

Lois and Morrell Robinson
9/10/16

Sam (S): I'm just going to put this here so you guys get picked up because I'm loud. So when I found your letter to the Home Mission Board, I'm just going to read it to you. Is that okay?

Morrell (M): Sure. I've forgotten right now just exactly...

S: You don't remember every word you've ever written?

M: No.

S: I have a thousand questions for you guys. Normally these interviews last between an hour and like an hour and a half. Is that okay?

M: I think we can manage that without a problem.

S: Wonderful. Wonderful. Let me just pull it up because I was so taken by this quote and by your thoughts on this. And I read it to Larry Rankin. Do you know Larry Rankin? He's the person who put me in touch with you and he said you got it exactly right.

Lois (L): Yeah let me hear what Morrell wrote. I'm interested too.

S: Right. Alright so you were writing to James Ellis? Yeah?

M: Yes.

S: Alright, you wrote:

"During the holy week I wrote my people about the possibility of having to leave due to diet problems. I did this to acquaint them with the idea and to counteract any feeling of it being due to the political situation, which has not affected us in any deep, personal sense. Since Lois's return I've been struggling with decisions concerning our future relations to work here and what we might request of you that would be fair and best for all concerned. Naturally the thought of taking our years leave a year early occurred to me but quite frankly, aside from present nationalism, I doubt that the Cuba church needs what we can offer it. To put it another way, I feel that a missionary, in order to warrant his presence in another country, must be able to contribute something that possibly no other national might contribute at that particular time. He should be an expert in some line or pioneer in some field. Unless he can do that he is competing with national pastors with the cards stacked against them for their salary is much lower and he often does not have access to funds from the states."

What were you... why did you write that? What were you intending? Cause I read that and I was taken with that. It was... and then also afterwards I read

correspondence between James Ellis and Roy Short. Yeah? They almost seemed to have a certain anxiety about that sentiment that you were expressing that the role of foreign missionaries should be more limited. If you could speak on that a little bit, that would be really lovely for me.

L: It has been a long time.

M: Been a long time. I... Read that sentence please, about the appetite, what was it you were talking about?

S: I'll read the end of it again.

“...but quite frankly, aside from present nationalism, I doubt that the Cuba church needs what we can offer it. To put it another way, I feel that a missionary, in order to warrant his presence in another country, must be able to contribute something that possibly no other national might contribute at that particular time. He should be an expert in some line or pioneer in some field. Unless he can do this he is competing with national pastors with the cards stacked against them for their salary is much lower and they often does not have access to funds from the states.”

You were making a statement it felt like.

M: Making a statement and what were the last two words?

S: It felt like you were making a statement.

M: I was trying to be sure that we were going to need it at the time. And I had followed a Cuban pastor there...

L: I don't remember his name. I'm sorry.

M: I'm trying to remember that too.

S: What year was that?

L: I don't even know what year it was. Do you know? There is so much we've forgotten about Cuba and the work there.

M: At the time... in the process as it was going on in our lives personally and in the life of the church, they were kind of unique and to my dismay the memories, precise memory in terms of place and time, become confused. Now we had a visit back to Cuba I think celebrating the 100th anniversary of Methodist work in Cuba or some sort of real moment in the Methodist work in Cuba. And we had some wonderful people in the... my voice, she's been giving away a little...

L: Do you want your cough drop? Will that help you?

M: It might.

S: You're all set up.

L: I'm all ready with them. We both use them.

S: Sure. How long have you guys lived in this community?

L: Ten years. So it's been a while. We retired when Morrell was... he retired in 19... Morrell what year did you retire? You remember that don't you?

M: I remember retiring.

L: What year was it?

S: It wasn't from the Methodist church though was it? You had left the Methodist church?

M: No, no, no. When you say the Methodist church...

S: As a missionary.

L: We were not missionaries but he was serving in a church in Florida when he retired.

S: Were you a pastor?

M: Yes. You talking about when I was with the doctor...

L: You talking about Hewlett?

M: Doctor Blackburn.

L: That was when you retired wasn't it.

S: Are these your grandchildren? Who are these people on our wall?

L: That is our great grandson. We only have one great grandson. And the couple getting married is our daughter got married last year.

S: Congratulations. That's beautiful.

M: She's a Methodist minister here in town.

S: That must be nice to have everybody close. Are you guys from Jacksonville?

L: I'm from Clearwater and he's from, well he was born in Birmingham, Alabama. He's not from there but that's where he was born.

S: Got it. What drew you guys to Cuba? Were you married before you went to Cuba?

L: Yeah. We talked all the time about what it would be like to go to Cuba and... I remember long discussions because it was serious business with us. You know,

what to expect and how it might happen and all this. I remember. But we were married when we went to Cuba.

S: You were there for a long time right? You were in Cuba for a while?

L: Yeah. How old were we then? Do you remember that Morrell? I can't remember all this stuff. I'm sorry.

S: Did you arrive in 1950? Is that right? I don't know why that date is in my head.

L: Yes it was the 1950s when we got there wasn't it.

S: Was Batista the president when you were there?

L: Who?

S: Batista. The whole time?

M: He was making his move while we were there.

L: Yeah. Fidel was making his move and so most of the time was taken up and fighting was in the country.

S: Sure. Where were you guys located?

M: Mayari.

S: So near Preston?

M: Yeah.

S: So you know Richard Milk?

L: Yeah.

S: I just talked to his son Robert Milk. He's writing a book about the agricultural school.

L: Is that right? Good for him. I'm glad to hear that.

S: And you know the Strouds? Yeah?

L: Yeah.

S: These are the heroes of my story. I'm telling a story about all of the Americans who lived in Cuba. So you have people from the United Fruit Company who very much cared about the United Fruit Company. And then you have people from businesses in Havana who had some connections with Cubans but mostly were interested in those businesses in Havana. And then you have people like the Milks and people I think like yourselves, people like Betty Campbell Whitehurst who I just

spoke to. I don't know if that's a name you remember. Carol English who I've been in constant communication with. She's lovely.

L: I don't remember Betty Campbell.

S: She was with Uleyla Cook.

M: Ulila Cook.

S: Ulila Cook. I apologize. These people seemed to really invest in themselves.

L: They were really dedicated people, the Milks especially. They had us out to their house for meals occasionally. We were really close with them.

S: Yeah because you were pretty... geographically you were pretty close too right?

L: Yeah.

S: So you were a pastor in Mayari?

M: Correct. Yes.

S: And what was your role with the church of Mayari?

L: I was the nurse and I was in charge of, when I got there they put me in charge of, it was something I never thought I'd be doing, of a children's clinic. In Mayari the church sponsored a children's clinic and we were open... two days a week? Is that right Morrell? I think so.

M: I think so. She had a doctor that worked with her.

L: Yeah a doctor. A local doctor that worked with us in Mayari.

M: It was a children's clinic.

L: Yeah.

M: People brought children in from the hill country.

L: What?

M: Parents brought children in from the hill country around...

L: Yeah.

M: ... where there was no doctor.

L: There was no doctor. There was just nothing until Castro came in. He set up a good medical system. But not before. We didn't have it and so we... yeah I enjoyed that because I did some teaching to the mothers who were in the clinic about various health related issues and I got to know the mothers and the babies. I was kind of... the doctor had me be kind of a, I would greet them first if it was somebody

new and find out all I could about them and then the doctor would see them and see what he wanted to prescribe for them.

S: Got it. Were you the only clinic in town?

L: Yeah. We were the only clinic I'm sure.

S: Where would adults go if they needed medical help?

L: Adults... do you know that Morrell? I have no idea. As I think about it now I don't think they went to a doctor.

M: Some of them went to the hospital in Preston. Preston was their center for, what do you call it?

S: United Fruit Company?

M: Yeah. And they had a hospital. One or two of our children were connected with that as a baby being born or in early childhood where they needed attention because of our own children's health.

L: The days of the clinic when we were not open we were there... the nurse that was in charge of the clinic, I kind of overseen it but the nurse that was in charge would take care of any child that would come in. We had a lot of people, children, come in that were dehydrated and we had to give them fluids, IV fluids and that kind of thing. They would get diarrhea real bad and diseases and that's why they had to come in. So we saved a lot of children's lives. At least I thought we did. I don't know if we did or not.

S: Who founded the clinic? Was it the Methodist church?

L: Yeah.

S: The Strouds?

L: Yeah.

S: And Garfield Evans?

M: Garfield was probably a part of that whole scene. He was a district superintendent for a while and I'm trying to remember. He had become associated with... seemed like there was another Methodist group that he became associated with.

S: In Cuba or after Cuba?

M: This was in Cuba. When you say after Cuba what do you mean?

S: After the Methodist church... I was just curious what you meant. Do you guys know what was going on when you arrived in Cuba? Do you remember the political situation at all or no?

L: Well I was just getting ready to get upset. Batista was... No he hadn't been... Fidel... It was after we got there that Fidel landed in Cuba, you know, he was in hiding.

S: With Batista, had he already had his coup?

L: His what?

S: Had he already overthrown the government?

L: No, he took a group of men and went up to the mountains around the coast of Mayari and they were operating from there but Batista was still around wasn't he Morrell? He hadn't fled yet?

M: That's right.

S: How many years did you spend in Cuba? Do you remember?

M: Seems like it was about five years.

L: Five years I think.

S: So around the middle of the 1950s? So the whole time you were there until Fidel Castro was president, Batista was president?

L: Yeah.

S: What did you guys think of Batista?

M: Well we were fortunate in one aspect. We had the sergeant, he hated the... During the time when Batista was still supposedly in charge of the army but the army was a loose cannon. Some of them were very responsible. We had a young middle-aged sergeant. Do you remember his name?

L: Sorry I don't.

M: He was the leader of the group.

L: The outpost. He was in charge of that outpost that the government had there in Mayari.

M: It was an army outpost. He was a member of our church and we were co... what would you say? We were caught up in the revolution because we actually left before daylight one time because we knew that there was about to be a strike by the government air force that was supposed to be against our arm there.

L: Maybe he doesn't know about when Batista was trying to take over the whole island or get in charge of it again, we had to flee, flee from Mayari and go out to the agricultural school where the Milks were but the Milks were gone at the time.

M: The who?

L: The Milks were gone at the time. And who was the young man there that was...?

S: Ed Neissman.

M: Neissman.

S: Ed Neissman.

L: Yeah Ed Neissman was the one.

M: He was a wonderful missionary.

S: He lives in Tampa. Still. I went and talked to him.

L: Is he still living? I guess he is.

S: He and his wife Marge are still living. He seems in not great health. He just lost his daughter.

L: He's not doing well.

M: He'd lost his daughter.

S: They both had had strokes. Yeah. But he lost his daughter very recently.

M: What did he have?

S: She was sick. They both have had strokes, Marge and Ed have both had strokes. I could give you their contact information if you want?

M: That would be good.

L: I used to keep in touch with them but I don't know.

S: I'm sure he'd love to hear from you. He's still with it. He's very together but yeah... he seems to have lost a lot of weight is what he told me.

M: He's a wonderful man. And she. They were both good missionaries.

L: Yeah we enjoyed both of them too at the agricultural school.

S: So the sergeant warned you that an attack was coming from the Batista air force.

M: That was rumored widely, these things.

S: How did you get your information?

M: Well it was rumored widely. I mean it. Things are rumored to happen before they happen. Because the army has to make adjustments and they have interests and protocols that they have to... sometimes the army was not really the army. They were kind of a loose cannon so to speak.

L: I think I remember when we were out at the agricultural school the rumors were that Batista was going to bring his planes in and bomb us and so we felt like we had to leave, had to leave the agricultural school. One morning early we had help from several people. Who was it that came in and helped us? We were headed for the Campo Meto, which is the camp... What?

M: That was the young people's camp.

L: Yeah the young people's camp up in the hills.

S: Was it the rebels?

M: No it was a Methodist camp where you had programs for summer churches and the young people and so that was the project. Not just our church but the Methodist church was involved.

S: So you guys had to go, I'm sorry...

L: We were going up there but we got as far as what was the little town next to the...?

M: Yeah I know what you're talking about.

L: Anyway. We got part of the way there and then a couple took us in who were American, Americans took us in. I'm sorry. It has been a long time. We have trouble remembering all this. Or I am. I have vague memories of it but I remember that because the lady who was...

M: One of the Methodist women.

L: Who was a member of our church and sergeant... married to the sergeant. She was in the car with me, I was driving the car, and you were in the truck with somebody, I forget who it was that you were in the truck with. With Gerardo? Was Gerardo on that trip?

M: I think he had his own truck.

L: Who did you go with when we left, when we fled the school and were headed for the mountains?

M: I was driving with...

L: Anyway that lady kept praying aloud. She just, you know, she just knew they were going to come bomb us while we were... and we had to flee through the corn fields. I mean cane not corn, the sugarcane fields. We were going through them.

S: You were driving through them?

L: Yeah.

S: So just knocking over cane?

M: No they had roads.

L: Yeah they had roads.

S: That must have been terrifying.

L: So when we got to the town the couple that I was talking about, they took us in.

S: Were they connected to the Methodist church or what was that couple doing there?

L: He was connected with the cane business, with sugarcane.

S: With United Fruit Company?

L: With United Fruit Company yeah.

M: Who are you talking about Lois?

L: The people we stayed with in the little town for a couple of nights.

M: They were not Methodist people. They worked for the fruit company.

L: Yeah they worked for the fruit company, the United Fruit Company.

M: And we had the person that helped George come into the world, there was a Methodist women's worker...

L: Yeah she's a nurse missionary.

M: And that was the first human hands that received George.

L: That's our youngest son. Two of our children were born while we were in Cuba. So... but Esther, the second one... when I went into labor with her we drove to the hospital in Preston. I remember that.

M: And they had a little different protocol at the hospital, which the nurse... a hospital that was not a Methodist hospital but...

L: I guess it was the United Fruit Company hospital is what it was.

M: That's where it was. You're right. And they took the attitude of "you leave the child with us, we'll let you know" and we wanted to know a little more than that. So we were...

L: I remember the nurse was the one that delivered Esther because the doctor hadn't come yet. So I did talk to her afterwards.

M: The first time we knew Esther had been born, or one of them, we heard crying.

L: You heard her cry. I already knew that.

S: You already knew that she had been born.

L: I already knew that.

S: Was the hospital only for Americans, the hospital at Preston? Or was it for everybody?

L: It was for everybody.

M: If you were a part of the system.

L: If you worked for the United Fruit Company.

M: They didn't just bring anybody into the hospital. If you were an employee, that would give you an entrance, and if you were connected to one of the Methodist works, either the farm, which was a good size, really wonderful work.

S: The agricultural school? Yeah?

M: Or if you... with somebody who, like the sergeant who were members of our church and for that reason we were able to be a part of saving of or assisting in the saving of the family.

S: What do you mean that you assisted the family?

M: Well it had been widely circulated that the air force, the Cuban air force were going to bomb the agricultural school, both because of Methodism and the army. You know, we're kind of off bounds for the Cuban effort to hold power. I remember when they had a vote and I remember we didn't feel like it was a real free vote because the army was there with their guns and you didn't feel like you were getting a real free vote. But some of us went, and I say us, we were one of the few American couples, I think part of that year, Ed Neissman would gain some extra training in the states. So part of that time, they were not there but they didn't stay gone too long and we were sort of... simple words escape me and it has nothing to do with anything but my memory. It's very troublesome when you get a certain age and you have trouble with memory.

S: It's good to have a partner though. It's lovely...

M: Yeah that helps a lot.

S: You guys seem to work as a team in really beautiful ways.

M: So we had the... we went with Ed and what was her name? Ed Neissman's wife?

S: Marge.

L: Marge yeah. I remember that.

M: Marge. I got you there. We went to a movie about... a real good movie.

L: You're talking about the movie we went to see in Holguin?

M: We went all the way down to the largest... Santiago.

L: All the way to Santiago to see a movie? I thought we went to... we might not have memories that actually... We remember things differently. The Bridge Over... what was it called that we saw? Is that what you're talking about? Sam might remember that movie. It was very popular back here in the states. Maybe it got some academy award. We went to movies in Mayari. They had a little outdoor movie theater but we could, we saw some movies there. Then when we were in Holguin we went to some other movies. I mean, they were more current what we saw.

S: Were there many Americans in Mayari?

L: Some. No. Very few.

S: What were they doing there other than the missionary work?

L: Well the ones we knew were the missionaries. I don't think we knew any other Americans did we? They were either working at the agricultural school or you know involved in some kind of Methodist work that I don't remember what it was.

S: How big was Mayari in the '50s?

L: I don't know. Have you any idea how big Mayari was? I don't know.

M: I imagine that the city or town must have been... it was a center for...

L: Yeah it was a center for the area, the counties more or less.

M: And we were close to a river.

L: That was a very important river.

M: Might say independent sort of business and they had a little horse drawn device that had a huge barrel on the top of it and they'd take water out of the river and sell it for people to cook with.

L: That's where they sold that water. To people down... they'd buy that water and use it for everything. I don't think it was as clean as what you get off the roof when it rained. We got our water when it would rain, you know it was collected in a big storage tank and we'd use that water. We also got water from the agricultural

school, a big five-gallon container of water. Seemed like we drank that more than anything else, didn't we drink that water?

S: They got their water from the United Fruit Company right?

L: The town did? No.

S: No the agricultural school I thought.

L: Yeah the agricultural school did. Yeah. So we'd go out and then it would get empty and we'd fill up the bottle, the five-gallon bottle again.

S: What was your relationship with the United Fruit Company? Did you have a relationship with the United Fruit Company? Just because they were everywhere right?

M: Well we had the strong comradeship of American farmers in a Cuban setting and we had, seems that the Americans around, we helped each other. We went to Christmas. We were not victims but we were fellow... what's the word for people who are not... we're having to leave for our family's sake because of the belief, widely scattered that we... our unit of the air force to bomb that area and so we were on what you might say alert and we left Mayari to the nearby school run by Methodist missionaries and I think we were there during the Christmas season.

L: That's when we were at the agricultural school. That's what you're talking about. Yeah we spent Christmas there. I remember that.

M: So we had the advantages of being connected to Methodist work both from business in Preston where we had quite a large community, business community. People working with nickel.

S: Nicaro? Nipe Bay?

M: Well they were working with nickel, I think it was nickel.

S: Yeah. Nipe Bay?

L: You talking about the cane business?

M: No.

S: The mining. Freeport or Free... yeah it was right in that neighborhood. Nicaro was the name of the town.

M: What did you say?

S: Nicaro.

M: Nicaro. Yes.

L: Nicaro. Remember that town?

M: Sure.

S: So that was part of your mission as well?

M: No we were just fellow victims.

L: He used to go over there and preach.

M: I'm trying to think of the word when you're on the run and just using whatever group is available. We used, you know...

L: Refugees.

M: Refugees yeah that's what we were.

L: We had a very exciting time when we were in Cuba. All kinds of things were happening.

S: You were in a war zone.

L: Yeah we were in a war zone. That's right.

S: So you would go to Preston and preach and you would go to Nicaro and preach? That was your role? And Mayari as well?

M: I had a church in Mayari, a beautiful little church. We had our... and the clinic was an extension at the back of the church and we even had an apartment back there for lame people who were temporary workers and I'm not sure ever were finally received as missionaries but they were being made ready for mission work.

L: We had somebody who stayed in our clinic. Who was that? And why was that? I can't remember.

M: Well they were being introduced to the Methodist...

L: Yeah. They were new. Or they were interviewing us. Which was it?

M: They weren't part of the Methodist system. They were interested in it and they were... in the space there for an experience of being connected to a Methodist community.

L: How long did they stay with us? We didn't feed them. They had some way to fix a meal but they lived in the clinic. It was right beside our house and that's why we were able to take them in and let them stay there but I can't remember too much. I don't remember much about them.

M: They were caught up in that period when we were refugees or about to become.

L: Ourselves yeah.

M: So they, I think they may have had some of their children with them.

L: I don't think they did. I don't remember a child being there.

S: Were they part of the revolution? No? Did you guys ever do anything that would favor one side or the other in the fighting of the revolution? Did you ever provide safety for people?

M: Well this family from the army, they were members of our church. They became, with us, refugees escaping what we thought to be an imminent attack by the Cuban army.

S: Even though they were part of the army?

M: Yes.

S: So their air force was going to attack them was the fear?

M: Yeah.

S: Because they were rebel sympathizers in Mayari or why?

M: Well they were... they had children and they wanted safety for them and their army was like a loose cannon. Some of them were decent and some of them were not even subject to army. It was really...

S: Did you guys see some of the violence? Some of the other missionaries I've talked to talked about knowing people who were tortured and knowing people who were killed by the military.

L: I think we might have known someone who was killed. I was trying to think of that young man who gave you your stereo system or what was it?

M: It was a radio.

L: A radio. And wasn't he killed?

M: He had become a refugee himself so he left when we were still there in Mayari, something that we could keep for him while he was literally on the run.

S: From the army?

M: Yeah.

S: Because he had supported the rebels?

M: Right.

S: And then he ended up being killed?

M: I don't think so. I'm not sure about that at all.

S: How did you guys get your news? Did you listen to radio? Did you read newspapers?

L: I guess that was it. We didn't get a newspaper did we?

M: Yes we did.

L: We did? I had forgotten all about that then.

S: Was it the Havana Post? Or the Times of Havana or was it a Spanish language newspaper?

M: I'm trying to recall. I think it was a Spanish newspaper.

L: You were pleased to get that radio I think because you could hear all the things you couldn't read from the paper or find out from the paper.

S: So you listened to Radio Rebelde? The one that the rebels were broadcasting as well as the one the government was saying?

M: I don't recall.

S: So Betty Campbell Whitehurst, the one who worked with Ulila Cook or Uleyla Cook right? She said that what they would do is they would play the music very loud in the front of their house and then in the back they would listen to Radio Rebelde which would give a more accurate picture of what was going on then the government news sources that were trying to frame the conflict in a certain way right? Do you guys have any recollection of trying to get information that was more accurate than what was being fed to you from...

M: As I say, rumors in a country under pressure... people who are under pressure from a political situation... I remember going to a funeral from one of the young men on the hill by the, I believe, section of the army that had become a rebel army for Castro coming in and this is what made it so hard for me to carry on with the work that included Gerardo Martinez who was close by and had a young family and they were, we didn't think of them as rebels but we thought of them as people who were interested in freedom and democracy so that put them as question marks for both the army, whether that was regular army or...

L: I think the closest we got to the war... the one thing I could remember we could hear in Mayari we could hear the bombing... Batista sent some of his airplanes to bomb this old encampment of the rebels, you know, and we could hear it. We could hear the bombing going on from where we lived. And then the next day or so Batista won this encounter, wasn't a big thing at all but they marched the prisoners that they had taken through town. I remember how bad I felt about them. They looked so terrible, you know, some of them were injured and some of them were... again its little fragments of memory that come back to me and I can't remember the whole picture. I don't know where they took them. I don't know what happened to them but...

M: I think you're referring to a funeral that was there for one of the men who had been shot.

L: I don't think so.

M: Either by the rebels or by the army. I remember walking with the group for the funeral and it was thought of as a witness that we were making against the army and against those who were trying to upset the status quo.

L: I don't remember that at all.

M: Well I don't remember any bombs. I remember going to bed at night and my daughter was interrupted with her sleep and she would say, "Tiros, tiros."

L: ... tiros, tiros. Do you know what tiros is? Shots.

M: She could hear those going over but I don't remember any bombs.

S: How old was she?

M: Oh she was preschool. Maybe four or five around there.

L: She would wake up crying at the bullets that would fall on the roof, that's what woke her up? I don't remember.

M: I thought she was waking up by the regular things that would wake a child up in the night. It wasn't a terrible war situation but it was somewhat noisy and you were sleeping and I was able to help out with the...

L: Yeah you would comfort her. I remember that part because I don't think she was even a year old.

M: She was already walking and we went to the airport one time when Lois had to have her, what would you call it? A PTSD?

L: Yeah I had PTSD. I'm sure I did.

M: She came to me one morning and I was on the phone and she began to talk to me in an unknown language and so before I hung the phone up I called her mother and her mother came in the plane and landed I think it may have... I don't know where she first got on. I believe she went part of the way by bus and then came down to Mayari.

L: Yeah she helped me out.

M: When you say out you mean out of Cuba.

L: Yeah. I went home with her, with my mother for a while.

S: This was right after the revolution had...

L: Yeah. Things were in such turmoil that I was suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

S: Did you take your children with you?

L: What?

S: Did you take the children as well?

M: She did.

S: That must have been so frightening.

L: It was.

S: Yeah having that physical reaction and sort of relief but not knowing what's next.

M: It can be illustrated and I was about to reveal to you... I think in this same period we went together with the children and I think her mother had come over and went with Lois to the airport and the city there and either Mayari or did you all get a bus to get to...

L: To Holguin? What are you talking about? To Santiago? To Havana?

M: It was either... it wasn't Santiago it was...

L: Guantanamo?

M: Guantanamo was further down. This was right at one of the... did your mother pick you up in Mayari? I think I remember going to get her.

L: You may have but I don't remember how she got there.

M: And I either brought her or... I think I did. I think I picked her up somewhere and I took them to an airport somewhere, either the middle of the island.

L: I wish I could remember this better but I just have vague memories of all these things because so much was happening all at once it seemed like. I can't... now thinking back it has been a long time since the '50s.

S: Yeah. How old were you guys when you were down there? How old were you when you arrived in Cuba?

M: Lois was pregnant with Esther I think.

L: Yeah I was pregnant with Esther when I went but that doesn't tell him how old I was. You decided we went to Cuba in the late 1950s wasn't it?

S: What year was Esther born? What year was your daughter born?

L: Lets see. I have to remember when I was born. Three children... I don't always get it right. Steve was the oldest and he went with us. He was old enough to go with us and he was born in... I just can't remember.

S: My dad doesn't know when I was born either so it's okay. He always gets the year wrong.

L: I forgot how old I was when Esther was born. I used to know those numbers and everything but in old age it's got...

M: It is embarrassing.

S: It isn't embarrassing. You guys have lived lovely lives together, you've lived many lives.

L: Yeah. We enjoyed our time in Cuba.

S: What drew you to Cuba? How did this end up happening?

L: Oh lets see. We were planning to go to South America because we knew more about other parts of South America and was it the bishop in Florida that persuaded us to go to Cuba?

S: Ranskin?

M: Ranskin. He wanted us to go somewhere in Cuba where he had connections as a Methodist missionary bishop. And so...

L: The Methodist church had good preparation for missionaries going overseas and we had to take several months of schooling at Scarett College.

M: Yeah get a little background... and then later I think we were already in the missionary field when we were sent somewhere in Central America.

S: Costa Rica for language school?

M: Costa Rica.

S: Yeah so that was a few months and then you went back?

M: Yeah.

S: So he convinced you to go to Cuba?

L: Yeah I remember that.

S: And when the revolution won, and I know you were going through some health stuff, did you have a sense of relief that it was over? What were your feelings?

M: Well when she went and visited with her mother for a while, that was wonderful trip for her because she came back to her normal life.

L: My normal self.

M: So she came back and she was ready to go back to work. So it didn't take too long for her recovery from her stress.

S: When the revolution was happening... and it's so interesting because you guys were in it right? So people in Havana for instance they have very firm opinions about events and they wanted democracy and that's why they supported the revolution. These are Americans I'm talking about. Or they wanted to be able to go to the movie theater without fear of it getting bombed and that's why they were rooting for the revolution there to succeed so almost superficial stuff compared to what your lives were at this moment. At any point during the revolution, were you sympathetic with the rebel cause? Or was peace what you were hoping for? How did you guys view events as they were happening?

M: You want to answer from your point of view?

L: Oh you want me to give my view? I don't remember ever being a fan of Batista. I mean he was just an unlikable person to us and what we knew about him and I think we were relieved to get a change of leadership in Cuba so I don't remember it being something...

S: What about Batista did you not like?

L: Well just that he was a dictator you know? It wasn't a democracy we lived under at all.

S: What did you hope for?

L: What did I hope for? Well that's a good question. I don't know.

S: A change?

L: A change I guess. Yeah. That's a good answer.

M: The army was operating as a loose cannon. They were doing some terrible things.

S: And you were aware of that?

M: Yes.

S: How were you aware of that?

M: The newspaper.

S: After the revolution?

M: No during the revolution they were getting very... people knew what was going on so it was a time of real unrest and I did feel awfully cut off from our superintendent who at the time he lived in...

S: Holguin?

M: Holguin right.

S: Was this Carl Stewart?

M: Yeah. He never called us during the time we were under a lot of pressure and when I say pressure I mean we couldn't get food. That was one of the things they did as a terrorist group. They cut off...

L:... regular deliveries that would come like food.

M: All the trucks were stopped.

L: I couldn't get milk for the babies, for our children. I remember that.

S: Who did this? The rebels or the army?

M: Well the army... there were elements in the army that were really identified with the people but there were others that were completely loose.

S: So the sergeant that was a part of your community? He was one of the... he was trying to help people. And then these loose cannons, these were the ones who would shoot people and torture people is what you're saying?

M: Yeah.

S: And you knew both groups existed in Mayari?

M: No.

S: Just the more decent folks?

M: Yeah. The sergeant led our group. He's like a... He was in charge of this encampment, a group of the army and so he had... we were fortunate in that we were not... we were looked upon with favor by our local leadership and it turned out to be good both for him and for us.

S: Because he was a Methodist?

M: He was a Methodist.

S: So he ran the encampment. Were there ever other people from the military who would come in to Mayari or was it just only this sergeant at all times?

M: Well there were a few people I know who weren't Methodists that were a part of the friends and those who believed in change and so they were... We were able to help them when they left the scene of violence and what we thought to be an assault by the airplanes and they had some connections with Preston and the investments that American money... we had a lot of people who owned businesses. We had a friend who was a Methodist minister and whose relatives were about a... and their

family and their investments in property just as non-Methodist people did. A lot of American money in Cuba, both in areas like Mayari where we had both the nickel investments. We had, of course all kinds of money in cane and so on. A lot of money invested and so when they had a meeting with an American businessman or American, what would they call them? Who are official...

S: Executive? No?

M: No. What do we call them Lois?

L: Who? I didn't hear what you were saying. I have to get over closer.

M: The Americans who are official representatives of the United States.

S: Foreign Service officers. People who worked in the State Department?

M: You're getting close.

S: I'm getting close. So people who worked for the embassy?

M: Yeah. What do you call them?

S: Diplomats.

M: That's close. Anyway, we had relationships where we are seen as people who had money or who could get money to do...

L: The clinic that we had.

M: I'm not talking about Methodist work or even humanitarian work. I'm talking about people who can invest in a program, moneymaking... 400-500 cows for moneymaking because people need to eat the meat and all kinds of ways to make money. You have a wealth of possible venues for investment, you know. So there was always people, not diplomats but that's close to the word, you know they had a... in the town... various countries had an official, a representative of the United States.

S: Ambassador.

M: Ambassador. That's it. In a nice big building there in Havana. The American ambassador has an appointee of our government who is officially a representative of the United States. So that's an important contact.

S: So there was a consulate in Mayari or no?

M: Not in Mayari but in Havana.

S: Okay yeah.

M: So we had that kind of relationship. Havana was where our ambassador was located.

S: Earl Smith right?

M: I believe that's right.

S: What did you think about the role... because as you left, what struck me most about that letter is you're talking about competition with locals right? The idea that as a minister, almost you felt like you were taking somebody's job. Is that fair? Like you were worried about that?

M: That's true. We had some Methodist young people who had been a part of our Methodist program and on the other side. You always have a group that's open to change and so they naturally lean toward cleaning up the army's loose cannons so they won't be oppressing people, they'll be helping people. And so on. So I remember going to a funeral, maybe I mentioned this already when we walked through town with a young man who'd been killed by the army, their own army. We had a large contingency of citizens who came out to that whose lives were under pressure because they were for freedom and for change.

S: Did you feel like you were taking a risk by walking with that group?

M: I knew that there was some risk. In fact, I at one time, I don't know whether you were with me or not but maybe two times. One time we were on our way, I think on our way back home for a brief...

L: When that man stopped us in the car? He was a soldier and he pulled us over but I don't remember.

M: We had one incident where I passed a soldier without... he was hitchhiking and we had our whole family in the car and I just didn't think about it. So he caught up with me. He got one of his army friends to pick him up and then they went and stopped me and my family and they carried us to the ambassadors office of some official.

S: U.S. government official?

M: Well he was an ambassador or something?

S: Consulate?

M: So he had the power to put us in jail but the judge refused to do it because he knew of our work and where we were.

S: Was this in Mayari or in Holguin?

M: This was in Holguin. So the judge just refused to move on it so we were able to get back home to Holguin, then Havana and then the states for Lois's recovery I think it might have been.

S: Did you feel that you were more protected because you were Americans?

L: I think I felt a little bit that way.

M: You know, in a situation of change like this young man that left his radio with me, we knew that he was an outspoken anti-Batista and that he was... he could be taken out at any time.

L: Do you know what happened to him Morrell?

M: I never did know. I kind of believe that he may have come through but I don't know. I had no relationship with his family. He was a bright young man and he was not just... So I don't know how that... I visited Cuba after we left, I mean...

S: For the 100 year anniversary? Yeah? Did you guys get to go back to Mayari?

M: I did. I'm not sure you did.

L: I don't think I did.

S: Was this in 1980s or 1990s?

M: I guess it was...

L: I have no idea myself. Maybe Morrell remembers.

S: Do you remember if it was during the Special Period? Were people very hungry or no? Because there were two dates when it could have been right? So in the 1880s you have the first Methodists come to Cuba right in the 1880s. But the U.S. mission didn't arrive until the end of the 1890s so I'm not sure if it was... which date they mark it by. It's not important. It's okay.

M: Well it's good to try to keep these times and movements that are so interrelated. I think that's what I was trying to say... We had movements from one side and then the other and they were interconnected. The army, the revolution, the private investment, the different Americans.

S: Did you ever think that was a problem? It's interesting just the way that you spoke about the role of missionaries. The way you speak in your letters back to the mission board and I've read a lot of your letters from 1950-whenver you arrived- to 1960 and there is this theme in it that we really need to give them the reigns of their own country. And certainly you said that pretty explicitly in terms of the Methodist community. Did you feel that way about the business community? Because you're right, there was a lot of U.S. interests. I think we owned 40 percent of their sugar production, their railroads, all of their electricity and utilities, 90 percent, not all. Did you ever have that sense that what you were saying about the Methodist community needed to be translated also to other elements of Cuban society?

M: I'm sure that that was part of my feeling. And we were so interconnected with moneymaking in our investments and our interdependence.

S: You're talking about the Methodist community and the business community or you're talking about as Americans?

M: It's hard to, in my mind, to separate them. It's all together and you can't understand that and believe it that change in a volatile situation is dangerous. You can't be on both sides but you have to be on both sides so it's a tricky situation and we had a gentleman that you mentioned just a moment ago who was a superintendent.

S: Stewart. Carl Stewart.

M: Carl yes. Carl Stewart. I think he was identified as the older Methodist missionaries probably were with the idea of this is our work and we'll let them... I think they, we all had a different outlook maybe because of our backgrounds but there is no question that we had this sense of ownership and we had been a part of for a long time and we began to have this... what's the... there's a word for it when you become... it's like a parent. You saw them grow up but it's still your child and you're going to control it.

S: Paternalism.

M: Paternalism. So that's part of what we go through in these relationships is we have churches coming and so many of them have been to our Methodist... as you know we have there a school for Methodist ministers in Cuba.

S: In Matanzas.

M: In Matanzas. Right. We had our own Methodist program of teaching young men and women to minister. So we were constantly, I think, challenged by our work. We started... So we had a group that came in that were literalists in scripture, very conservative, and some of us were thinking, I'm sure not all of us... but we had to go through these growing up young men and women going into the ministry. The stresses.

S: Was Stewart a literalist?

M: I think he may have been. He had a background, what's that school that you mentioned a minute ago in the United States that's a conservative group?

S: SMU or Southern Methodist University or Emory?

M: You mentioned it. So I know it's back there...

S: Where is it located?

M: It's in the central... it's not in the upper east. It's more Midwest.

S: Not Scarett?

M: No.

S: Vanderbilt... Midwest. I don't know.

M: I'll think of it in a minute.

L: What are you trying to think of Morrell?

M: ... the center that was so conservative among the Methodists. It's a well-known seminary. But anyway, it is in the central part...

S: Did you think, and it's interesting how you're talking about this paternalism in the church... did you experience this also?

L: What?

S: Like a sense by Americans at least within the church that it's still our responsibility to tell you how to be a good Christian even though you're clearly capable of doing it on your own. Is that a fair way to put it?

M: Yes.

S: Did you sense that as well?

L: I didn't.

S: You didn't. Maybe you were less directly...

L: Yeah.

S: Did you sense that with other elements of Cuban society because you're talking a lot about this interdependence which I'd love it if you could expand upon that a little bit. This idea that we're an American community. Yes the Methodists, I think you said earlier, there is this natural sympathy between the Methodist mission and the people working for nickel in Nicaro and the people who were working for United Fruit in Preston. There is this natural sympathy and maybe this interdependence. Was there this same paternalism maybe espoused by the business community as well? And was the revolution a reaction to this?

M: I need to study and rediscover my experiences that are clouded by memory loss. So I would...

S: Did you guys ever write down your experiences or no?

M: Some of these letters...

S: Okay just the ones you sent to the mission boards?

M: I'm not sure. I know that I must have sent some to our man, you referred to him, he was the missionary...

S: Milk, Stewart.

M: Carl Stewart. He was not.

S: Rankin, Sherman?

M: I think there tends to be a period when the church is becoming itself. The Cuban leadership is actually different... we went to different seminaries and stuff like that. The seminary I should remember because they still... I'd like to know how far they've changed in the last 50 years.

S: In Cuba?

M: No.

L: Come in.

S: I think it's time for your medicine. Maybe another 20 minutes? Is that okay? I would never let them go out the back door.

L: I don't do that.

M: So... gosh I need to talk to you some more. It might recover some of the memories.

S: Do you guys use email?

M: Yes we use email.

S: We could continue conversing over email if that's...

M: Sure.

S: What's your email addresses?

M: Mine is Morrellsr@comcast.net.

S: And Lois what is yours?

L: I don't use the computer now. I did for a long time but I got sick and never could get back at it.

S: Do you like typing? Is that easier for you sometimes?

M: Yes.

S: Okay so if I sent you some questions that would be easier and you could think about them and take your time with them. Did you guys ever, I mean it sounds like you guys were pretty supportive of... and I'll wrap up because I know you guys need to go to lunch and you've been so generous with your time. It's already been an hour and a half that we've been sitting here. But did you guys, when the revolution was happening, when Cuba started nationalizing industries and this tone of anti-

Americanism started coming up in the Cuban revolution, how did you react to that? Were you surprised by that?

L: I don't remember if I had any real strong feeling to it. I was a little bit upset sometimes about what Cuba was doing after Castro came in and took over. That's all I remember. Maybe Morrell will remember better than I do.

M: Well I was a part of that change that took place. We had liberal people who were Cuban and had been open to change long before perhaps the Methodists were but I think many of our missionaries were open to it and realized that we had our connections with one would say materialistic investments and all these connections to our own welfare and not necessarily those of the natives.

S: And so it seemed necessary in some ways?

M: This is change you mean?

S: The change and kind of shedding those connections to materialism?

M: Well of course you can't get away from the environment of investment and the systematic... a large country with a lot of influence cannot help but be a draining and conservative influence on many of the decisions made regarding the welfare of people and the others have the stress of the development of a society open to change between the old and the new, between those that are heavily invested, they may be liberal people and they may be decent people and they will invest in your outfit if it meets their needs but you are constantly also feeling the pressure of the status quo going on in the original investment and so on. So I would say that the Methodist church has been in many ways a liberal influence in most of our missionary work and I think that we met some... my good friend Carl... who's my good buddy? The man who became a bishop after he...

L: I'm sorry. I'm not good at remembering all those names.

M: Not Carl Schaefer but my goodness.

S: He was in Cuba or no?

M: Yes he was in Cuba. He was in the capital of Cuba.

S: In Havana. Not Stroud? Lindsay? I'm trying to think of other men who are in Havana. I'm sorry.

M: I'll think of it in a minute. He remarried and moved to Alabama.

L: I don't know what you're referring... We never lived in Alabama.

M: I'm not saying we had. He moved to Alabama in retirement.

L: Lloyd Knox?

S: Knox. Is he still alive?

L: No he passed away years ago.

S: I have his letters also. Do you want me to send you these?

M: I would be delighted.

S: So they're photographs of documents but I'm happy to share them with you. Any time your name comes up or whomever you want. You could give me a list.

M: That would be great.

S: Morrellsr@comcast.net. That's right?

M: Yes.

S: So anyway you were saying Lloyd Knox who is this liberal influence in Cuba, go ahead.

M: Yes he was a wonderful man.

S: But you have this tension you're talking about from still the Methodist church run by North Americans is representative of the old even if they're a liberal...

M: We were separated by apartments. He was in the capital city and he had a different experience than I did. Of course I was in Mayari and we were on the southern coast and a part of the American investment and he was there and he had a... I was with him in some meetings and we both worked together in some Methodist work. So we had a lot in common in our thinking and in our doing. But he was a unique... I remember one time. I don't remember enough to get into that but I'll talk to you sometime Lois about it.

L: Okay.

S: I'm really excited we are going to continue this conversation over email. Do you check your email occasionally?

M: Yeah.

S: Okay and you have a computer so I'm going to send you some questions and you can take your time with them, there is really no rush. That's how Carol English prefers... do you remember Carol English? She taught at the agricultural school while you were there for a few years actually. She was very young. In her early 20s I guess.

L: I don't remember her at all.

S: She was there from '54-'57 in the agricultural school and then she went to Buena Vista in Havana, the girl's boarding school. But she prefers to speak over email and

now we have over 50 pages written back and forth because she is a avid emailer. I get three or four. It's intense. So I'm not expecting that but I'm very excited to continue this conversation and it is such an honor to speak to you both. You have both shown up in the record as real heroes and really with an empathy that very few Americans had in Cuba. I think there was a connection with the people that you guys shared that was inspiring in a lot of ways. And even before I was just so shocked when I spoke with Larry Rankin and he said yeah they're still alive and together and I love the partnership that you guys have too. It's been very exciting for me to sit down with you and I'm very excited to continue this conversation over email. I know that you have to get your medication and go to lunch but really...

M: Where do you live now?

S: Currently I'm in Miami because I'm at the Cuban Heritage Collection because I got a grant from the Cuban Heritage Foundation to do research on this and 90 percent I read about and write about is the business community, which was less empathetic and less thoughtful in terms of what their responsibilities and roles in Cuba were. And sitting with you two and speaking with you two and reading what you've written- and I'll share all those things with you as I look over them and I will be looking over them in my notes in the upcoming months- it's just a different sort of experience.

M: I sure appreciate your time and I look forward to the connection.

S: Thank you so much. It was such a pleasure.

L: Thank you from us too.

S: Thank you so much. I'll be in contact. I'll shoot you an email this weekend I think.