else.

M: I don't think so. I don't think there is a dynasty there.

S: There is some talk about his 50-year-old son and people want him...

M: I don't know much about him.

S: Yeah we'll see. Maybe we'll have this conversation in a few years when I'm still working on this. I can't thank you enough. You've been so helpful.

M: Well it's my pleasure Sam and call me if you have any questions at all.