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Miguel Rodriguez: My name is Miguel Luciano Rodriguez, and the date is November 11, 2007, and I am here with my grandfather Luciano Rodriguez, who I refer to as Pop. And Pop, I have your permission to record today? You know that we're recording?

Luciano Rodriguez: Yes, we do.

MR: All right. So let's just start with a little bit of biographical information, like where and when you were born?

LR: I was born in Ybor City, September 21, 1938.

MR: Where at?

LR: I was born in Fifteenth Avenue and Sarah Street in Ybor City, in a small bungalow.

MR: So you—

LR: I don't remember much about that house 'cause I was born there, and then we moved down Sarah Street a few blocks to Twenty-Sixth Street and Sarah, to another bungalow house, a little bit bigger. And it was like three bedrooms, one bath, and the old type tub,

claw feet tubs. I can just picture it right now and everything. My childhood there was great.

MR: Like, what was it—tell me everyday—what did you did do as a child in Ybor City?

LR: I can remember back when I was about five years old. I still wasn't going to school because I had asthma when I was one year old and it was pretty bad, and my mother had to rush me to the hospital probably once a week, at least. I'd have an asthma attack but I couldn't breathe, it was real bad. And we had started getting medicine. We went to this clinic that was called A.A. Gonzalez in Ybor City. And we used to get our medicine from Cuba. I'll never forget it, because it was a blue pill; it was colored blue back then. And I was—I can remember when I was about five or six, getting those pills. And my sisters—I had three sisters and they were all older than I was. I was the baby of the family and they had me spoiled rotten. They all wanted to dress me up in pink clothes, it was so bad, but I wouldn't let them.

But during that time—my dad was real mechanical, and he was a bus driver—I'm sorry, it was a streetcar motorman. And during the time he was a streetcar motorman he used to take me to work with him, and they had wood benches in streetcars and I can remember being right behind him in a wood bench sleeping because he'd be driving the route, and his route was all the way to Port Tampa, which was way southwest of Tampa, close to MacDill Air Force Base. And then we'd come back and go into the barn, and then he'd take me back—we'd go back home in the evening, and we just get home and mostly—I can remember after that, when I was about seven or eight years old, my dad started building kites. He knew how to build a lot of kites, I mean, he was great. And then I started building kites and selling them for fifteen cents apiece back then.

MR: In Ybor City?

LR: In Ybor City. I put them in the window and kids would come by and buy our kites for fifteen cents, twenty cents, and it's according how big because we made them real big. And we used to make one that was four feet tall and two feet wide and we called it *La Corona*, which was called "The Cross" in English. It was a real big kite, and if you didn't look out—if you were standing out too far it would pull you down the street, it was so strong. And I used to fly kites all the time, and then the bicycles came in and we were riding bicycles. I could learn how to tear up a bicycle and fix it back up, me and this boy, this friend of mine that lived in the projects, 'cause about two or three blocks away from us was the projects, and they had sidewalks.

So we buy roller-skates—they buy us roller-skates and we'd go roller-skating down the sidewalks, and they were metal roller-skates with metal wheels back then and we'd wear them right out. It wasn't a week and we'd wear them wheels right out. But mostly, that was our childhood. And then my father, one day he brought a horse home, a black and white pinto, and I loved that horse. Charlie was his name.

MR: In Ybor City?

LR: In Ybor City, because my uncle had a bunch of horses and he lived like six blocks away from us north, further from us, about maybe six blocks at the most. And he had four or five horses; we all rode horses back then, and it was real fun.

MR: What street was it (inaudible)?

LR: This street was Sarah.

MR: Sarah Street.

LR: Yeah.

MR: And what was—like, what was the community like there, or just your street, Sarah Street? Who lived on the street, how many houses?

LR: The whole street, there was a—my aunt and uncle lived across the street, Tilly and Maxi Cuervo. He had—I can remember him coming home in an ambulance; he was in war and he came home in an ambulance; they had put a fifty millimeter bullet right in his legs. I can remember going to Bay Pines Hospital with the family to take him down there until they fixed his leg, and it took a long time, about a year or two, to mend his leg. And he limped ever since, but he was in war.

MR: Which war?

LR: In 1942—

MR: World War II.

LR: —to forty-five [1945]. He was in that war, yes. He was in the Army and his brother was in the Marines, I can remember all that. And they gave him a—when he came home wounded, they gave him a brand new 1947 Dodge, four door, black, pretty car. That was the prettiest car in the neighborhood when it got there, 'cause nobody could afford new cars; we always had used cars. Like, it was the forties [1940s] and we had the thirties [1930s] cars, the thirty-nine [1939], thirty-eight [1938] year of cars that we had. But when that brand new Dodge came in in 1947, that was the prettiest car we ever seen in our life, in the neighborhood.

MR: What do you remember about World War II from your childhood?

LR: Other than my dad and the people getting together and talking about old war stories, that's all I know about it 'cause I was born—I was real young. I was only like six years old during that time, seven years old when they were talking about it. But it was all in Ybor City, the time I was raised in Ybor City, and that's all I can remember, the old wartime stories. And my father, before the streetcars, he worked in the garage building batteries. He used to build batteries, and then he got lead poisoning in his system, in his blood, and he had to quit. And when he quit, that's when he went to the streetcars, to drive streetcars.

MR: When did you guys move to West Tampa?

LR: When I was ten years old, my dad decided to move to West Tampa, close to Dale Mabry. It was Columbus Drive and Lincoln Avenue, real close to Columbus Drive—Dale Mabry. I was just about eleven years old when he finally bought a house there, two lots and one house, and we moved to—I celebrated my eleventh birthday in that house in West Tampa.

MR: Why did your dad decide to move to West Tampa?

LR: Because during that time, there was too many—I'm trying to say, like, Afro-Americans moving into the neighborhood. They were like—I'm guessing probably only a quarter of a mile away from us; they started moving into that neighborhood because they could buy houses cheap there, and they figured they could live in the outskirts of Ybor City 'cause there was nothing there. Nobody would go in that area, hardly, and there was nothing there. We did all of our shopping on Seventh Avenue in Ybor City and Broadway, all the Woolworth and Kress and all the theaters; you had like three theaters down there. And there's where we used to do our shopping.

So when that started to happen with the Afro-Americans, there were fights going on and knifing going in the streets. I had three sisters, real young—all older than me, but I was ten and I had one, twelve, and then I had one, fourteen, and I had one, sixteen years old. So my dad thought it was time to put them in a safe area, so we moved to West Tampa with the rest of the—it was more of a Latin community that we moved to in West Tampa.

MR: Did you see any of the fights, or did you know of any friends or family members that got into conflicts with other groups?

LR: Oh, yes, yes. That's what broke the camel's back, is when my father's friend—they had raped one of his young daughters. But they lived closer to them than we did. And my dad said it was time to pack up.

MR: What was your dad's friend's name, do you remember?

LR: I think it was—now I'm trying to think. His first name was Jimmy, and I can't think of his last name. I think it was—oh, I can't think of what it was. I think it was Fernandez. Jimmy Fernandez is what I think it was.

MR: So he was Spanish?

LR: He was Latin. Yes, he was a Spanish man. Part, like us, Spanish and Cuban.

MR: So once you got—tell me a little bit about West Tampa, your life in West Tampa.

LR: My life in West Tampa was great because I was just turning eleven and I was playing little league baseball. I was going—I went to a grammar school, MacFarlane Park Junior High—I'm sorry, MacFarlane Park Grammar School. And I went there in the fourth grade, and from MacFarlane Park—and we used to walk to school. Everything was so great back then: we used to walk to school, we never had to worry about going in cars or anything. My mother—I was eleven and I still couldn't ride a bicycle on the street, so she wouldn't let me go on my bicycle. I couldn't ride my bike till I got home from school.

So I went all through MacFarlane, and then I graduated there and went to—at I think it was fourteen years old, I went to the seventh grade in West Tampa Junior High. They had

changed from the eight, nine, ten—seven, eight, nine; they went to the sixth grade: six, seventh, eighth, and ninth to West Tampa, 'cause if not I would've had to gone to a school called Cuesta. So I didn't have to go to Cuesta; they sent me to West Tampa.

MR: What type of people were in West Tampa?

LR: Mostly Latin people in West Tampa; it was very few Caucasians there, very few.

MR: Do you know of any Caucasians personally that lived in West Tampa?

LR: Oh, yes. Yes, we had a bunch of Caucasians there, friends that lived around the neighborhood that lived in there.

MR: What—

LR: Billy was one of them. I can't think of Billy's name, but he was a Caucasian type. We used to call them American people back then, instead of Caucasians; we used to call them Americans, yeah. Cracker: we used to call them Crackers because a lot of them from Florida were called Florida Crackers back then.

MR: When's the first time you heard the word Cracker? Do you remember?

LR: Probably when I got to West Tampa. Yeah, when I had got to West Tampa: when I was older, over eleven, then I started hearing, "Hey, let's go fight the Crackers," 'cause the Crackers wouldn't—there was a section in Tampa called Sulphur Springs and they had a big self-fed pool there, and it was by Tampa Greyhound dog track and Nebraska Avenue. And when we got towards fifteen years old, that's when they said, "Hey, you know"—that's when the fights started to happen, when you started to get around fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old. You know, getting out of West Tampa and going to high school, that's all they wanted to do was go fight the Crackers in the evening. If we wasn't roller-skating, we was going to Sulphur Springs looking for Crackers to fight.

MR: Do you remember the first time that you left West Tampa and headed north, whether on a—anytime, Saturday night, or to go—whether it was a fight or to go to Sulphur Springs?

LR: Yes. When I was fifteen years old, I decided to leave school. I was going to be sixteen years old when I left school. I figured I was real smart—I was smarter than the teachers, I used to tell everybody, but of course, you know, that wasn't true. But then I started to work at a—Supertest was real big in Tampa, the Supertest gas stations, and they owned a circus type—little circus show, where they had merry-go-rounds and roller coasters and everything. I mean, bumping cars, chain rides where you sit down and it goes around and it has chains on the seats. I started to work there so I consider me a carnie back then: at fifteen, sixteen years old, I was a carnie.

MR: Supertest?

LR: Yeah, Supertest Amusement Park, and I worked there for about a year. My mom worked in the hot dog stand inside, making corn dogs—corn dogs and hot dogs and hamburgers—and even my sister worked there. And we stayed there for about a year. I quit, they stayed; my folks stayed there, my mother and sister. And I went to Big Barn Food Center and I become a bag boy. I was a bag boy at sixteen years old, and I was working at the Big Barn Food Center, which eventually years later was called Kash n' Karry Food Centers. That's how we know then and people know them.

MR: So the last school that you went to was?

LR: West Tampa Junior High.

MR: West Tampa Junior High.

LR: Was my last schooling. West Tampa Junior High.

MR: And what happened? Why did you leave?

LR: I knew more than the teachers did, that's what I thought at the time, and I said, "It's time to leave, go to work, and make some money." (laughs)

MR: Did you have any conflicts or problems with any of the teachers, or any of the students?

LR: Yes, there was a schoolteacher there by the name of Ms. Rinaldi, she used to get my goat, I mean, upset me something fierce. And it seemed to me like she didn't want to teach me nothing. And there was one—she was a math teacher and she really didn't want to teach me; she thought I was a wise guy, which I wasn't. I was always a good kid when I was young. And she used to get my goat all the time.

MR: Was she Latin?

LR: She was Italian, yes. She was Latin and she was Italian. But then I had my English teacher, which was a great woman. She was a hunchback lady and she was no bigger than four foot eight [inches], but she was the best lady in the whole world. And she used to teach me history and English. She was great. We had a principal by the name of Braulio Alonso. He later became a big man in the school education part. He told me, "Luciano, please don't quit." He found out I was quitting school; my mom went to him and he found out I was quitting school. And he says, "During the time that you have to go—the period that you have to go to Ms. Rinaldi, you come to the office and I will teach you English"—I mean, math. "Please don't quit." And Braulio Alonso was a nice principal. I never did. I just couldn't do it, and I told him no, that I was just going to go to work in the working industry and just go ahead and leave school, which I did.

MR: Did you ever come into any conflicts with any Americans—Caucasians—when you were in your teens or working at the Supertest?

LR: Not really, because they were different people. They were kind of—I was probably twice as smart as they were. (laughs) I always got along with everybody. I had a good attitude because I was always a jokester, so I got along with everybody. I'd make them laugh.

MR: Do you know of anybody that—friends or family that got into any conflicts or anything?

LR: Oh, yeah. Later in life, like after I got married, it got worse. Or when I was going steady with my present wife, which is Nana, your grandma. But yes, her family. There was a lot of people that always—around Latins, they always say, "Don't marry Americans," or Caucasians, "because they are no good. They are no good. And most of the females go with everybody. Before you marry them, they've been with God and everybody." They didn't like that. I shouldn't have said that.

MR: No, you're all right.

LR: But I mean, that's how it was back then. And the Latins, that's what they thought. American—Caucasian women are no good. They go with everybody. They go to bed with all of them. They don't care. And then the Crackers, they say, "Don't go with Latins because they're no good." So, it was just a conflict between the older generations going on.

MR: When is the first time that you met Nana?

LR: When I met Nana, I was going with a girl and Nana was in the backseat with somebody else. I think it was really my cousin George, George Ferman. And I was with another girl. I was driving. I always had cars when I was young, so I was driving, and we went to Faylor's. There's a drive-in: they come to the car and bring you the hamburgers to the car and the cold drinks. You park there and they come up to your vehicle in roller skates. It was great. And you stay in your car.

It started with I kept looking back at her and we kept looking at each other, and my cousin started tickling her and she said, "You can't tickle me, I'm not ticklish." And I said, "I bet you I can come back there and tickle you." That's what I told Nana, which I did, and from then on we just hit it off. That began our episode.

MR: So where would you guys go when you were dating?

LR: We would go—at the beginning, we would meet in somebody else's place, or we'd meet at Colonial Beach in Habana [Avenue]. At the end of Habana was a nice beach called—a lake called Colonial Beach, and they had dances there. And there was another one across the street called Ralston Beach. It's close to Lake Ellen here in Tampa, off of Armenia [Avenue]. They had dances every Friday night—and Saturday sometimes, but mostly Friday nights—and we would meet there. I would meet Sandy there and dance with her.

MR: So you would call her and ask her to meet there?

LR: Yes, I told her where we were gonna go. I was going to Ralston Beach, or we were going across to Colonial. And then on Saturday I'd tell her we were going to the recreation center, or there was another dance hall on Saturday called Hellenic Center, right down there in downtown Tampa. All the kids that we used to hang together in the fifties [1950s]—it was great. I mean, we had a heck of a time. Dancing, that's all we used

to do was dance in the fifties [1950s], and have good fast cars. I mean, we were always working on our cars, and we had a real great time there.

MR: So when did you and Nana decide that you were going to get married?

LR: Okay, my father-in-law, his folks were from Georgia, and a lot of the Georgia people do not like Afro-Americans or Latin people. They do not like them. It's taboo. And he had moved to Florida when he was young, and most of all the—my father-in-law's name is Lane Carlton, and all the Carltons lived in Tampa. They were in Bartow, Arcadia, Fort Meade, and they were all spread from Tampa to Fort Meade. And they never did—all I can remember is going to—when I met him, he wasn't friendly at all. My mother-in-law was friendly. She's Irish. She was friendly, but my father-in-law hated Afro-Americans and hated Latins.

The way I found out is because he talked to Sandy—which is my wife now, Nana—and told her that, “This boy keeps coming around,” and he says, “I want you to break up with him.” He says, “He's Latin”—but he used another word.

MR: What word?

LR: He used—he said—

MR: You can say it.

LR: “I don't want you to hang around that nigger.” He used the “N” word describing me, and here I am Latin and he called me the “N” word. He talked to her, to Sandy, and Sandy called me up—we used to talk every night, and she'd call me about midnight, one in the morning, wait till he falls asleep and then she'd call me and we'd stay on the phone for two hours. My mother and dad used to get mad at me, but I used to stay on the phone real quiet. And she told me, “Dad wants you to”—which was her stepfather. Her father—her stepfather—and he told her that we would have to break up. So, she told me the whole story, and I told her, “Well, do you want to get married?” I asked her, “Do you want to get married, hon?”

MR: Over the phone?

LR: Over the phone. And she says—she thought about it. And we talked and she says yes. So, she gave me the big Y: she said yes. So, that's all she wrote. I said, "Well we're gonna go to one of your friends. Tell them that we're gonna go to one of your friends," which her name—we called her Beatle. I think her name was Mary—or Beth; her name was Beth and her nickname was Beatle. I said, "We'll go to Beatle's house. You pack up a few clothes. You go to Beatle's house and tell them you're gonna spend the weekend. And I'll come get you when you tell me you're there, and we'll go to Georgia and get married," because in Florida—they will not marry you here in Florida whatsoever. You had to be pregnant and both sides had to sign, mother and father; both parents had to sign.

MR: So, you didn't think both sides would sign?

LR: Oh, never in a heartbeat. Never. So, I said, "Were going to Georgia 'cause I think they're still marrying in Georgia and we could get married in Georgia." Of course, her parents didn't know it. We took a chaperon, which was my brother-in-law. His name is Frank Rodriguez. He was a waiter in Ybor City: for thirty-five years he was a waiter in the Columbia Restaurant in Ybor City, a real famous restaurant. And he went with us as a chaperon and we went to Georgia. We had a heck of a time trying to get married, because it was getting real bad then. They believed she was twenty-one, and they wouldn't believe I was twenty-one, because I only weighed 120 pounds and I was five foot seven.

MR: And how old was Nana at the time?

LR: Nana was fifteen years old at the time, and they believed she was twenty-one and they wouldn't believe I was twenty-one.

MR: And how old were you?

LR: I was twenty years old, and I looked like I was probably fifteen. So they wouldn't marry us, and finally we ran across a judge in Ludowici, Georgia. We had a witness outside and we brought him in and they finally married us there. And I think I gave him like fifteen dollars, that's all it was for the license. We got our license and drove straight back to Tampa. Scared to death, but we drove straight back to Tampa. Every red light we saw—we come across railroad tracks and we'd look at them from a distance and I figured it was the cops. They done got us. They passed the word. My mother-in-law and father-in-law done passed the word that I kidnapped her. Back then they used to charge you with statutory rape if you take a minor over the state line. You couldn't do that back then, because they'd really come down on you with statutory rape.

MR: That's the only reason you thought the cops were after you?

LR: Oh, yes. Definitely. Every time I saw a railroad crossing with the lights flashing I thought we done had it. So, I was speeding, and I got caught for speeding. The cop gave me a speeding ticket.

MR: That night?

LR: That night. Luckily, they gave—I had a AAA card. We belonged to the AAA way back then, when I was twenty. Actually, it was my brother-in-law's AAA card; he had it, and I was in my other brother-in-law's car, a Pontiac, 1955 Pontiac: it was brand new. And he gave me a sixty dollar ticket. I think I was only like seven miles over the speed limit and he still gave me—it was a thirty-five dollar ticket. And they took it off of the AAA, because that's a bond. Your AAA is a bond.

MR: So, what happened once you got back to Tampa?

LR: Once I got back to Tampa, that was a huge disaster story. I made a mistake and called my mother-in-law, 'cause my wife says, "Call Mama and please tell her that we're back in Tampa so she won't worry." When I called her, the first thing she told me was, "Where is my baby?" Crying, hollering. "Where is my baby?" she says. I threw the phone to my wife, Sandy. I said, "Here, you talk to your mom." So she did. We didn't dare go home. Then Sandy got on the phone—the next day, I remember the next day. Uncle Bob and—nope, I went to my dad's house and I told him what happened about her mother, and he said, "Well, you better go somewhere. You better go to a motel or something and stay hidden for a couple of days."

MR: What happened with her mother?

LR: When we hung up? But she was hollering and crying when I talked to her and I gave Nana the phone. And Sandy says, "Mom, we're all right. We're fine. We'll call you in a couple of days," I think she told her, 'cause we weren't going to go to her house the way she was.

MR: What did she say to that?

LR: The mom?

MR: Yeah.

LR: Oh, Sandy had to hang up the phone. We had to leave.

MR: She hung up on her?

LR: Yes. She hung [up] the phone. So, we took off and went to my parents' house in West Tampa, 'cause they were still living there. And my father says, "You know, they could annul the wedding, so you all better go somewhere and stay hidden for a day or so. And you know, we'll try to cover it up." And we did. What we did was, my father said go to Clearwater, Florida, and stay there and call us where you're at. I said, "Okay." So I told Sandy when we left, I said, "We're not going to Clearwater, we're going to Bradenton, Florida. That way, my dad don't know where we're at, and my mom, and they can't pressure them. And they don't know exactly where we're at." So we drove straight to Bradenton, which is thirty-six miles from Tampa.

MR: Do you want to take a break to clear your throat for a minute?

LR: Yeah, we can.

Pause in recording

MR: All right. We're going back to Bradenton. We were talking about you went to Bradenton, Florida, with Nana, because your dad said to go to Clearwater because they could annul the marriage.

LR: Right.

MR: But you didn't want anyone to know?

LR: Where we was.

MR: So you went to Bradenton.

LR: Both sides of the family didn't know where we was. So anyway, we landed in Bradenton and we were all scared to death. Every car that pulled up, we were looking at the Venetian blinds. We opened the Venetian blinds, making sure there wasn't anyone after us, (donkey noises in background) no cops or her mother had sent the cops after us, and her father to hunt us up. So we were scared all night looking through the window. Anyway, I call my dad. I call my dad to really let him know where we are at, because I thought about it and I said, "Nobody really knows where we're at, and if my dad's looking for me, he ain't gonna know where I'm at." So I went ahead and called my dad and told him, "Dad, we're over here in a motel in Bradenton, right off of Highway 41. And we decided to come up here instead of Clearwater."

So anyway, that was the next day when I got up and called him. And during that time—my dad knew our room and the room number, so that afternoon he calls us back. And it was getting close to—everybody was off work already; it was in the evening, like. Uncle Bob and this man called Chico—which Uncle Bob is Sandy's uncle, which is my mother-in-law's brother. He's very smart, very intelligent. He went and got Chico, because Chico's a friend of the family, but they didn't know that he was a friend of my father's at the time, too. And he knew of my dad from Ybor City when my dad had the garage down there. And Chico had a hardware store, the Casino Hardware Store in Ybor City.

They came over there to really find out where we were and what was going on. Uncle Bob came over with Chico. There was more than—I can remember my dad telling me there had to be more than two guys in there. Chico saw my dad come out the door when they arrived at the porch. And he said, "Mike, how you doing?" and they hugged each other 'cause my dad was raised with the Italians. My dad spoke fluently, Italian fluently, because he was raised by them. Uncle Bob and my mother-in-law, they didn't know that Chico knew my dad from back then, and it was a big surprise to Uncle Bob. And then they started talking and all this kind of stuff and saying, telling Uncle Bob that Tilly, my older sister, is her godfather—Chico is my sister's godfather, and they were all thinking about what a small world that was.

MR: Why did they come over there?

LR: They came over there—well, looking for us, looking for Sandy, because at the time, my mother-in-law was telling her brother to see if they could find us so they could annul the wedding and find us that way. All of a sudden, somehow—let me get back to when we first hit Tampa.

MR: All right.

LR: At that moment—

MR: When you first came back?

LR:—explaining Uncle Bob's position.

MR: Okay.

LR: What happened was when we first got back into Tampa, I called my mother-in-law and she had a fit so I threw the phone to Nana. Nana told her this, that, and the other. Then Uncle Bob got on the phone. I left that part out. Uncle Bob got on the phone and he starts to talk to Sandy, and he says, "Hand the phone to Chano. I want to talk to Chano." So, I got the phone and he says "Chano?" And I said, "Yes, Uncle Bob?" He says, "Where are you, Chano?" 'cause they were fishing to find out where we were so they could come after us. And that's when I told him, I said Uncle Bob, "I am on a street in Tampa where I can go north or south, east or west, but I am not going to tell you exactly where I'm at." (laughs) I don't know where that comes from; in my head? But I brought that out, and I told him, "I'm not going to tell you where I am at, but I can tell you I can go east, west, or south or north, but I ain't going to tell you exactly where I'm at."

MR: What did he say to that?

LR: He said, "Don't get smart with me, son." And I told him, "Uncle Bob, I'm not getting smart with you. I just—me and Sandy, we love each other and I don't want nobody to come in between us," is what I said, because of my mother-in-law having that big fit over the phone.

So then we went to my father's, we went to Bradenton, come back from Bradenton the next day, right? And we thought—I said, "Let's take our preachers to your mom's house." My wife is Methodist, I am a Baptist. All my family's Catholic, but I wanted to be baptized as a Baptist. So I got my Baptist minister, preacher, and she got her Methodist preacher. We got them in the car and we all drove to my mother-in-law's house that night, the next night, from Bradenton. That night we drove to my mother-in-law's house. She was laying in the house, crying, bags under her eyes. Lane wasn't there at the time; I don't know where he was working. And my mother-in-law's sister lived next door with Uncle Bill, Uncle Bill Hunt and Aunt Margaret. And Sandy, me and the preachers walk into the room, and my mother-in-law got up and they met my mother-in-law.

Before we got there—let me tell you this part. Before we got there, the preacher says, “Now if this lady, this woman, wants to get up and slap you, son, you take it like a man. I don’t want you to lift your hand to hurt that woman.” I said, “I will never hurt the woman, believe me.” And we walked in there and she stayed—wouldn’t look at me, but she stayed calm. She’d look at me, but with the angry eyes ’cause I hurt her, and she was mad at me.

All of a sudden, Sandy hauls butt to the next door, to her aunt and uncle’s, and leaves me in there with two preachers. And I was shaking to death. Two preachers and my mother-in-law and me in the house. They done all the talking; I was just quiet. I wouldn’t say much, you know, except the questions of “Do you love Sandy?” and all that kind of stuff. And we left that night, and we left together. I went back to my parents’ house. And that’s when her grandfather got involved, which is Uncle Bob’s father, William E. Sullivan. He’s a good Irish man, smart man, good guy. He told my mother-in-law—went to my mother-in-law and says, “You know, you can’t annul this wedding. If you annul the wedding, you’re making a big mistake.” And this is her father talking, which is my wife’s grandfather. He says, “You cannot annul this wedding, because what if she’s pregnant? What are you gonna do with her having a baby and no husband?”

So he talked my mother-in-law and she kind of—from him, so she’s got brains enough to agree to that, and that’s how the wedding did not get annulled. But they were always—my father-in-law always didn’t like me. It took my mother-in-law about a year to really come across. We would go visit them and come back home, like on Sundays, but I know the feeling of when somebody don’t really like you. But my mother-in-law started melting. She knew what kind of guy I was. She knew I wasn’t a bum and I worked. I had a job, I had a good job, and she knew I was a working guy and would take care of Sandy. But my father-in-law would never—it took him years and years, and he still—over three years—and he still didn’t care for me that much because he didn’t like Latins.

MR: So who told you that Uncle Bob was looking for you? How’d you find out that Uncle Bob came looking for your?

LR: My mother-in-law. Well, how I find out is the first time he got on the phone, when I told him that I’m on the road that I could go north or south, east or west. I knew right then he wanted to know where I was. And then my dad is the one that called me and he says—when I called my dad, he told me, “They’re coming over here, they want to come over here,” and that’s how I found out that Uncle Bob, Chico, and them were coming over to my dad’s house in West Tampa.

MR: Why did Uncle Bob get Chico? Like, why do you think he got him?

LR: I think it was for reinforcement, is what I think. Maybe Uncle Bob didn't want to come over by himself, you know, or they had called Chico to find out maybe if they knew my dad—which I doubt it, 'cause they were surprised when Chico showed up at my parents' house. My dad was surprised. So I think it was just for reinforcements, you know, because Aunt Ada, which is Uncle Bob's wife, is related to them, all the Italians, Chico and all them. Tony.

MR: Does Chico's—Aunt Ada was Chico's sister?

LR: Sister. Right, his wife. Chico's wife is Aunt Ada's sister.

MR: Do you think that they were trying to create a physical conflict when they were going over to your dad's house? Like, what do you think that they were gonna do?

LR: I don't think so. I don't think it was a conflict. It was more that they might have had a feeling that it could have been my dad, 'cause they found out my name, Rodriguez, 'cause of Beatle, my wife's friend. They could have found out through her what my real name was, Luciano Rodriguez, and they started tracing. Maybe they found that, you know? 'Cause my dad knew Chico and he must have known Aida. He knew his wife; my dad was always there in the garage and they would be together. And possibly—but I never found out. I never found out really how that come about. But they had to find out through the names. And people, being that my father—I mean, my father-in-law was raised by them, you know, the Italians.

MR: So Chico and your dad was close enough for him to become the godfather to your sister?

LR: My sister. Exactly. My dad, not only that worked for—he built batteries but he ran a garage called Fourth Avenue Garage in Ybor City, which was a front for the Ybor City mafia back then. My dad ran that garage. That's how he knew all the Italians and how he spoke it fluently, how he learned, when he was a young guy.

MR: How was it a front? What was it for?

LR: They were dealing and bootlegging, illegal whiskey. They would distribute it to Georgia. My dad was a driver. He would drive one of the Model As with fifteen five-gallon kegs behind. They'd tear the seat out of the Model A Sedan and they'd put fifteen kegs, five gallons apiece, full of beer, with a croaker sack, and they'd drive it to Georgia and put it in the cellar and they'd distribute it from there. So my dad was a driver for them. And all them guys, Chico—and there was another guy, Jimmy Lumia; he was really a mafia guy. My dad was never into that other part, but mostly into the whiskey part.

MR: I want to go back to Sandy's stepfather, Lane Carlton.

LR: Lane Carlton.

MR: Yeah. When's the first time that you met Lane, or the first time that you met Sandy's family?

LR: I was invited to come to dinner one night, because I had went to the house and we'd sit in the living room and talk and listen to records. You know, it was the fifties [1950s] so we were listening to all the fifties [1950s], Nat King Cole, and Johnny Mathis was our favorite—that's our favorite singer.

MR: And you listened to Nat King Cole at Sandy's house?

LR: Yes. We listened to music, and "Chances Are" was our song, which was sung by Johnny Mathis and that was our song that we constantly danced to that would come to our mind right away. So that was our favorite song together. And we would listen to records. So one day, Sandy asked her parents to invite me to dinner, and she did. So my wife says, "We're having dinner tonight and Dad wants you to come over. My father wants to meet you, and it would be you, me and my brother," which her brother was Bill Carlton, "and they want to meet you and know you better." Supposedly. So I said, "Sure."

We had dinner that night. Everything went good, but he was serious. You could tell when Lane was serious. He wouldn't crack a smile or anything. He wouldn't hardly talk. My mother-in-law did all the talking with me and stuff, and he would just look at me with the corner of his eye like a whale looking at you sideways or something. But you could tell there was always a little friction there. I felt uneasy with him, the way he was acting. But that went on for almost two months, and that's when he wanted to kick me out of the house and not have me come back, and that was two months to the day. And we ran away to Georgia.

MR: Did he ever say anything to your face that let you know he didn't want you dating his daughter?

LR: Never. Not ever.

MR: So he only said it with his—

LR: It was after we were married and settled in, and that was after, when I would go and help him out in the house or help him repair something. We'd go—I would go with him in the car, we'd go buy stuff at the hardware, and we would stop at the garage. There was a garage at the corner of Armenia and Waters. And Nick C. Nuccio was the mayor of Tampa. Mind you, he's Latin. He's Italian. And my dad's friend was the mayor of Tampa. He knew my dad, 'cause all the Italians knew my dad from Ybor City. We were all from Ybor City and they knew him. And we'd stop in the garage and he'd buy gas there, and I made a mistake. I pumped the gas. He made me pump the gas—he didn't make me, but he said, "Do you want to pump the gas?" I said, "Sure."

So, he'd go in there and talk to Gene. The owner of the gas station was named Gene. And they'd be talking between them, and then I'd go in. I'd hear them talking—they knew I was there—and they both didn't like Latins or Afro-Americans. And I could hear them talking about the mayor. And they said, "That mayor, that"—they even called the mayor the "N" word. "That nigger's running the city." And oh, I'd get angry when I heard that, and I just turned around at that moment and walked straight to the car, sit in the car till he came out. I just turned around when I heard him say that. It just made me angry to think that, that was the way he was thinking. "That nigger running the city," he said. And it was Nick C. Nuccio, an Italian.

MR: What year was this?

LR: Oh, I'm guessing probably sixty [1960], the early sixties [1960s].¹ Between sixty [1960] and seventy [1970], 'cause we were married in fifty-nine [1959], so it had to be maybe the early sixties [1960s]—sixty-five [1965], somewhere along there—when I joined the union. I finally joined the union filming industry in 1965.

MR: How did that happen?

¹Nick Nuccio was a two-term mayor of Tampa from 1956 to 1959 and 1963 to 1967.

LR: The reason—they asked me if I wanted to join the union and I told them no, that I was happy being a truck driver delivering whiskey and wine. I worked for Bay Distributors, it was called at the time. This was 1960 when I went to work for Bay Distributors. It was a whiskey and wine place, and I delivered whiskey and wine all over Tampa, Fort Myers, Naples. All the outskirts was mine, every town outskirts was mine: Bartow, Frostproof—you name it, St. Pete, Bradenton, Sarasota. I went all over. It was great, and I loved truck driving.

So I did that for four years, and then I said—I saw the money that they were making. My father-in-law is a projectionist. Uncle Bob was a projectionist, and Uncle Bill. The whole family is projectionists and stagehands; they were stagehands at the time. We put on live shows at—there was a place called Curtis Hixon Center, which was a convention center. It was fairly new at the time when I joined—I mean, when I was truck driving.

Her grandfather, which was William E. Sullivan, he was the head of the union for years. And my father-in-law's son was Bill Carlton. He wouldn't turn of age until 1965, and I was already twenty-six years old. So he was trying to wait till Bill got of age before he bring me, asked me to come into the union, 'cause he didn't want his son to have less seniority than I did. He wanted Bill to have more seniority than me in the union, so he waited that long. But at the time, Sandy's grandfather, the head of the union, he said that was enough when he found out and he brought me in the union: six months after Bill is when they finally decided to bring me into the union.

MR: Who asked you?

LR: The grandfather, William E. Sullivan, Sandy's grandfather, because Lane wouldn't get off his keister to let me join. So I finally talked to—Bill talked to me real nice, saying, “Chano, you ought to come into our union. I don't know how much money you're making, but it can't be much as a truck driver, and this is what we're making here,” which was a lot more money, I'm guessing \$150 to \$200 a week more. They were making more than I was truck driving. So I said, “That's a lot of money.”

So I told Bill, “Yes, I'll join the union.” And he took me in and I trained as a projectionist. I had to go to Tampa and I took a city electrical exam. I had to take an exam just like any electricians in Tampa that works in houses. I had to take the same test, and I barely passed it 'cause I didn't have much education. But I had the basics and I finally passed the test. I got my electrical license and so they trained me as a projectionist and I worked at—my first job, in 1965, was at the Auto Park Drive-In at Twenty-Second Street

Causeway in Tampa. It was on the south side of Ybor City. It's a section they call Twenty-Second Street, which Palmetto City, Palmetto, Florida.

MR: Tell me about—once you and Nana got married, where did you guys live?

LR: When we first got married after everything settled down, that we went to our mother-in-law's house and all this was going on, we stayed at my sister's house in South Tampa, MacDill [Avenue] and Fielder Street. They had a nice house there, so she told me, "Come over. You can stay with us a few months until you and Sandy decide what you want to do." And we did. We lived with my sister and brother-in-law. Ondina—my sister's name was Ondina Barnett and my brother-in-law, Ray, and we stayed at their house till we found a little apartment that we moved to in West Tampa, also close to the family. We were probably—I'm guessing a quarter mile from my parents' house, or a half a mile.

MR: Did you ever experience any conflict or any aggression from people seeing you and Nana married out in public? Do you ever remember seeing anything anywhere you went?

LR: Never.

MR: Were there any places that you had to avoid because of it?

LR: Not at all. We used to go everywhere we wanted to, any restaurant, any place. We'd go shopping anywhere and never had that problem. Never, never.

MR: Tell me a little bit about what *Nochebuena* is and when you guys first started celebrating *Nochebuena*.

LR: That I can remember?

MR: That you can remember.

LR: I can remember back—and this was every year, *Nochebuena*, which is New Year's Eve is *Nochebuena*. Christmas? You're right, Christmas. That's right, the twenty-fourth. *Nochebuena*, that's right. All the family, we all get together and we celebrate at midnight. The ladies, they start cooking during the day: the pork, the ham, the rice, the black beans, everything, cut up the onions, the salad, the Cuban bread. We all gather at one house,

whether it was my sister's house, my father's house. We'd all gather there and we'd celebrate Christmas Eve, which is *Nochebuena*, at one of the houses. We'd stay up all night till—we'd put the kids to sleep so the next day we could open the gifts. Santa Claus comes into town.

MR: Did Nana's family celebrate something similar? Like, did they celebrate a Christmas Eve?

LR: They did. They did because they knew Italians. They were mixed up with Italians and they had Italians in the family, and they would go to the Italians' house and celebrate—not that they did it themselves.

MR: Whose house was it celebrated at?

LR: That was Aunt Ada's sister, which was—oh, God, I can't think of the name right now. Nice people. They always loved us 'cause they knew my dad. It was Chico's brother-in-law and sister-in-law, my sister's godfather. So they even used to invite us sometimes, when we could go, but we could never go. But we would make it at an earlier time. They would celebrate it maybe a little earlier or a little later, and we would go and stay there an hour or so. But we did go to their house, and we'd see my father-in-law there, and mother-in-law. And we'd gather there at the Hillsborough River in West Tampa, Columbus Drive and—I think it was Ridge Avenue at the time.

MR: While you were at the *Nochebuena*, the Christmas Eve celebration, at the Italians' house of your wife's family, did you ever see Lane? How was Lane acting towards you at that time? Did you still feel—or how did you feel?

LR: Oh, yeah, yeah. He would just mingle with the other people, and I would just stay close to Sandy and we'd mingle with our family. It was like a separation deal there, you know, when you get to a little group in somebody else's house you always go with the people you know and people you want to talk. 'Cause some of the kids of Chico and the Italians that were older, they would mingle with us, like Jose. He was a jai alai player. He would come over with Elaine, and they all come and talk to us. The younger people kind of stayed together.

MR: Do you think that Lane—did you ever see that the Americans, as you called them, or the whites, treated the Italians the same as you guys, as the Spanish, or differently? Like, if you can think back to a conversation that maybe you saw Lane having with another Italian, do you think he treated them the same as you?

LR: He looked more friendlier towards them. He looked friendlier to the people there, you know, the sister-in-law of the Italians, the brother-in-law, Chico, his wife, Ada, Uncle Bob. He would stay talking to them, mostly. You know, a lot friendlier than [to] us. He would try to avoid us—my mother, my father—you know, as much as he could. You could feel it, you could see it, you know.

MR: Did Grandma and Granddaddy Carlton ever host the Christmas Eve party at their house?

LR: Yes, we did. We used to eat there, too, and the Italians would come over and they'd host a party at their house and I'd cook the pork. I'd cook real pig and I'd cut—I had them gut it and everything, and on his barbeque—we had a big one—I would roast a pig there in the later years. And my mother-in-law would fix all the food, and Sandy would help and all the ladies would help in there, you know. And then the Italians would come over, just one big party there.

But I never felt comfortable anytime around Lane. Never did I feel comfortable, till I didn't have to take his crap anymore. I was probably in my forties, forty-five, where I would have to take his stuff anymore. I would put him in his place.

MR: What stuff? What was he doing? What was he saying to you?

LR: Smart aleck towards me and talking rough, you know, what I should do and grow up. And he would tell me to grow up and stuff like that just to spite me, to get me mad. And I would tell him off in a heartbeat, always. But then he knew where I stood: the older I got, the more he knew that he couldn't get away with his stuff with me. But I used to feel uncomfortable—we'd go to the fairgrounds together with his friends and they were all Crackers—you know, they were Caucasian—which they loved me to death: Edith, Gary Ratliff that runs the Tampa Theater, his mom and dad. They were friendly to me, but they were all Confederate; you can tell they were all Confederates. You know what I'm saying? They belonged to a club. You can tell they belonged to a club that didn't like Latins. But Ratliff's parents, they were great people; they knew how to treat you even though they knew you was Latin or anything, and they treat us better.

MR: And what is Ratliff in relation to Nana?

LR: They grew up together. They were like three years old, two years old: they already knew each other, they were in the family that long. They were real good friends, Claude and Edith. And I was telling you we'd go to the fairgrounds, when we'd go to the Tampa fairgrounds, which was in Cass Street and North Boulevard, the old fairgrounds. When we first—'cause remember when we were young, there's where we used to go instead of on [U.S. Highway] 301 where they have the fairgrounds now. We used to go to the old one.

They would look at me like—they'd go to a beer pavilion, because my father-in-law was a beer drinker; he loved to drink beer. And my mother-in-law and Claude and Edith, they would all stay under there and they wouldn't want me around. They act like they don't want me to sit down, me and my wife, and have a conversation with them, so they'd send us—"Go watch the kids and go to the kids and watch the kids and make sure they're okay." So, that's how you knew. They always sent you somewhere where it wouldn't interfere with their conversation. They were probably talking about us, you know.
(laughs)

MR: Pop, the recording is over an hour, and I really did enjoy listening to this so far.

LR: Oh, we got more.

MR: It's great. We're gonna do another—

LR: Session.

MR: —interview, another session. But I want to stop it now, at an hour, so that the quality of the recording is maintained.

LR: We done?

MR: Yeah. We're gonna end now. But thank you so much for doing this, and then we'll make plans to do it—

LR: Oh, I got more.

MR: —do it again. All right, Pop?

LR: All right. You're welcome.

End of interview