

Maria J. Cazabon
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Maria (M): For some reason, I suppose a nun sent this over, they wanted to publish it and out of respect for their wishes they left everything in English.

Samuel (S): But the nuns spoke Spanish no?

M: Not really. Some of them spoke... the ones who were there longest, they understood a lot. You will notice that this was during the Batista dictatorship and there was no one representing the government.

S: At the school?

M: At the school. Usually the Minister of Education came to the graduation ceremony but not this...

S: Jorge Garcia Montez?

M: Jorge Garcia Montez. That's right. He was Minister of Education at that time. But nobody was invited this time.

S: Wow. Was that a political statement made by the nuns?

M: Well I don't know. They just... I think they'd rather steer clear of that sort of thing.

S: Sure but it seems interesting that if they would normally come, why in '56 aren't they?

M: I don't know. I don't remember if actually the other year... let me check. I have '53 here. This is from one of our commemorations and they wanted to throw this out and I said, "No, no, no. Give it to me." Look. You see. It's the same setup exactly. You see? Here is somebody who is not a priest.

S: Right. So that must be government?

M: I don't know. I don't know. I remember one time in which the last Minister of Education of the Batista regime, and she was a lady and her daughter had been at Merici and she came. I remember she came to that graduation.

S: Oh wow. So much history.

M: This was the program the way the program was given out.

S: It was in English also.

M: Oh yes. Everything was in English.

S: Were you in the high school program or the bachillerato program?

M: No. There was not bachillerato.

S: So it was only a high school?

M: Only we had academic and commercial and secretarial.

S: Both were in English.

M: Yes. All the subjects were in English. Except of course Spanish cartografia. We had Spanish short hand. But all the other, like we had Spanish...

S: Oh I didn't realize that.

M: ...We had Spanish as a language. We also had French. We also had Latin.

S: So everyday you were at school you would be speaking English in school exclusively?

M: Oh yes, with the nuns. But not among ourselves. No, we spoke Spanish.

S: Of course.

M: We spoke Spanish among ourselves but we spoke a lot of mixed English that I remember our Spanish teacher got angry when she heard us say like, "El bookstore." "El library." She'd say, "El biblioteca. That's how you say it." And I have no yearbooks to show you. No. Because they're all at Ameriquita's. You met Ameriquita?

S: I did. But also a lot of them are being digitized right now by the Cuban Heritage Foundation.

M: Yes but not the yearbooks yet.

S: Not the yearbooks.

M: No. I've had them for 15 years and I drove them over to Ameriquita's because we were getting ready for our annual reunion this year, which was the 75th annual anniversary of the foundation of the school.

S: Wow. So it was founded in '41?

M: '41. September of '41. Yes. And we wanted to set up displays of the entire history of the school through the three buildings where it worked and those lasted for 20 years. That was it.

S: Were any of the nuns there the whole time?

M: The whole time... well you could say Mother Thomas was.

S: Mother Thomas was one of the founders?

M: Mother Thomas was one of the founders.

S: Was she in charge of the school? The headmaster?

M: Oh she was everything. She was the superior, she was the directress, she was the foundress, she was the soul and spirit of the school. And she was there until the nuns had to leave. I have what the nuns wrote as they told the story of those last few days if you want to see it.

S: Oh that would be incredible.

M: You want to see it?

S: I would love to see that. Is it...

M: I have it here. I have it right here I think.

S: Do you own a scanner or no?

M: I do have a scanner.

S: Maybe later on we could scan some of these things?

M: Actually I have it on the computer.

S: Oh you do. So email, that would be great.

M: Everything was published. This was published in three parts in our bulletin.

S: Alright. Wonderful. So maybe I should get hooked up with that.

M: Yes. You've read about the bulletin?

S: No, I haven't.

M: You haven't?

S: I haven't. I know. I've got to talk to Beatrice about this. Wonderful. Yeah. So this is 1960.

M: This is 1960. I added all those notes from my own...

S: Oh this would be fantastic for me. This is right up my alley.

M: You know they would not leave until they were ordered to leave by the Cuban government.

S: Was that right after the Bay of Pigs?

M: This was 1961, January of '61.

S: Oh so before.

M: That was before. Yeah they took over all the schools before Girón, which is what we called it in Cuba.

S: Sure. When did you come back? When did you come out of Cuba?

M: I left in February of 1983.

S: Wow. So you lived really two worlds.

M: So I know all about... I know all about it.

S: Now how old were you when you started at the school?

M: I was nine.

S: You were nine.

M: I was nine and we were not from Havana. We were from the province of Las Villas. I want to show you the place because it's interesting. I have a map right here. I can show it to you right now. You see this old map of Cuba. You see that point there? That's where my hometown is.

S: Oh. Did you have this made?

M: No, no. I bought it. I bought it.

S: Because they marked your hometown.

M: Well because it is important not because it is my hometown. It is practically the northernmost point in Cuba where the island curves like that. So it is from this area that most rafters leave because it is closest to the United States.

S: Caibarien.

M: Caibarien is the name of the place.

S: Got it. Wow.

M: Northern province of Las Villas which today is called Villa Clara. It is not called Las Villas anymore. That's my hometown. We used to get all the American radio stations.

S: Yeah? Because you were so close to Miami?

M: Because we were so close.

S: Now how did you end up at Merici?

M: I'm a first generation Cuban on my father's side.

S: Where is your father from?

M: My father's family is from the south of France, from the Basque country. My father was born in Bayonne. And my grandfather and grandmother immigrated to Cuba. My grandfather came over first. They set up a factory, a tanning factory.

S: For hides?

M: Exactly.

S: Because Las Villas was where all the cattle...

M: And they chose this town in Cuba because it had, it was close, next to the coast and had very, very good sources of water. Tanning needs a lot of water.

S: And also Las Villas was the capital of the ranching industry right?

M: Not really. Ranching was more like Camaguey, a little more to the east. That was the big ranching country but Las Villas had a lot of farms too and cattle breeding. That sort of thing. Yes. That sort of thing. That's what they... my grandfather came first and I know for sure that my grandmother came over in 1909 with the children. My father was the youngest. He was two when they came over. So they grew up in Caibarien.

S: Wow. Did they speak Spanish when they arrived?

M: No they didn't, but they learned it very fast. So fast that they forgot French.

S: Did they speak Basque?

M: A little. My father especially because he was sent over to France when he was like 13 and he remained in France for three or four years in the Basque country with an uncle who was a priest and had some kind of, or was working at some kind of school, like a seminary. And my father he was there for some time and he learned some Basque. The family remained very Basque. And in Caibarien he met my mother who is the daughter of a Basque immigrant from Spain. And my grandmother is also the daughter of a Basque immigrant from Spain. And so we are Basque on both sides, on either side of the Pyrenees. French and Spanish.

S: Was that seen as like an intermarriage? Cause I've talked to some other people who said people from certain regions of Spain were very...

M: Yes, my grandmother used to say that the Basques used to smell each other. They would smell each other out. There is a story in my own family because my grandmother was born in the province of Matanzas because her father had established himself in Matanzas. And when my grandfather, who was to be my grandfather, first came to that town, he immediately asked, "Are there any Basques around here?" And he was told, "Oh yes go to this place. There is this Basque. He has like a café restaurant." My great grandfather. So he went over to introduce himself because they went where other Basques were and he ended up marrying my grandma. So that's true. If you've been told that, you've been told the truth.

S: So you were born in this small town in Las Villas...

M: In that house.

S: That's a beautiful house. Wow. And then your parents worked in the tanning business.

M: My father. My father... of the children, there were two boys and one girl came from France and the other girl was born in Caibarien, my aunt.

S: So is your father a French citizen?

M: He remained a French citizen until just about the time he married my mother. Although actually he became a Cuban citizen because of the business. Because it was important at the time that at least one of the people who handled the business was a Cuban citizen and they sort of chose and said, "You. You have to become a Cuban citizen." So he did. But my father was very Cuban. He learned French again, when he was 13 or 14, and spoke it with a horrible Cuban accent.

S: What language was spoken in your home growing up?

M: Spanish but a good deal of French because my grandfather lived with us.

S: So when you arrived at Merici at the age of nine, do you speak a word of English?

M: Very little. Yes. Because I'd had English in primary school, in my first school in Caibarien.

S: Alright and that was in your hometown right?

M: Yes.

S: It's so interesting. So then you're just thrown into this world where...

M: Yes and I was so excited about that. The thing is my father had a great admiration for this country. He wanted his children to learn English. In fact, he wanted to send me straight over to Canada to Quebec so I would learn English and French. And my mother refused because I was nine years old. So they kind of compromised with Havana and Merici. So I went in '48 and my sister went in '52 and we both graduated from Merici.

S: Wow. That's incredible. Well what are some of these other beautiful things you've laid out for me?

M: Want to see? Well let me show you. This is the only yearbook that I have and it is the least of the least because this was ours, 1956. This was the new building. The final school building that the nuns built and it was being built when I first came to school. When I started, the school was in the area of Vedado. You've been to Havana?

S: Yeah.

M: Okay. Vedado. A very lovely neighborhood.

S: This is all English too.

M: Some of the... we were asked to write essays and some of them were chosen for the yearbook. So you see there the chosen ones. Lisette and Mary Lynn, some of us were chosen. Roxanna. From each of the departments. Some from economic, some from business, Sarita, from academic.

S: So business was comercio.

M: Yeah. Business for a time was when the nuns first started they just had the academic... First they just had the academic and a short two-year secretarial course. And that worked for a couple of years and then they added on subjects and made it into a fuller commercial course. But secretarial still worked and some girls came in and did the two years of secretarial and just left. But after, in 1956? '55. The nuns started... the commercial disappeared and the made it into like a commercial high school with other subjects.

S: Got it. For what purpose?

M: Because the commercial students were not happy and the parents also because there were not enough, you know, substance of another kind. It was just the business things and the girls complained that the academic had everything and they didn't have anything and they created this new high school. It was called General High School. My sister was a graduate of the first group of General High School.

S: So now when you graduate from general high school or the comercio program beforehand, what would you do afterwards? What sort of opportunities awaited somebody who had that degree?

M: Actually the real purpose of the nuns opening the school was, and I have something I wrote here. You can keep this.

S: Thanks so much.

M: Yes. You can keep this. I wrote this for the UM for the...

S: For the Cuban Heritage Collection.

M: Yes for the digitation project. And I have summarized some of the first part of the history here. And you can see, let me show you.

S: The other side. Yeah.

M: I take advantage of everything. Okay. You see, the American... there was an English academy first at the Colegio de las Ursulinas, which was the same order as the nuns who came over from Spain.

S: Did that remain a school?

M: Oh yes. Yes, yes, yes.

S: So that's Ursuline.

M: Colegio de las Ursulinas was the oldest, the first school. Don't you know that?

S: No I don't. Well because that one was, by the time you were there it was Cuban.

M: Absolutely. It was always Cuban.

S: But it was founded by English folks?

M: No. It was founded by Cuban nuns.

S: Yeah. I knew that.

M: Here's the story. You'll see. There were no schools at this time in Havana in the 18th Century for girls. No Catholic schools, no nuns, nothing. So they petitioned the Holy See for that kind of school. They wanted one. And then it happened, it was suggested that they could model that school after the Ursuline school that existed at that time in New Orleans because Louisiana at that time was still in Spanish possession. Then Louisiana falls under the rule of France.

S: For five minutes. Right. Yeah.

M: And the nuns, there were French nuns there, a number of nuns. But the superior was a Cuban.

S: Oh wow. That would make sense. Yeah of course.

M: And they got very nervous thinking that persecution would soon start.

S: Because of the Americans?

M: Because of the French revolution.

S: Oh.

M: Which had persecuted the nuns you see.

S: So this was the end of the 18th century.

M: No.

S: This was in the 19th century.

M: 19th century. This was the beginning of the 19th century. Actually the end of the 18th because it took some time and then the Cuban superior who was, this was her name.

S: Yeah. She was born in Cuba.

M: She was a Cuban. She asked permission from the King of Spain to found a school for girls in Havana. And she finally came over in 1803. There were 16 nuns who came over from New Orleans.

S: And were they all Cuban?

M: No. There were several Cubans. A number of them were French. And I have here somewhere...

S: Wow this is going to be... I'm definitely going to look at this. You don't have to go through it right this second.

M: I just wanted to show you this. And they were the ones who founded the first school. I have this here that I was just looking at.

S: You really are the historian.

M: Yes.

S: You created a little archive.

M: Oh yes. I've been working on this for 15 years. This was printed for the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Ursulines in Cuba, which was in 1954. And I remember perfectly because I took part in the celebration.

S: So your connection with the Ursulines...

M: Ursulinas.

S: ... Ursulinas was just that you were from the same order. How close were the two schools?

M: Yes. You see the Ursulinas opened up an English academy inside their school and the nuns came from New Orleans. There were like two nuns teaching English. And they were the ones who realized the interest that there was in Cuba for this kind of school.

S: So at the beginning of the 19th century this is kind of the foundation of this.

M: No, no. The nuns arrived in 1803 and this was, like we say in Cuba, tiempo de España. Tiempo España. It was before the Republic okay?

S: Of course. Of course.

M: And the governor who was Marquez de something or another, I remember his name but I forgot.

S: Sure no worries.

M: He helped them and there were a number of very distinguished people in Havana who helped them. And they ended up, let me show you where they ended up. This is the Journal of the Ursulines in Rome. The See in the order.

S: This is incredible. I'm flying to Rome in three days actually.

M: There you are. This was the school that the Ursulinas built in Havana.

S: So that was funded by Rome?

M: Not really. By the society there. I suppose. I can imagine that Rome contributed. But this was Cuban. This was Cuban. And this is in the center of Old Havana. On Ejido Street.

S: Is it still there?

M: Oh yes it's still there. And the plaza in front of it was known as the Plaza de las Ursulinas.

S: Wow.

M: That was its name. And they worked there for 100 years until it was... this was too decrepit to work in. And it was both their convent and their school. You will see that here. I just wanted to show you.

S: I'm really excited.

M: And then in like 1926 the Ursulinas bought some land on the other side of the Almendares in the new area of Miramar and they built this, which is the Colegio de las Ursulinas, which was taken over by the communist government like all the others.

S: Right.

M: It was here that there was the English academy that was working in the, I mean it must have been the early '40s. Just before the war.

S: Got it. But before the development of Merici?

M: That's where it began.

S: So that is the birthplace.

M: That is the birthplace of the school.

S: So those were American Ursuline nuns who came and then decided to...

M: Exactly. One of them, Mother Bernadette was among the four nuns who started Merici.

S: With Mother Thomas.

M: With Mother Thomas and then another two nuns.

S: Wow. Cool. Now I know everything. That's incredible.

M: They managed to interest their superiors in the possibility but the idea basically was to prepare girls so that they could come to college in the United States. That was the whole point.

S: Wow. And the comercio track was to prepare women to work for U.S. companies?

M: Yes, exactly. So that they could get a job as secretaries and still keep up their social life and that sort of thing because it was a two year course, and to the point I imagine. The basic skills and that sort of thing.

S: Did a lot of graduates go to University of Havana as well?

M: Some of them did but the University of Havana did not accept...

S: Because it was not bachillerato.

M: You had to study bachillerato. So there were many, many of the girls who went to Merici, left before graduation. Some of them went to Ursulinas for their bachillerato. Others went to other schools.

S: And then they could've gone to the University of Havana.

M: And then they went on to the University of Havana. I have one friend who was an architect who did that. And any number of them. Some of them did their bachillerato parallel on their own. Parallel to their academic.

S: How close were the two schools together, like geographically?

M: Geographically? No. Well first Merici started in Vedado. In '41 it was in a family home that was for rent and it was one of those very stately Spanish style family homes as you have seen in Havana. And one of the... well there are a number of coincidences that were not really coincidences because this was the mother of one of the girls who was in the English school at Ursulinas and she was an Ursulina graduate. So they wanted to keep on and they helped a lot because they were interested in having this project succeed, okay?

S: Of course. So were you planning to go to a university in the United States at any point?

M: I was. I was. In fact, I got the scholarship for it.

S: Where were you going to go?

M: The Ursuline College at New Rochelle in New York. I got the full scholarship.

S: And then you decided not to?

M: But then my parents didn't let me go.

S: Got it. Your mother didn't want you to go to Canada, didn't want you to go to New Rochelle.

M: And it sort of... Cuba was, in '56...

S: I know.

M: And I had a boyfriend.

S: Got it.

M: Who was also planning to come and work in New York.

S: Where did he go to school?

M: He went to school at the University of Havana. I later married him.

S: Where did he go to high school?

M: Our town Caibarien was not important enough to have instituto so the closest instituto was in the next town, which was called Remedios and actually there was a Catholic school for boys, the Marist Brothers, they had their school in Caibarien. But I think they only had as far as first year of bachillerato. Something like that. After that, the boys had to go on their own to Remedios every day on the bus and finish their bachillerato if they wanted to go to the university. So most of the boys in Caibarien did that.

S: Now what percentage, and you might not know the answer to this, of people who graduated from your high school ended up going to university?

M: A small percent.

S: A small percent. So most didn't?

M: You mean schools like Merici?

S: Yeah.

M: As I recall, very few. I had a teacher who was a graduate and who was a graduate of New Rochelle. She was a graduate of '46. Yes. And she when she came back she became a teacher at Merici. She was my history and sociology teacher and I loved her very much.

S: What was her name?

M: Teresita Batista.

S: Got it.

M: She died like a couple of years ago. I loved her very much.

S: Did most of the graduates from, and I guess teachers from Merici, did they come to the United States at some point? Are most of them here now?

M: Oh yes. Everybody's here. Basically. We have our alumni association here. And there are some students still in Cuba.

S: But the vast majority...

M: Oh absolutely. There are like two or three or four. Everyone else has left.

S: Why did you decide to stay so long?

M: I was married to a revolutionary.

S: Got it. He fought in the conflict?

M: No but he participated very actively. Yes. His older brother was... participated in the attack on Moncada with Castro and he was one of the founders of the movement.

S: Wow. Was he captured or no?

M: Oh yes and he was in prison. Yes. Of course.

S: But he wasn't killed.

M: He wasn't killed but he was injured. Very, very greatly injured and he suffered from... well the shock went in his back and injured his leg and he was, you might say, I don't know what you call walking like this. That's the way he walked. His right leg was, he couldn't quite lift it and it pained him all of his entire life.

S: But he wasn't... but he survived the, so he wasn't captured by the military? He got out?

M: No he was captured.

S: Oh I thought most of the people were tortured and...

M: He was very lucky.

S: How did that happen?

M: Oh you didn't tell me you were interested in that too.

S: I'm interested in all of it.

M: He was shot. When he entered the barracks he was riding in the same car as Castro. It was the car Castro was driving. They were together. And well, there was this mess up at the beginning because they didn't expect any soldiers to be there but there was a group of soldiers there and Gustavo had to shoot and one of the soldiers

was killed and he was a very good man. He was an incredible human being and he suffered from that his entire life until at the end, one of the times that he went to prison after that, he met another one of the people who had participated in the attack and he told him, "No, you did not kill that man. Somebody else killed him." He knew what had happened and Gustavo was very much relieved. He had not killed this man. But he was lucky because two of the people who were his comrades found him lying on the ground and they dragged him, they drove him in a car that was all broken down and I think the one of the tires had no air or something and Gustavo knew that a friend of the family who had lived in Caibarien for many years, he was a doctor. He was the director of an important clinic in Santiago. And he knew the area, the neighborhood, the reparto where they lived. So he told his friends, "Drive me to reparto whatever." And they did and they left him in front of the house. And Gustavo went and knocked on the door and there was a woman that opened the door and he said, "I am hurt and I need a doctor. Would you please call the..." Let me remember the name. Posada. Dr. Posada. The family of Dr. Posada who is the director of the clinic of the Colonia Espanola in Santiago. And they did and the doctor was not there but his son, Alejito, who knew Gustavo came over and picked him up and took him there. And later on, they came to pick him up. The army came to pick him up and Dr. Posada said, "Over my dead body." And they did not take him. He saved Gustavo's life. He would've died just like the others that they killed. So that's the story.

S: So when you were in school were you dating your boyfriend at that time?

M: Much later yes.

S: So when did you and your future husband, what year was that?

M: '55.

S: So at that point you had already developed anti-Batista politics?

M: Oh yeah. Yes. Everybody was anti-Batista.

S: That early though?

M: Oh yeah. Pretty early. But of course he influenced me, and of course I knew the family. I knew the family. I mean his cousin was in school with me and all... our family and theirs, my French grandparents and their grandparents, my husband's grandparents, lived next to each other.

S: Oh wow.

M: In a town like this, a very tiny town. So the families knew each other very well. But I had not really met Sebastian, which was his name.

S: What year did you get married?

M: '61.

S: '61.

M: After he came out of prison.

S: He was in prison not under...

M: Under Batista and then later on under Castro.

S: Wow.

M: Two more times.

S: What did he do in terms of revolutionary activity, your husband?

M: He was the, you see Gustavo was the head of the movement in the province of Las Villas. He was the one who recruited. He went from town to town recruiting and forming the cells for the revolution inside Cuba while the others, because of his injury you see the others left. Everyone else went to Mexico and there was a younger brother who also left to Mexico and he was in the Granma when they came in. And he was killed.

S: He was killed that day?

M: He was killed well four or five days after they landed.

S: Oh wow. So you were really in it.

M: Oh yeah. The entire family was.

S: So you're going to school in Havana. Your world is very different but very much shaped by the, it must've been interesting for you because you're in this... the revolution didn't feel, I know later there was this language of anti-Americanism.

M: Yes but there wasn't at the beginning. Not at all.

S: What do you think your husband's family, you, what did you hope for in the revolution at this point?

M: At the beginning everybody was convinced that there would be, all Cubans were hoping for honesty in government because there was so much corruption. We just wanted a constitutional government which Batista's was not. And we just wanted good, decent, honest government.

S: How was it talked about in the school?

M: It wasn't really talked about in the school.

S: Were the nuns aware of it?

M: Yes I suppose so. I suppose they were. Yeah. But there was one Spanish teacher who I loved very much and she was very anti-Batista. She was a patriot. Ms. Marcos.

S: It must've been interesting for you then afterwards having gone to this American school for so long and in '61 America becomes the enemy in a lot of very visceral ways.

M: Not really. This was slow. It did not happen overnight. You see, the people who left in '61 have no idea what it became. No, believe me. They had no idea what it was to live in that country. And I lived there for 24 years under the revolution okay? Let me show you my home.

S: It wasn't the same home?

M: What it became after my husband was in the human rights movement. He and my son were the only ones left. I left with my daughter in '83. At that time my son was in prison for one year but he had already been released and his father and Gustavo were in prison still.

S: As political prisoners?

M: Yes.

S: Oh wow. Was this graffitied on?

M: Yes.

S: Because your family was in prison.

M: This was after an act of the republico, which lasted about three days in which all kinds of things were thrown and all kinds of...

S: Were you in the house?

M: No, no. I was here. This was 1990. I was here in Miami.

S: Did your husband and your son ever come here?

M: Well my son is here. Yes of course. He came much later. This is so complicated. Do you want the whole story?

S: Whatever you're comfortable telling me. I know we're here to talk about Merici but...

M: I have no problem in telling you the whole story but do you really...

S: What's interesting to me about this story is that every other person I've talked to who is connected with an American school, was here by 1965. Every single person. So understanding your story adds texture to my project that I don't have right now. Do you understand what I'm saying?

M: Yes, absolutely. I understand. Yes. I understand what you're saying. You see I was the only one in the family who did not leave finally. No one in my family left at once

okay? The first one to leave was my brother. My father shipped him out when he was 16 and this was '63 because of the, what do you call it? The draft. Okay.

S: How did he get out? Was that Pedro Pan or no?

M: No, no, no. He left, I think he left from Mexico and then came to the United States. You see we were very lucky. My mother had like a foster sister who grew up with her in Caibarien and as a young girl she married another young boy from Caibarien and then they immigrated to the United States. They had lived here from before I was born okay? And they worked very hard and they built a life for themselves and by this time they had a home that they had bought in New York and they were living a very, not a wealthy life but both were very hard workers, her and her husband. Their son went to Fordham University and she remained very close to our family because she had grown up like a sister to my mother and my aunt. So when the family started to leave, they all went to her house so there came a point where like the entire space was full of Cubans. So that's where my brother went. Everybody went there. And my cousin because they started to leave too.

S: Did your brother go to an English speaking school as well?

M: He went to an English speaking school. It's very interesting you see, after the revolution at first they just made it difficult for you to go to school in the United States. But my father who wanted my brother to, he wanted him to study, he wanted my brother to become an industrial chemist because chemistry was so important in tanning you see and that was the family business. So he asked permission and he got permission to send my brother to New York.

S: So he was already there?

M: He had been there. He was there for a couple of years and then everything became so difficult and we were so hostile to the United States, he brought him back.

S: Got it. And then he sent him back in '69.

M: And then he sent him back.

S: Did you ever visit the United States before the revolution?

M: Once. Once. Because we went to, my parents took me to Europe in 1952 because they, actually they went to France to bring my grandfather over to see the family. My grandfather was, now we know that he had Alzheimer's. We didn't know at that time what it was but actually he'd had Alzheimer's. They brought abuelo over to France to see one of my aunts who lived there and had not returned to Cuba. She actually, she lived in Cuba for many years but she went to France when my grandmother died. My grandmother wanted to die in France so she went over and her daughters went with her. One of them returned to Cuba and the other one got married and stayed. And I couldn't go with them because they left in the middle of the school

year. So I went like a couple of months later and I went by plane from Havana to Madrid when there were no jet planes. It was 18 hours with three stops.

S: Wow. Where did you stop?

M: We stopped at Bermuda was the first one. I saw the first Bermuda shorts. They were, the British wore them. It was a British uniform with Bermuda shorts. It was Bermuda and then it was the Azores islands, the second stop, and the third was Lisbon where we had a wonderful lunch. It was this big and I remember the view of Lisbon from the air. White houses with red roofs. I can never forget that and my parents were in Madrid waiting for me and after that we went to the south of France... no the south of Spain. We went to Seville, Granada and so on. And then we returned to France and stayed with my aunt for the rest of the summer and then came back to Cuba. We left the... it was the August 12th of 1952 and we traveled to New York and that was my first view of New York. And I remember, I wanted to tell you this because I knew you would be interested in this. My mother, who was a very smart lady and she had just gone through the stress of meeting all my father's family in France. The little Cuban girl, you know? And when we went up on deck to watch the boat coming in, this was a privilege because so few people have the opportunity to make a trip like that in one of the French line ship. Ours was the Isle de France, first class.

S: Wow. The tanning industry was doing well.

M: Yeah. Oh yes. And that's why I could go to Merici. I was a boarding student for five years. I lived at the school.

S: Wow. Were you allowed to go out of the school?

M: Oh yes.

S: With a chaperone or no?

M: Well we often had weekends off and I had two aunts living in Havana so I always had somewhere to go to. And then on the off weekends you had to stay and then we used to go out with school chaperones. One of our teachers, Ms. Doyle. I have pictures of the American teachers.

S: So a lot of the stuff is in the brochure?

M: Let me finish the story because I'll forget.

S: I'm sorry.

M: What my mother told me, I'll never forget that, we were looking at the Statue of Liberty and she said, "Hija this is the greatest thing." She told me "Europe is all very well, it's all very ancient, it's all very refined, but this is the greatest thing in the world." That's what she told me when we were coming in on the boat. You know what we were bringing on the boat? It was the first Mercedes Benz to come to Cuba.

S: Wow. Your family?

M: My father brought it.

S: Wow.

M: My father had this in mind all the time. I know he did because my mother tells the story, she says, "We were walking down the sidewalk in Paris and your father says lets go in here and look at these cars." And my mother went and there was this beautiful car going round and round on this display thing and my mother said, "Oh it's beautiful." And my father said, "Do you like it?" And my mother said, "Yes." And my father said, "Do you think we should buy it?" And he did.

S: And then so did you take the boat from New York to Cuba?

M: No we came down US 1 in the Mercedes.

S: Wow. That's cool.

M: Because we were taking the car so we had to take the ferry. The ferry was called, como se llamaba? El... I forgot the name of the ferry.

S: I don't remember. Something with a star...

M: No. No, no, no. El Havana something. I forget. I'll remember. I have a very good memory.

S: I can tell.

M: We took the ferry to Cuba.

S: I can't believe you graduated in '56. You look so young.

M: Well thank you very much. I was 17 in '56. Here I am. I'll show you. Donde esta el yearbook? Aqui. You keep this if you like but I can send it to you where it will be easier to read.

S: Sure. And I don't want to take away...

M: No, no, no I have more.

S: Whatever you want to give me I'd love. These things are what I live off of as a historian. Well these things actually.

M: This is me.

S: You look exactly the same.

M: No I don't.

S: Wow.

M: All those Basque names. The nuns were incredible. I remember one of the nuns we were particularly close to because she took care of the boarding students, she used to call my sister and me, caszabonsitas. They were incredibly respectful of our culture. Incredibly respectful. You know our names our complicated. I was Maria Juana, they made an effort to say our names the way we would say them. And all those complications like Maria del Carmen, they accepted it so fully.

S: Did they rotate in and out or the women who were down here, were they pretty permanent?

M: No some of them stayed longer than others.

S: Got it. Were they at all integrated into the American society of Havana?

M: No. I don't think so. Oh, I have a mental note to tell you about the girls who were at Merici who were American.

S: Oh tell me.

M: Somebody told me that you were interested in that so I know most of them.

S: Do you?

M: There were the Losas. You've heard about them?

S: No.

M: Well Mr. Losa was what we would call today the CEO of the U.S. Rubber Company in Cuba.

S: You don't know the name of it?

M: The U.S. Rubber Company.

S: Okay. Yeah. Mr. Losa.

M: Losa. L-o-s-a. And they had this big plant near Havana in this place they called Loma de la Tierra. And the girls, I met them all. There were four girls. One of them is here. Teresita was beautiful. She's still living. Teresita Losa. She was the oldest. And then there was Sally Ann who was about my sister's age and then there were the two little ones, Valerie and Carol.

S: And the Wilkes. Piper.

M: Joanie, she was a classmate of mine.

S: I interviewed her as well.

M: I'm sure you did.

S: Yeah she was great.

M: Joanie is so Cuban.

S: Yeah.

M: There was the MacEvoy's. Has anyone told you about the MacEvoy's?

S: No. Who are they?

M: The MacEvoy's came and went. They were there some years, they weren't other years.

S: Were they Irish-American?

M: They were the daughters of one J.P. MacEvoy who was a correspondent for the Readers Digest. He was a writer. These were New York people. And the girls, Peggy was my age and Pat a year older.

S: Now they would send their kids like...

M: They were Catholic and whenever they were in Cuba for a time, the girls would go to Merici. Yes.

S: And they would choose Merici over a school like Ruston or Lafayette.

M: Of course. Ruston was a very good school. Very, very good school. Ruston was tremendous. My cousin went to Ruston.

S: What was your cousin's name?

M: Maria Elisa Rivastera.

S: So but it's interesting that within your family the idea of an American education was important.

M: Oh yes. We all went.

S: Was that, and it's very interesting your mother's reaction to seeing the Statue of Liberty and...

M: Well she had been to the states before because she and my father traveled occasionally.

S: Was that a common thread throughout Cuba or your family specifically?

M: No it was very common among a certain group of people.

S: So upper middle class?

M: Yeah. Upper middle class and in Havana especially but in the interior, as we used to say, the provinces. The time I was in boarding school at Merici, there came a point when there were 63 of us from all the provinces. People from Santiago de

Cuba, from Banes, from Holguin, from Camaguey, from most of the cities in Las Villas, from Matanzas, Cardenas. They sent the girls.

S: So it's interesting, somebody from Banes for instance...

M: From?

S: Banes right?

M: Banes.

S: Yeah, their family would've worked for the United Fruit Company right?

M: I have no idea. I just met the girl, one of my classmates was from Banes.

S: Right but you don't know what her family...

M: No.

S: And they were boarders?

M: Yes I was a boarder for five years.

S: Now among all of them there was this kind of appreciation maybe for the United States?

M: Oh absolutely.

S: And that's why they went to school there.

M: Absolutely. Most Cubans, educated Cubans, were very much aware of the need to teach their children English because they knew... My father taught himself English over the radio because he was, oh, he was very good with everything electrical and mechanical and all this sort of thing and he, I remember when I was a little girl one of the first things I learned in English was, because I would hear the radio when he was listening to the radio so I would hear the station call for NBC and CBS. "Papi, que cosa..." And he taught me to say "National Broadcasting Company" and "Colombia Broadcasting System."

S: Wow. What type of programming would you listen to with your father?

M: Baseball.

S: Did you watch the game last night?

M: Of course I was watching. And I was telling my daughter just to make sure she knew, do you know, have you ever been told that a Cuban invented the way for Cubans to be able to watch the World Series in Havana?

S: No.

M: You didn't know that?

S: No.

M: Well they did.

S: How did they do that?

M: A plane flew over the sea in front of Havana catching the signal and then there was this special retransmitting rig, whatever it was I cannot explain it to you but it was like one of these round things like a big dish.

S: Sure and it would project it?

M: And it would project the image and my father would watch the World Series from our living room.

S: Wow. What year did that start?

M: That was like '54?

S: Really. Wow. So it was basically intercepting the broadcast and projecting it. That's really...

M: Because Cubans were crazy about American baseball.

S: Sure.

M: Baseball in Cuba was absolutely the national sport.

S: Still is.

M: Still is but my father, he was really into that. He played on the local team. He was a catcher.

S: Would they play the Sugarcane or no?

M: No, no. Didn't get that far. It was very, very local.

S: Who did he like in the United States? What team in the United States would he root for?

M: I really don't know because I didn't hear him really expound about it.

S: It was just the game itself.

M: He knew... I'm totally familiar with the names of the teams.

S: Sure. I grew up in the Philly's games.

M: But I was familiar with all their names and of course in the off season, the American off season, that was the season in Cuba. It was the winter.

S: Sure. All the stars would come down.

M: And many of the American players went to play in Cuba. I used to go with my father to the games in Havana.

S: Yeah actually some of the people I've interviewed from Ruston... because people have explained my project to you a little bit?

M: Sort of.

S: So I'm basically studying the influence of American institutions in Cuba in the 1950s.

M: Look, the influence began way back when.

S: Of course. Of course. How do you think your life or what values, what things different did an American education give you that you wouldn't have gotten, like what value other than English do you think you would've gained?

M: Ah. English is so important.

S: Of course. Do you think there were other things though? Like when you got to the United States for instance?

M: When I got to the United States after that time that I was telling you about when we drove our car from New York down to Miami to take Florida. That was the name. The ferry was called Florida. We had to take the car so we had to take the ferry.

S: You drove all the way to Key West?

M: No. Port of Miami.

S: Were you the translator on that trip or did your father speak enough...

M: No my father spoke enough English to get around.

S: So do you think there were any, cause I spoke to a man named Ricardo Sanchez and he went to Ruston and he talked about how James Ruston imbued...

M: Mr. Ruston.

S: James Baker I'm sorry.

M: Ah Mr. Baker. I knew Mr. Baker. Yeah. Well Mr. Baker is here. You know what? Let me show you. No not here, here.

S: Oh the nuns wrote about him.

M: Let me find the place. This was January the 3rd, 1961 and the nun says, "Merici is situated between the Catholic University" that means Saint Thomas, Villanova, "and Ruston Academy. All of us are between Havana Military Academy, Ciudad Libertad,"

which was the government airfield. And then she says, "We decided to prepare for any shells that might fall accidentally or purposely. So spent the late afternoon fixing up the cellar of the auditorium as a bomb shelter. We arranged the table as an altar should it be necessary to celebrate mass there. Carted over chairs, food, bottled water, wine and hosts. Everyone is glad to hear the retiring bell. Scarcely an hour later the phone rang. It was Mr. Baker, head of Ruston Academy who had been appointed to contact us in any emergency. He told Reverend Mother that diplomatic relations had been broken with Cuba and we had 48 hours to leave the country."

S: Wow. Why would he be in that position?

M: Because it was the American community.

S: So in that way they were connected?

M: Well they became connected. They did know each other from what stories that I heard. Actually I think the mothers knew the founder of the school, Hyrum Ruston.

S: Well that would make sense if they were right next door. The Bakers lived there. And just really quick, Havana Military Academy, was that run by Americans or was that run by...

M: I have no idea. I think it may have but I really don't know.

S: Got it. I've got to look that up.

M: You were asking about the geography. We're going back and forth.

S: Sorry. We're both very tangential.

M: You'll find your way. Find the thread somewhere. Merici began in Vedado. For us the first school was on 19th Street and L Street, which was the very, very center of Vedado. And then the second school, which was a beautiful house, that's where I started, was on Linea Street and when I came in in '48, the school at the Biltmore was being constructed. It was under construction and we used to go on weekends, they'd take us over on the bus, to look at the new house. So we were very excited about it. And the next year the school moved to the Biltmore. The first year was 1949. The school year that started in 1949 was in the new school.

S: In the neighborhood of Biltmore?

M: Yes but it... Biltmore was way west. Way west.

S: Is that Country Club neighborhood?

M: Almost. Yeah. Country Club is here and Biltmore is a little bit more to the East. Reparto Biltmore is next to the Country Club. Rather far from the center. I remember when my grandmother used to take me back after a weekend, she would have to pay all of two pesos for a taxi and she would complain, "It's very expensive to take you to school." This was 1949, 1950.

S: Were you friends with, when you were a boarder at the school, the other boarders at the school were mostly Cubans as well?

M: They were all Cubans. Except for the MacEvoy's.

S: But they weren't boarders were they?

M: Oh yes. When they were in Cuba, they were boarders. Pat and Peggy.

S: Wow. Got it. Did you, so were you friends with the MacEvoy's?

M: Very good friends.

S: Would you hang out with them socially as well?

M: No. Remember, I was not a Havana girl. I went back to Caibarien for my social life. I was in school to learn.

S: I'm trying to understand, a lot of the people I've talked to, even at Ruston which was more American maybe...

M: Yes absolutely yes. They have no uniform.

S: People keep telling me that.

M: My cousin who for awhile we lived together with our grandmother and we used to sleep together and she would try on half her closet every night looking for the perfect clothes to wear to school the next day. She wouldn't let me sleep. "Wake up. Look at this. Do you think it matches?"

S: How was her relationship with the American community different than your relationship? Was she more integrated into it?

M: No she wasn't. Not really. No.

S: Did your parents have any friends that were Americans or no?

M: No. They didn't have friends.

S: They had some friends though?

M: For example, the tannery was set up with American machinery of course.

S: So how did they get that? They had business contacts?

M: No. I wasn't there. The whole thing was set up and working before my grandmother came over with the children from France. So it was a very old business okay? But it kept improving and I remember one very nice American gentleman who came over to teach my father to make patent leather.

S: Wow. So an American came from the United States?

M: Oh yes.

S: Not from Cuba?

M: No. An American from the United States came to teach him the technique of making patent leather because they said, the firm set up a new patent leather plant that my father...

S: What was the firm?

M: I know it's here... Cazabon Genin y Compania, Fabrica de Cultivos.

S: Just quickly. I'm going to make a transcript of this and then I'm going to send you the transcript so you have a copy. Because it's not like you have enough documents floating around. What else? You seem to have laid more things out for me.

M: Because I kept thinking about the things you might want to see.

S: I mean this is all incredible.

M: Really? You think it's incredible?

S: Yeah.

M: Well you should see the yearbooks.

S: The yearbooks are always cool.

M: I have some pictures to show you. This is the school cafeteria at Biltmore. The little ones at the school cafeteria. It was a beautiful school. This was the chapel.

S: And you would go every day?

M: Well if you were a boarder, you went to Mass every morning.

S: Do you still go to Mass every morning?

M: No I go on Saturdays actually.

S: Saturdays. Mixing it up. Avoiding the rush.

M: And this was the First Communion in the school chapel. All the little ones.

S: But this isn't you?

M: No, no, no this isn't me. I had my First Communion in Caibarien in my other school. That was my other school that I did that in.

S: Wow. When you were less than nine?

M: You read it. It says the year. 1946. I was seven.

S: I couldn't imagine doing that today and I'm 30.

M: Well I did it with an old nun who had a very bad temper.

S: Well that will get it done.

M: And it was my Mother's Day gift. You see? Para mi mama.

S: Yeah.

M: And then my name and it says Colegio del Apostolado, año 1948, Caibarien.

S: So cool. Yeah. Sorry.

M: The visit was out in the yard. We had these, we called them the ola marina, the sea wave. The girls loved it. And this was physical education. This was our teacher. This is a fourth grade album. Somebody's fourth grade album. This is 19... I'll write down the year, the graduation year. The class of '61. And this was the class of 1960.

S: That's the last class to finish?

M: That was the last class to actually graduate. My sister is '59. She graduated a year before. The last class graduated in 1960 and this is the sixth grade. You see, you should be interested in this. The nuns were very, as I told you, very careful and very respectful about our national allegiance. The American anthem was never played at Merici.

S: Really? So I heard there was a song that everybody sang, *God Bless America*.

M: We sang God Bless America. Friday was the day we would salute the flag.

S: The Cuban flag or the American flag?

M: Cuban flag of course and then we would sing the Cuban anthem and after that we would sing God Bless America.

S: Wow. How would you salute the flag? I see the physical hand but then what do you say?

M: Nothing. No you don't say... that is the salute.

S: Okay so it's not like I pledge allegiance...

M: No not like in English. No. We didn't say anything. And we still do that. They told you? In our annual reunions we sing *God Bless America* because everybody remembers those little things.

S: My grandfather used to always say that should be our national anthem.

M: Well the other is kind of difficult.

S: It's difficult and it doesn't really make sense and it's kind of about slavery. Right.

M: The music is beautiful.

S: The music is beautiful. Francis Scott Key knew what he was doing.

M: Orchestrated it is fine but when people start to sing it and I don't like those horrible solos that they do. One good thing, the Cuban anthem, I never heard anybody sing it solo. It's always groups singing.

S: That's interesting actually.

M: Okay let me see if I have anything else. The nuns were incredible.

S: Yeah if you have the ability to email me at least these two documents that would be great.

M: I will. Anything else you want.

S: Well I'm curious...

M: I have a million things.

S: If we could look through those things I could tell you what could be useful for me.

M: What you're interested in... well I'd have to write it down then. These are the boarders. You see this was the first year of the school. No trees. Everything was...

S: But there was a tennis court?

M: Oh yes of course. This is the auditorium and these, they were all boarders. And this was a pool. Now the pool was empty but we had our picture taken for the yearbook.

S: And you can see there is no water.

M: Of course this one didn't go into the yearbook. It went like this. This is me.

S: But your hair is wet?

M: Because we got wet. We threw water on one another.

S: That's funny.

M: See here. What I told you, girls from all... this is Pat MacEvoy. She's there. We sang together, Pat and I. She had the most incredible alto.

S: What did you sing?

M: Oh...

(Cuts off at 1:21:40)

S: I'm meeting with Chris Baker. They're doing... They do a cruise.

M: Mira, mira, mira. I have this to show you. And then I will show you what I have on the computer so you see. Okay. You see, this is from one of the yearbooks, so you see here is Father Seymour, he was one of the Augustinians from Saint Thomas Villanova. They always taught. They taught religion or philosophy. Things like that. And this is our Cuban...

S: Calixto Garcia.

M: Calixto Garcia who was one of our...

S: Was he related to...

M: Yes. Grandson.

S: Grandson of Calixto Garcia.

M: Yes. And this was Mr. Lista. Mr. Lista was the one who created the commercial department when the nuns decided to expand and make it something more seriously commercial. Well he was the one who prepared the... what do you call it? There is a word for it.

S: Curriculum.

M: Curriculum. And this is Father Laveya who taught us singing. He was a Basque. He was a Jesuit. And this is Madame who taught us French. And she taught us Spanish. She was the one who got angry when we said 'library.'

S: Well why would you say library?

M: No "biblioteca." Well we didn't speak English. I remember in the dining room, the boarders, we were supposed to speak English all the time because it was the whole point of us being there so there was always a nun supervising us in the dining room. So when we first sat down the nun would give us permission to speak. If there was no permission to speak, you didn't speak until you were told. So we started and of course we all started talking Spanish and then the nun would make the rounds and as she was getting closer, we would go, "Oh will you pass me the salt please?" Because of course we didn't speak English among one another. And she was the typing teacher, a very good typing teacher. And this was Ms. Maria Quintaro. She was an Ursuline student from the original Ursuline and she was Mother Thomas's first advisor when she first came.

S: So did they all live on campus?

M: No. Only Ms. Doyle and she was Irish to the bone and she was the best English teacher in the world.

S: Wow. And she taught algebra.

M: It almost killed me, the algebra. But the English, nobody taught me as much English as Ms. Patricia. And this was Mrs. Lista. She taught penmanship which is an old fashioned kind of skill. One time I got praised by Ms. Doyle. I think it was my third or fourth year in high school and I did a presentation of some kind and she praised me.

S: That was a big deal.

M: It was a big deal because she didn't praise very often. No. But she was our speech teacher. She taught speech. She was the one who made us learn like, "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears..." I would recite it in the shower and my grandmother would walk in and say, "Are you crazy?"

S: Wow. This is great.

M: Let me see. I have other things. This is, you see, I think you can take this. Llegaron a la... which was not right because there were more than nine. There were 16 or 17. This is an old newspaper of the arrival of the Ursulines.

S: What newspaper is this?

M: La Havana, 18 de junio, 1803.

S: Wow.

M: This is Mother Bernadette who was at the English Academy teaching English. And she was one of the founders of the school. And this is Mother Andre who was mistress of boarders. And this was Mother Virginia Marie who we all adored. Mother Dolores was in Cuba, I think, for almost 20 years. Mother Beatrice. She was British. And this was a lay sister. She didn't teach. She worked in the kitchen and the dining room. We loved her very much. Sister Maurine. Okay and there you have the same. Oh this is I think is a '53 yearbook. The different subjects. You see? This is Ms. Quintara. She taught Latin. She was my Latin teacher. This is all English. Here's Ms. Doyle. And she was an alumni, she was one of the alumni who became a teacher, Mrs. Gallinde, she taught my sister and she taught me. She was substituting for Mother Virginia but she was a good teacher. And this is my dear Ms. Batista, the one who went to New Rochelle.

S: No connection to any of the...

M: No, no, no. There is a very distinguished Havana family by the name of Batista and she belonged to...

S: And they're separate?

M: Batista came from a very poor...

S: But Ruben Batista, the first student who was killed in the...

M: Tampoco. He had nothing to do with... but he had the same name as his son, of Batista. Who, by the way, was in Ruston Academy.

S: I know that story very well.

M: My cousin had all the, she had all the yearbooks for Ruston and I would look through them and I knew everybody.

S: They're all online.

M: Yeah. So I heard.

S: Were the Lobos, they went to Merici or no?

M: Who?

S: The Lobos. Leonor, they would've been a little older.

M: No. I know the names of everybody. No.

S: Julio Lobo.

M: No see, I think a niece of his was at Merici but she didn't have the last name. Mira, she was also an alumni. It's basically the same thing over and over. Okay, you want to see this? Let me see if I have anything else that's interesting. This is a school that... Look what I found. This is the time the Trapp family singers went to Merici.

S: The Trapp family.

M: The Trapp family. This was an Austrian family who fled the Nazis and they came to the United States and they made a living singing, giving concerts. They became very, very famous and they went to Havana one day with a contract for concerts and they were staying at a rooming house across from the school on Linea. This is the school at Linea, which is a beautiful, beautiful building. A very traditional colonial style built like around the central courtyard. It was beautiful.

S: That looks incredible.

M: And I was looking for this for our celebration for the display and couldn't find it and I found it now. And Mother Thomas sent them a message telling them that we had a chapel and they could come to Mass if they wanted.

S: So were they Catholic?

M: Oh yes. Very devout. Very, very devout. And they came. I wasn't in the school yet. That was before I came. And so in gratitude, they gave us a concert. They gave a concert for the entire school.

S: Wow.

M: So I've given you bits and pieces.

S: Yeah this has been great. I'd love to look at some of the documents. Is that alright?

M: Yeah of course. Just come over and...

S: Your manual of prayer. Is this for the general order or is this...

M: Just for you to see. It was, you see, they would print it every once in awhile when they ran out.

S: The school gave it to you?

M: The school gave it to you. Yes.

S: Now, your services were mostly in Latin though?

M: Oh yes, of course, at the time yes. Except we had for example when the American school started, the American Ursulines I imagine started to have like Holy Hour services. We started Holy Hours too because they were connected. By the way, the school... I think I have it here.

S: What's a Holy Hour service?

M: It was just a devotional service. You had exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and you had singing and all that sort of thing.

S: Was it in English?

M: Everything was in English.

S: Okay but Mass was in Latin then.

M: Oh Mass was in Latin yes. But any other prayers, everything was in English. Everything else was in English. When I first came in, I remember the first thing I learned in English in religion class was the prayer to the Holy Spirit. Imagine. Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of thy faithful and then kindle in them the fire of thy love. Send forth thy spirit and thou shalt be created and thou shalt renew the faith of the earth. That. You had to learn it.

S: Yeah. They drilled it in.

M: Absolutely and I learned it fast. Okay here we are. Lets try this. Here you are. I have a part of it that's finished, that's the first ten years.

S: You wrote something about it?

M: Yeah the first ten years of the history. I have them.

S: Those are the yearbooks or you wrote a history of the school? Oh wow. I would love that. Are you publishing this?

M: Not yet. Let me see now. This is the beginning of the school. Yeah I explained that. This is the whole story of how the school was founded. "The urgent need for the creation of a Catholic girls school..."

S: So is this what you were...

M: Yes I made a summary of that.

S: Got it. Anything that you have that you're willing to share with me would be super helpful.

M: Well anything you would like. This is very interesting because this is checking from the school records that the nuns kept. "It was not members of the American colony but the Cuban people themselves who came to enroll their children..."

S: Wow. That's really important. This is so essential to my own...

M: "... in such great numbers that they were totally unprepared. Desks were available for sixty peoples. The others had classes on the staircases with the teachers standing at the front of the steps." They didn't know what to do. They were so surprised the nuns. They didn't expect Cuba to be like that. They came expecting something absolutely different and when they saw, they were really impressed because these were people of refinement, people of culture, and they didn't expect Cuba to be like that. They expected it to become more like missionaries.

S: Yeah so these documents would be very helpful for me if...

M: Well all of that is contained in... yes all that is there. And the description of the uniform and everything. Yes. The nuns were, they became a cause of scandal among the other Spanish schools you see because they were so advanced for the time. Merici was the only school where the girls didn't wear stockings up to their knees. Okay? And long sleeves. We had like, it was like a camp shirt with short sleeves and an open collar. And when they built the school at the Biltmore they had a swimming pool and the girls would wear bathing suits.

S: Right. How scandalous.

M: Can you imagine that? Okay. And the description, the academic description, how it worked and then this was the staff at the beginning, all that sort of thing. There is one chapter for each of the school years and I don't know which parts you would like to have. This is the introduction, the historical background, in that summary that I'm going to send you which is separate it's on my other computer. I don't have it here.

S: That's fine.

M: But if you would like, maybe you would like '49, '50. That is the year the school was moved to Biltmore and there is a very exact description of the school that I prepared for my memory because I lived there for years so I know exactly what it

looked like. Tengo abrirlo con... I have to open it with Word. I have to open it with word.

S: Not the one that is a Word document? Cause you're opening something that doesn't look like a Word document.

M: But on this computer it is. This is an old computer. I have to upload the new program on it. I haven't had time to do it. There you are.

S: Oh wow.

M: You see?

S: Yeah. That would be great and the summary would be great. Anything you're willing to share with me would be fantastic.

M: Well this is good. I could you send you, if you like, the description of the Linea building and how it was arranged and so on, and the part that has the description. You see? I know the size of the building. It's somewhere in the materials. The auditorium, everything else. I think I made a good description of it.

S: Wonderful. I'm very excited about this.

M: I'll look through and send you two or three of these so you can expand or whatever.

S: Are there other documents, something like this. Do you have access to that?

M: Oh yes. I do. Let me see. This is not the computer I usually work with. I work with my laptop in my room but this is where I keep things okay? Let me see. Donde tengo esto? Merici. No. Not here. I have those things on the other computer.

S: What I can do is I can send you an email and I could just write this down now, listing the documents... so far the things that you've shown me, the summary and this, these will be very useful to me.

M: And I will send them. I'm a person of my word.

S: I'm sure. You seem very organized and have it all together. Alright this is from earlier today.

M: There is one thing that I wanted to talk to you about that disturbs me a great deal right now in this country and it is the way that the... the use of the word Hispanic to designate certain groups of people. They use the word Hispanic as if Hispanic were a race. Hispanic is a culture. It's a language okay? The Spaniards are Hispanic for god's sake. And so are we, the descendents of the Spanish. We are all Hispanic. The Hispanic world is composed of all the races. There are Black Hispanics. You should meet some of the Chinese Hispanics that I know. Cuban Chinese are Hispanic. My father was born in France but he became Hispanic. And it makes me very angry to... because it's like classifying people on certain outward qualities that are convenient,

politically convenient, politically correct but that are not true. Are you aware of that?

S: It's an interesting conversation in Latin American history actually, the terms that we use are very important right? So the term American for instance.

M: Hispanic is like American.

S: Right. It's problematic because it's describing two sets of continents and here we are taking ownership of it. But Hispanic and Latino, those are conversations we have as well.

M: Hispanic is the important thing because it is the language and the culture of Spain throughout the world. There are Hispanic communities in the Philippines. Just because the Spanish groups that are most significant in the United States happen to look like this or like that, that doesn't make them Hispanic. What makes them Hispanic is their language. If they speak the Spanish language as their native language or if it is the language of their culture. Because we Cubans get very angry, very angry because we are Hispanic for god's sake and very proudly so. So I just thought I'd mention that.

S: Did I use the term incorrectly?

M: No, no, no. I was thinking I would tell him that and he talks to a lot of people and I'm going to sew that seed into his head.

S: I would be shocked. I know exactly the conversation you're having because it is a conversation that we have in Latin American studies generally. I would be shocked if 75 percent of my friends who are American knew the difference between Hispanic as an ethnicity, as a culture, I don't think they could identify it. I think it's something that's very under appreciated, those differences.

M: Because Spain colonized any number of races and they all became Hispanic. But they themselves did not become less Hispanic because of it. Okay?

S: Totally. I'm with you. I can't thank you enough.