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Ana M. Varela-Lago: This is an interview with Mr. Frank González. Frank, I would like to start by talking a little bit about your family. Could you tell me, why did they come to Tampa, what did they do here?

Frank A. González: My daddy, my father came from Key West because his family had moved to Key West, from Key West, after the Spanish, during the Spanish-American War; my father—

AVL: What was your father's name?

FG: Frank Armando González. My grandfather was a major, *comandante*, I'd say translated to English, Spanish, armed forces, in Cuba. My father came to Key West from Cuba at the age of 40 days. He stayed in Key West until he was a young man, then he went into the cigar factory and he went to St. Augustine and worked there with the firm of Garcia y Vega, which is known in Tampa as Garcia y Vega. He was one of the few that moved in the late 1800s to Tampa from—with the firm Garcia y Vega, and they settled in West Tampa. My mother came from Cuba at the age of ten or twelve years old.

AVL: What was her name?

FG: Maria Teresa González de Baez, and she never had a desire to go back to Cuba or visit Cuba, as a matter—because we try to take her at different times and she said, “No.” My father, well, he worked in the cigar industry until he had an accident, one Christmas Eve, with a space heater that consumed gasoline, had just come into the market and one of them not exploded but the flame engulfed him and burned him up, his arm and his back and so he decided—he figured after many months, over six months that he was in the hospital, he opened up a coffee mill, and he had a coffee mill for four or five years,

and then he opened up a restaurant which we had until about 1938 or '39. I forgot the dates.

AVL: What was the name of the restaurant, do you remember?

FG: La Diana.

AVL: Where was it located?

FG: It was on 11th Avenue and 15th Street. It was till I think it was '38, about '38 he decided to close and he went back to the cigar factory.

AVL: What did he do in the cigar factory?

FG: He was a roller. And he always made well in the cigar factory.

AVL: So when did he go back to the cigar factory, was it in '38?

FG: '38 or 39, yes. My brother had just graduated from Jesuit High School and, then he went back into the factory.

AVL: How about your mother, did she work?

FG: Yes, she worked in the cigar factory.

AVL: What did she do there, in the cigar factory?

FG: She was a roller, too.

AVL: A roller too. And they both worked in Garcia y Vega?

FG: Well, my mother used to work at Martinez Ybor. But then that factory closed, you know, and then she gave up cigars and then she went to work with my dad at Garcia y Vega. They worked there many years until I went into the service and my brother went into the service, my mother said, "Well, I was working forward to I don't need to go to work anymore."

AVL: So they had just two children, you and your brother?

FG: No, we had—there were three brothers and one sister.

AVL: Tell me a little bit your memories of your childhood growing up in West Tampa.

FG: No, not in West Tampa, in Ybor City.

AVL: Ybor City, sorry. What are some of the memories that come to mind when you

think about your childhood?

FG: Well, to me it was—we had a—I'd say a happy childhood, because my mother gave us and my dad gave us everything, I mean within their means. They sheltered us, and we had a good education, they saw to it that we stayed with the right crowds at all times. They were after us all the time. And, what else, I mean, I just a—I never could say anything wrong, you know, my mother was always helping the neighborhood even with the restaurant, when we had the restaurant we went to school and it was during, the height of the Depression and I used to bring every day two or three, poor kids. I used to tell her, "Mom, they forgot their lunch." They never had any lunch.

AVL: What do you remember of the Depression in Tampa?

FG: The Depression was—we had—my dad had the restaurant and he made a contract with—I don't know whether the City or the state, anyway, that he would give the lunch to the—you know, serve lunch to the kids, the school kids. And he served, I don't know, it was two or three years or—for x amount of money, you know, they gave him—he would give them either a hot plate with milk and a fruit or they could get a quick lunch like a hamburger and a coke. Whatever, they had to be, what was required by the state.

I know we, my folks, helped a hell of a lot of people, finding them places to stay, helping pay for their rent. When my dad had the coffee mill he had places that he used to take coffee, deliver coffee, and then he would go out and, before we went to that house, that certain house, we would buy a quart of milk and a loaf of bread and then take it to the—because it was, probably this was the only—the only dinner or food that they had in a couple days. In those days, it wasn't like now that you can go get food stamps, you didn't get—there were soup kitchens all over the place, it was, I mean, for a small town, for a small city, it was really, really bad.

AVL: Was the cigar industry particularly hard hit?

FG: Oh! it was hit hard, yes. They closed a heck of a lot of factories, and they—

AVL: So what did people do when they closed down the factories, I mean how did they manage, could they go to work other places?

FG: Work out on odd jobs or work—some of them they didn't do a thing but just stand around. Okay, they used to come to the restaurant there and they'd just hang around, just trying to, you know, work here and there. And then when WPA came in—I forgot when—I don't know, I think it was when the WPA—that was a—what was it, Worker Progressive Associa—

AVL: Administration?

FG: Yes, administration

AVL: Work Progress Administration?

FG: Yes. That's when the NRA came in too, I forget what year it was, '36—that's when the people started to —and then when the war came in, what was it '39, I think it was '39 that the shipyard opened and it started picking up. And that was the end of—we thought that, you know, as soon as they opened the shipyard and then they opened up the—they start working on the, I forgot what year they opened up the MacDill and Drew Field, I think that it was '39 that they started, and people were working all over the place.

AVL: Tell me about the clubs, did your family belong to the clubs?

FG: We belonged to the Centro Español and the Cuban Club.

AVL: Not to the Centro Asturiano?

FG: Oh, my wife belonged to the Centro Asturiano.

AVL: How did one choose where to belong, either the Centro Español or Centro Asturiano? Were there different people going to the different clubs?

FG: No, no, you hear these people that say, "*Los gallegos*, they belong," that's a lot of baloney, that's just a—the reason that this club was formed because it broke away from the other club and because the other club did not want a hospitalization there, but we had the HMO which this club was the first one that started. But there was —the reason for the existence of this club, before that they had a smaller club like *Fraternidad*, they had *El Porvenir*, which was founded in Port Tampa in the late 1800s. But they were only, no help but just—they would give you like a supplement.

AVL: Was there any rivalry between the Centro Español and the Centro Asturiano?

FG: In a way there was a rivalry, but not, because they all worked together, they would work together in a—all the clubs worked together in putting up the different kinds of facilities. But there was always a—the idea "we are better than you," but when—come one of the holidays would come—heck, the Centro Asturiano used to take care of *L'Unione Italiana* members, you know, in the hospital and—so there was no real rivalry per se as I said, you know, they can't get along with each other, no. I remember when I was president here [the Centro Asturiano], we all worked together on different projects.

AVL: Okay, tell me a little bit about the war, the Spanish Civil War. What are the memories that come to your mind when you think about that war?

FG: What I knew about the Spanish Civil War was what I saw in the news, and what I heard from the people. Now, at that time, you have to remember that there was no TV, where you could get them instantly, you got very little from the news from the—in the—like the past news, and the—that they used to show, you know, and what you have from the—what you have in the newspaper, and then a lot of the Latin newspapers that you got

were one way, just one side, they only gave you a—

AVL: What side was that that they gave you?

FG: Well, over here in Tampa, *La Gaceta* went with, *con los leales*. So, I saw a lot of neighbors, that had been neighbors for ages, you know, fight among each other because of the—because one guy they didn't respect, you know, they figured that you didn't donate, you were a fascist all over. They didn't care whether— When there's a [?] but, if you didn't donate they have a clerk that—

I'll give you the story of Manuel Melendi. He was a district manager for the *Tampa Daily Times*. This group, they used to collect funds, asked him for a donation and he said that he would not give a monetary donation to—for brother to fight against a brother, but that he would send food or any other help that they need, but no money, so not only did they declare him a fascist they declared the *Tampa Daily Times* a fascist newspaper and they boycotted in West Tampa, well in a lot of communities, they boycotted the *Times*. Mr. Melendi went to the editor or the publisher, if I recall his name was Smitty, Smith, anyway, he was the editor and he explained it to him what had happened and he—the publisher said, "Well you go ahead and give the delivery boys what they were making. If they collect X amount of money and it's not up to par to what they were collecting you give it to them so they have—until this is over."

And finally, it was, but all the delivery boys were paid even though they had lost a heck of a lot of customers.

AVL: I see. You mentioned before that *La Gaceta* was in favor of the Republic, how about the other newspapers?

FG: Well, I don't recall of it, because Manteiga, he was always — always making speeches and—I'll bring it to the time when I was president here in this one, now I'm talking about the late '60s or the '70s, early '70s and I invited—now this is at the time when the United States government had made peace with Japan, with Germany. We couldn't make peace with the Spanish government, so I invited the consul out of Miami to come here to one of our facilities, so this guy that I pointed to you in the picture, he went to the—to *La Gaceta* and explained to him that I had invited this man not knowing that I—the Centro had a—what do you call it, an agreement, you know, not to support the—not to support the Spanish government in whatever endeavor that they had. But—and they wrote, heck, a full page which I'm going to bring it to you to see it, I showed it to Willie not long ago.

Now the same man, when his son became a Board of Director here in the Centro, in a hell of a lot of turmoil, they brought from Spain the ambassador and all. They sent a picture of the king of Spain—

AVL: So that was after Franco had died?

FG: Yes, no, no, no. That's when Felipe was—had been—

AVL: Right, so that's after Franco's death, because there is the monarchy now, because when Franco was alive there wasn't a king.

FG: No, that's right, that's right, yes, yes, yes. I forget, anyway, we had a general membership meeting and I went to this fellow, when we were standing in the hall, the grand hall, and I said, I asked him—I says—I called him aside and I showed him the picture, and I say, "Who is that man, whose picture is that, I don't recognize him," he say, "Oh, he's the king of Spain." Say, "Oh, he's the king of Spain." "What's his name?" I said, he told me, king—

AVL: Juan Carlos.

FG: Juan Carlos, so I say, "Oh! that's the one that you were so—you were against and you were raising all kind of hell. Now because your son is on the Board of Directors, he's on the—" I said, "How about all those agreements that they had with the Spanish government, they don't exist anymore?"

AVL: So the Centro Asturiano actually had some kind of agreement or decision not to be in touch with any Franco representatives?

FG: Right! they made—

AVL: Was that in the minutes and everything, I mean was that a decision agreed upon by the Board of Directors—?

FG: Yes, *si no, pero de esto*—I don't know if you can find the minutes, *pero* there were, all the clubs, you know, they say war and right away it is the same thing like they figured, you know, the families over there and the—and they figured that what they were doing was right. And then they have—you have—a good speaker or these people are called—they call them agitators, you can call them the leaders of the pack and they [?] and they go and they, you know, [?] nobody would say—I used to play in the American Leagues when I was a kid, the American Leagues in the Post in Ybor City and when I was going to Catholic school they started, they started, you know, hell, they started calling me a fascist, I didn't even know the meaning of the word.

AVL: Because you were going to Catholic school?

FG: Yes. So I told them, I says, "Let me tell you something. I wasn't born in another world," I says, "I was born here, I'm raised here, all my family is, you know, we've been here for quite awhile and it—you know, if it comes to that, I says, I can prove it to you how American I am by busting your behind, so—"

AVL: So for people who were really religious or Catholic in Ybor City at that point, was that a hard period for them?

FG: No, you have to, it was hard for them, *pero*, the church kept going, kept growing. They had—these people—had control over the cigar factories.

AVL: The Frente Popular you are referring to?

FG: *Bueno*, a lot of them—

AVL: The leaders of the—

FG: Yes, and they would—control it the way I tell you that they would spread the word around the factory, he's a fascist, he's this or he's that, you know, and—so people would— [?] and just—not that they, wouldn't, you know, give him a job or anything but they were—it was terrible the way they were. Well, I mean as far as that—and then when it was all over the same people who were blaming the church and—I saw it in the '40s already, they going back to the schools and back to the—getting married in the church and going—and you see it today, so—and there's just a few that profited from it.

AVL: How about your family, did your family have family in Spain at that point, relatives?

FG: No, no, not that I—maybe we had—

AVL: But you weren't in contact with them in any way.

FG: No, because when they left they left for—some of them went to Venezuela and other, you know, the rest came here and then went to New York, they've just—

AVL: So what did they think about the war, you parents for instance, what did they think about the situation in Spain?

FG: Well, my dad always told me, "You are an American first, no matter what the hell they tell you, you are an American first."

AVL: How about themselves, I mean, how did they—?

FG: Well, they, that's the way, that's the way it was. Like I told you, my mother never went back to —she never visited Cuba again and my fath—well, my father died here, just —everyone, all of them died here.

AVL: So they weren't interested in the situation in Spain at all?

FG: Well—my mother, like any mother, she never liked the war, and we knew a lot of the guys that were from Ybor City who went to—

AVL: Oh, you did?

FG: —you know, to fight in the war but—but then in '35 or '36, I'd say by '39 they were started—they started here—like they had—what do you call it—around '39 or '40 they started—I forgot when the draft started, that they started calling some of the boys, you know, to —and most of the guys that I knew were going to the CC Camp and my mother didn't like the CC Camp because you wore an Army uniform.

See, during the Depression the Army—not the Army—well it was under Army control but they would send, CC Camp was a conservation — Civilian Conservation Corp. that they went out and built bridges or built on the national forest or whatever, and they used to give young people so they could have some money to send back to the family. My mother didn't—never wanted my brother to go over there because she saw the uniform. I wanted to go one year, I wanted to go—while in high school, I wanted to go to —the Army had an —like a reserve officer training corps, but it's not a—it's a summer camp and you go there like a military. You spend there maybe two or three weeks a month and you stay there, under them—in a military [?].

Then, I went into the Service in '40? Hell, I forgot what the hell year, '42, December '42, I went into the service, and I went to the service with my buddy and my mother didn't want me to hang around with him. He does his work too damned fast. He was faster than I was. I spent three years in the service and—out in Las Marianas, in Guam, at one time they were Spanish possessions and there were still some Spanish priests that I—that were there, Spanish priests and nuns.

AVL: You mentioned before that your family knew many of the people who went to Spain to fight as volunteers. Who were those people, do you remember their names or their families or—how they left, or—?

FG: Well, one of them was a cigar maker, I remember him, he was a cigar maker, and *le llamaban El Miliciano*.

AVL: Oh, Frank Vazquez. Was that his name?

FG: No, *uno que le cortaron una oreja*.

AVL: I think that was his name.

FG: He used to hang around the—I could see, you know, the way he used to walk and—and the way he was—he got shot up pretty bad over there. Then there was two others but I don't remember their names. The coffee shop that was right there by the little restaurant was right there by La Cirila, the cigar factory where, owned by Jose Arango, and there was —they had a nickname, because all the cigar factories had the nickname, like La Cucaracha, that was the name of the—but outside of that, I mean, it was more the feelings, you know, between—I remember a friend of mine that—well, he was a member, he served with me on the Board of Directors, that his sister and his mother were going to

church and they—when they used to pass by this restaurant they used to, you know, *ahi van las Fascistas*, and he told his brother, Al, and he followed them, and the next time they had it out but it was just—what do you call it—as far as what was going on over there it was just what we read in the paper.

AVL: How about the American papers, the *Tribune* and the *Times*, were they also one sided or—?

FG: No, no, no.

AVL: Do you think they were fair in their reporting, or—?

FG: Well, I don't remember, I mean, it's—you know—what I remember I think they was—we got both ends of the—

AVL: Do you remember any of the Republican speakers who came to talk here?

FG: No, no, they had some here, they had some at the Centro Obrero, but ahh—.

AVL: So, your family didn't really get involved with the activities—?

FG: No, no. My mother donated, we donated food, and we donated—you know— they used to have the different donations and then they had—at one time they were picking up—bandages, all kinds of bandages and for medical, but—as far as she going out and— No, she wouldn't do that.

AVL: So people from the Frente Popular would come to your house, they would get things? Now, how about the people who supported General Franco, were they organized in any way to get things for the other side, or—?

FG: Well, that I don't remember any group like that.

AVL: Or throughout, you know, through the Catholic Church, were there any groups—?

FG: No, I don't remember, in school I don't remember that they donated— Hell! there was nothing to be donated in Ybor City prior, because people were down and out. You're talking about the height of the Depression—

AVL: But the people who would say, well, I don't want to send money, you know, to this side but I'll send money to the other side, I mean, how did they manage to do that?

FG: Oh, I don't know.

AVL: You know, there weren't enough people kind of to put this thing together?

FG: No, not that I ever know.

AVL: And how about the other communities here in Tampa, the Italians and the Cubans, what do you remember of them, were they—?

FG: I can't—

AVL: Were there conflicts between the Spaniards and the others regarding the war in Spain, or—?

FG: No, no. I don't remember any of that because, hell, I was—I used to go to all the *bueno, los picnics que tenian los italianos*, that they had picnics and they had facilities, we used to go over there, I don't remember—

AVL: But the fact, for instance, that—

FG: Heck, everybody lived together! How the heck can you have—they were your neighbors—they all played on the same ball team, they went to the same school, they went to the—it's not that they lived in a commune or a group by themselves or—no, just a—

AVL: So there were good relations?

FG: Yes, yes! there've always been good relations here. You might find a couple of hot-heads all the time in any group that you look, but, no. I always consider the source and just—What else we got?

AVL: Let me see. Tell me, I mean, why—now—looking back to those years, why do you think that people in Tampa reacted so much in support of the Republic, when you think about that, why did they do that so overwhelmingly?

FG: Well, I can't tell you that. First of all, a heck of a lot of the war was fought in the Asturian section so— that's, I mean, that's—and maybe that they wanted— when they choked down the Republic that's when they—when they were fighting for, but—why, I don't know.

AVL: Do you think the fact that people had families there still might have influenced that? What do you think about the war now, again in hindsight?

FG: The war in Spain?

AVL: Um-hm, what are your opinions about that? Sixty years?

FG: Yes, after the facts, moving like a quarterback. Oh, I just, it's just like any war, it don't accomplish a damn thing! Like when we went to—we went to the—I went into the service, from day one, they were showing us pictures of—and statues of Japanese and German and said, this is your enemy, this is where you've got to hit—you know, vital

points, you know—You're killing for them and they have that on you 24 hours a day, you know, kill or be killed, kill or be killed. No sooner is the war over they say this is your friend, we have to stop the—And just as we would have done, they get the propaganda going, going, going and—and in Spain—and then they had to, they had to k—which they didn't do, from what I have read they didn't do much. They just had one group and people got tired of it and tried to get them out. So, they brought them back, but they didn't bring them back with the same power that they had.

AVL: When Franco died, you mentioned that earlier, was there any reaction here in Tampa when Franco died?

FG: No, that's, I mean, I don't recall anybody—because the same people that were fighting, now that they see Spain with all the openness and all of that, they say, what we need in Spain is another Franco so you, you put that in your pipe and smoke it now.

AVL: So, you think later on they came to see Franco as not such a bad thing?

FG: Like they say, I used to go to Spain and I used to walk the street, and I used to do this and that, and now I go to Spain and it's worse than here.

AVL: Do you have any opinion on him, do you think, you know, in the 40 years he was in power he was good or he was bad—?

FG: Well, I'll tell you what, he had a hell of a time, from what I have read, he had a hell of a time trying to keep the country together for the simple reason that all the monies had been sent to Russia and Mexico, and Spain was bankrupt. So, what little he had he struggled and they—I know they relied on him, but he pull it through. And now the same people that didn't want him over there say, that's what we need, we need a stronger hand.

AVL: Okay, Frank, before we stop the interview, I would like to ask you, is there anything else you would like to add or some aspect that we haven't discussed that you think should be included in the tape, anything we might have forgotten to mention? Any final thoughts that you would like to—?

FG: Well, I know now, but the people who you talked to are dead now, but there were a lot of people that profited, like all wars, that profited from the Spanish Civil War here in Tampa.

AVL: In what ways, what did they do?

FG: Well, monetary—and the groups like I tell you—I said before this guy Guillermo Alvarez, he had a cabinet shop—

AVL: A what shop?

FG: Cabinet. And—this guy, he used to go to collect every week, he used to go to collect

from the cigar factory and give them—he had his receipts booklet and he would give a receipt to what they donated, so, every Friday, he would, after work, this guy would come in, after he made his collection, would come into this shop, and stay there, sometimes 45 minutes or an hour, in the restroom, so finally Guillermo said, that guy must be sick or something, I wonder, let me go see what—He said, "I'm going to check one day, this is going on for months." So, he looks over the top and what this guy was doing, he was rewriting all the receipts.

AVL: Why is that?

FG: And, you know, putting in less, and more in his pocket, so he went to the Centro Obrero where they used to have the meetings, you know the general membership meeting there, and he asked that his name was Guillermo Alvarez and he wanted to know—he asked them if they kept records of all the donors and they said, yes, we have all the receipts and we keep everything in order. He says, "All right, my name is so and so, I'm at such and such an address and I want, to know how much I have given to date." And he said, they asked him, why? he says "Because I got my receipts here and I want to know how much I have given because—" they squashed that.

AVL: Was that very common, you think, a lot of people doing that?

FG: Yes, yes. And there was—like I told you in this—that came out in the *Tribune* in the late '40s or early '50s, this story where the collections that they were making here, how much was cut off here in Tampa, how much was in Philadelphia and how much in New York that they were—and if you checked in the files you might be able to get that story.

AVL: Anything else you would like to add?

FG: What's that?

AVL: Anything else you would like to add before we conclude the interview, any other—?

FG: No, no.

AVL: Anything else that comes to mind?

FG: The only thing that comes to mind is that—that baby dresses and all that that were made by this woman to donate it so they could raffle it off or sell it and raise some money, because she didn't have any money and she made it—and this woman, well known woman, I don't want to mention her name, she took it and—with the idea that they were going to raise money with it. Well, when her daughter or her niece gave birth that was there and the woman who made it saw it. Oh, they were—I could tell you more stories but I don't wanna—because the people who told me the stories were—you know, one of them is still alive, but—that's the name I gave you, you can—

AVL: Any more stories regarding—?

FG: No, offhand, I don't remember any stories. I mean, I don't recall anything, all I recall is just the division that existed, members against members, I mean, neighbors against neighbors. I don't know I guess all the wars are like that, it happens with all the wars.

AVL: Were there conflicts also within the clubs maybe, between members who supported one side, or the other?

FG: No. *Bueno*, if there was a conflict they wouldn't say because they would be kicked out of the club, you know, just as—and yet—some of the clubs wouldn't allow politics or religious, you know, to be discussed on it, or for the simple reasons that they didn't want—

AVL: Anything else, Frank?

FG: No, that's it.

AVL: Okay, this concludes the interview with Mr. Frank González. Thank you very much for participating in this project, Frank.

End of interview