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**Ana M. Varela-Lago:** This is an interview with Ms. Melba Pullara. Melba, I would like to start by talking a little bit about your family; where did they come from? Why did they come to Tampa? Could you tell me?

**Melba Pullara:** They came from Spain.

AVL: Where in Spain?

MP: Asturias.

AVL: Your parents were from Asturias?

MP: My father was from Arriondas and my mother from Campo de Caso. Well, that's where her parents were from, Campo Caso.

AVL: Campo Caso. Could you tell me their names?

MP: *¡Ay! Ahora si me fastidiaste.* Now you got me messed up there! I think my grandfather on my mother's side was Angel, and you know what? I don't remember the others.

AVL: Okay, what was your mother's name?

MP: Purificación.

AVL: Purificación. And her maiden name?

MP: Bartolomé.

AVL: Bartolomé. And your father?

MP: Benjamín Blanco.

AVL: Benjamín Blanco. Why did they come to Tampa, do you know?

MP: Well, my mother, they brought her when she was five; her uncle brought her to New York when she was five, and he raised her in New York. And my father just came to the New World, I guess.

AVL: Did he come alone?

MP: Yes, he [did]. An uncle brought him from Spain.

AVL: Did he go through Cuba, or did he come directly here?

MP: He went to New York, through New York, I think. Yes, because I don't remember him saying anything about Cuba, but I know he went to New York. That's where my mother and my father met.

AVL: What did they do in New York? What kind of business did they have in New York?

MP: Well, no, my mother's uncle, he had a little—well, we call it a buckeye, *un chinchal*.

AVL: I see, *chinchal*, which is like a small cigar factory.

MP: Right. And being that my father's uncle was associated with the cigar industry, well, my father went to my mother's uncle and got a little job there as an apprentice, and that's where he met my mother. And my mother did not speak a word of Spanish.

AVL: Really?

MP: And my father didn't speak any English.

AVL: So did they live in different areas in New York?

MP: No, no, the same area but not real close by.

AVL: I see.

MP: And my father taught my mother English, Spanish I mean, and you couldn't, you would think that my mother was raised in Spain. She had the Spanish accent. And also, you couldn't tell where she was from, from Spain or from the States.

AVL: I see. That's interesting. Did your father learn to speak English?

MP: When he was by himself, when there was no one around that spoke both languages he would speak it, but if there was somebody around he would not speak it. He said nobody was going to make fun of him.

AVL: I see. How about you? Did you learn English at home or when you went to school?

MP: I learned it at home, English and Spanish both.

AVL: Yes, they were both spoken—

MP: My Spanish is a backyard Spanish.

AVL: Oh, really? It sounds pretty good! Okay, so why did they decide to come to Tampa, your parents? They were there in New York, they got married in New York?

MP: No, as a matter of fact, they got married in Tampa.

AVL: Oh. So, they met in New York, but then—

MP: Yes. Well, my mother's uncle moved to Tampa and, of course, she came with him.

AVL: When was that, do you think, in the '20s, the '30s?

MP: Well, my mother married when she was 19. My father was 4 years older than her. Okay, let's see. I was born in '21. I think she got married in 1919 or 1920.

AVL: So, you think they came here before World War I, for instance?

MP: When was World War I?

AVL: 1914 to 1918. About that time—it's not important. But, before the 1920s they were here.

MP: Yes, they were here. I think she married. She was 19 when she married, I'm not sure, but I think so, because I was 20 years younger than her. She had me when I [she] was 20, that's what I'm trying to—

AVL: And they came together. Your mother came with her uncle.

MP: No. My mother came with her uncle, right.

AVL: How about your father?

MP: He came later.

AVL: He came later. But they already knew each other.

MP: Yes, yes, yes.

AVL: So why did they decide to move to Tampa. It was the job situation, or family or—?

MP: Well, I think, my father—because he didn't come following my mother—his uncle that lived here sent for him.

AVL: Oh, that's interesting.

MP: See? His uncle claimed him from Spain. And my father lived in New York for a little bit until a brother of his came in to the States also, because, you see, my uncle claimed his brother. So.

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

MP: Miguel Rodriguez.

AVL: Miguel Rodriguez, I see. So that's why they decided—

MP: That's why my father and his brother came into Tampa. But I think, I think, I am not sure, that my mother was already here, or if not she came a little bit alter that. But they already knew one another.

AVL: I see. So they got married here in Tampa?

MP: Um-hm.

AVL: And they lived in Ybor City most of their lives?

MP: Um-hm.

AVL: You were born here already, in Tampa?

MP: Yes.

AVL: Okay, tell me about your childhood. What memories do you have of growing up in Ybor City? What comes to your mind when you think about those years?

MP: Well, up until about 5 years or five-and-a-half, I remember few things, not anything to amount to anything. Child's kids. I remember a man that got electrocuted in the telephone post, but that's not interesting.

AVL: It's interesting that you remember that.

MP: There was a storm and the electrical wires were on the ground, and the electric company came over to fix them and he climbed up the post to grab the thing and he was electrocuted right then and there. I remember that, and I remember playing with a kid, but I moved over here when I was five and a half.

AVL: To this house where we are now?

MP: No. The one right behind me. And I remember a kid playing. I was playing with this kid and his aunt came, and she used to hit me, so my mother says, "When she comes in and hit you, come home." I went home and on the way, half way down the lot, she called me and I turned around and when I turned around I received the bottom of a bottle, glass bottle, and it cut my chin right here. It opened it up. That's about all I remember until I was about five-and-a-half, and then we moved over here and that's when the fun started.

AVL: What do you remember of living in this house?

MP: Oh, gosh!

AVL: If you had to pick out two or three moments of your growing up, what would you choose?

MP: Two or three moments growing up? I was always climbing trees and what have you. And I remember one, his one I never forget it, Carmita de la Grana, she used to live up the street here. She was Carmita Rubio at the time. And she had done something to me that I didn't like, and I wanted to pay her back. And we had made a swing, there was a big tree there, we had made a swing out of a rope and she climbed on the swing and she wanted me to push her. And I pushed her. And she was scared of heights, and the more I'd push her the more she yelled, "Stop!"

And I kept pushing her, and pushing her, and pushing her, and the rope broke and she landed way over there and it knocked her unconscious. And I ran over there and I said, "Carmita, *¡no te mueras, no te mueras!*" I remember that. There was a house here and one of the girls was looking out the window and, they had no screens, and when she flew, the girl jumped out the window. I remember that part. And I was hitting her and yelling, "Don't die! Don't die!"

AVL: What happened to her?

MP: Nothing. She came to.

AVL: You were scared?

MP: Yes, because she flew. But, I mean, I wanted to pay her back but not that way. Oh, well. And we played with all the kids around here. In the summer we used to go out right after supper and play around here. Because there was a big pond over here and right in through here there was a ditch and we were the only house here. You had to cross the ditch to get to my house. Now there was no—no garbage man would come here, they'd go through there. Well, we had no gas, because the gas would not reach here. It would reach up the street and over there and over there but not over here, so we had kerosene stoves and we had cows. We had two cows. I remember

milking them. We also had chickens. And they used to give these picnics, *el parque* La Columna, and where was the other park?

AVL: That's in West Tampa, La Columna?

MP: Yes. And the other—

AVL: De Soto Park?

MP: No, De Soto Park. But the big picnics were not there. There was another place.

AVL: Ballast Point?

MP: No. They had them there once in awhile, but it was *el parque* La Columna, and I can't remember—

AVL: Nistal? *La finca* Nistal?

MP: Finca Nistal! And we used to go, and there was always yellow rice and chicken. And we always had to leave early because we had to milk the cows, and I hated that. That's about—

AVL: Your parents, were they both working in the cigar industry here in Tampa, or—?

MP: No, my mother never worked, my father did, yes.

AVL: I see. And what did he do, was he a cigar maker, or—?

MP: My father was a selector, *rezagador*.

AVL: In what factory?

MP: At that time he was working in Corral [factory], but there was a selectors' strike, and it was a long one, and after that he—he only knew how to make cigars, so after that he said, "To heck with it. I'm going into cigar making." So, he went into cigar making. And I remember he worked in Villazón, and that's where I learned, and from Villazón he went to Corral as a foreman, and later I worked there too. And then I went up north during the war.

AVL: During World War II?

MP: Um-hm. And my father passed away in '43. So I came on down, planning to go back, but I had my mother and my sister here, so I decided to stay.

AVL: To stay. Where were you up north, New York?

MP: No, I was in Rahway, New Jersey.

AVL: You mentioned one of the strikes before, what do you remember of the strikes here in Ybor City?

MP: The only thing. Really and truly, I don't remember anything. I know there were two strikes. There was one that they call it *la huelga de los diez meses*. You heard of that one?

AVL: A little bit.

MP: And all I remember. I was little, and all I remember was that we went to the beach. There were three families that went to the beach. The men stayed here, working in the phosphate mines and we went to the beach, the women with the kids and I was one of the kids. And they used to go over there on Fridays and come back Sunday or Monday, I don't know. And the only thing I remember of that was that I didn't want to eat.

AVL: You didn't want to eat?

MP: I didn't want to eat.

AVL: Why, you didn't have any appetite—?

MP: No, I guess not. And this lady, she used to run with a plate in her hand, she used to run after me, and the spoon, and I used to run down the edge of the beach, and she would run. That's the only—and then I remember there were two older kids that they used to play with near the water and they used to pick me up and throw me in the water. That's all I remember, I don't remember anything else about the strikes, I don't remember. Now, that one that I said that the guy got electrocuted—

AVL: That happened during a strike also, or—?

MP: No! No, that wasn't—no, I got it mixed up, no. It wasn't during the strike—

AVL: So your father was working in Corral, and then there was this strike and he left?

MP: How was that again?

AVL: You mentioned that your father first was a *rezagador* in the Corral factory and then there was a selectors' strike.

MP: Yes. I don't know when, I don't know what, no. No, that was another strike. I think, I think, I'm not sure—oh, I'm getting my dates—No, that storm was a big storm, that was what I was getting confused. It was a big storm and it was in the 20s—I was born in '21 and I might have been 5.

AVL: So around '26.

MP: Around there, I think there was this big storm at that time, I'm not sure, but I think there was

a big storm. I don't remember anything about the strikes, really.

AVL: How about the Great Depression, what do you remember about those years here in Tampa?

MP: Well, we weren't rich, but I remember I didn't go to bed without eating any day. Of course, what we had to eat was a lot of *potajes*—

AVL: *Potajes*?

MP: Yes. Every day it would be one or the other, and my mother even invented a *potaje* made out of pork and beans.

AVL: Really?

MP: And a man came over one day and my mother had a little bit of it left over. Because he was a *rezagador* with my father, a selector with my father, and he came over for lunch with my father. My father would bring friends unexpected for lunch, and when he said, "Look, I brought so-and-so." My mother didn't have anything to give him but that *potaje*. And he said, "Oh, that *potaje* was so good, with sweet beans—" And she gave him that day *potaje*, pork and beans, and *huevos fritos* and *arroz*, that's what she gave him. And he went home and he told his wife, "Ask her how she made it, because that was good *potaje*." And it was made out of pork and beans.

My mother would invent a lot of *potajes*. Meat, steaks, forget it! We wouldn't eat fried chicken, we ate *arroz con gallina*, because we had chickens and they raised chickens so we had the fried chicken when they had the roosters, but otherwise it was old hens what we used to eat. And, you know, we had meat, of course, like stew and all that, but it wasn't the fancy meat, forget it!

So, we really didn't go to bed hungry at any time. And for lunch my mother used to make me sandwiches out of omelets or whatever. But I do remember that there was a supermarket downtown, and she would go. My father would take her there once in a while, because around here there weren't any supermarkets, it was downtown. That I remember there weren't any here, there could have been, but I don't—

AVL: On 7th Avenue there wasn't any supermarkets?

MP: Supermarkets, no, not that I know of. But there was one downtown, it was across the street from the telephone company. It was either the Big Barn, I think it was called the Big Barn, I'm not sure. And my father used to take her there once in awhile and they had, every once in awhile they would have the picnic hams on sale for 24 cents a pound, so my mother would buy it and cook it and we'd have sandwiches, one meal out of that and then the sandwiches. So, we had ham sandwiches.

And we had a lot of—my mother would bake a lot. We had eggs, we had milk, so she would bake. Every Friday she would bake, and that was for Saturday and Sunday. My mother wasn't a very good cook, but pastry, she used to make good pastry. And, of course, our dessert for the

week, it was *natillas*, homemade stuff, *arroz con leche*. Oh, and the butter, oh, I used to hate it!

AVL: Why?

MP: Homemade butter. Oh, I couldn't stand it! I couldn't stand it! My mother used to also make cheese. She even made a cream cheese, very similar to our cream cheese, the one that we have, very similar to it. And we had what they called *cuallada*.

AVL: *Guayaba*.

MP: *Cuallada, no guayaba, cuallada*.

AVL: Oh, *cuajada*!

MP: *Cuajada! Los Asturianos* call it *cuallada*.

AVL: I see.

MP: We had that. My father used to eat that with sugar, I used to put salt to it. And they used to eat guava. Guava cheese, guava paste with cheese. That's what our weekly dessert was. Now Sundays, Sundays my mother would open, when she could afford it, a can of peaches. That was a special! And I remember I used to get a peach and cut it up in little tiny pieces so it would last.

AVL: How about the jobs, what was the job situation during the Depression here with the cigar industry? Was it hard to find a job?

MP: Well, my father was working. Now his brother lived with us—

AVL: What was his brother's name?

MP: José.

AVL: José Blanco?

MP: Uh-huh.

AVL: And he was also a cigar worker?

MP: Yes.

AVL: So, was it hard for them—?

MP: He lived with us, but then he—I guess he was fired or something, I know he didn't have a job. Now, my father did, he had the job. Now, I don't remember how much he made. I do remember that once this man, you got the daughter's picture here but I'm not going to mention her name, he tells my father, "How is it that you work alone and when I ask you for a couple of

dollars you can loan it to me? And in my house my wife works and I work, and I'm always short of money?" And my father told him, he says, "Well, very simple. I have a good manager in the house." He says, "Now we don't eat the pork chops, we don't eat the steaks, we don't go to the bakery to get all the stuff, and our chocolate milk my wife makes it for my daughters, your wife buys it from the dairy, so that's the reason that I can handle it better than you. I've got a good administrator at home." That I remember, I remember that because I heard it. They didn't know I was there but I heard it. Yes. And I think that they made, between the two of them, they made \$12 a week, because he said they made double what my father made. So my father must have been making \$6 or \$7 dollars a week, and they made \$12. I remember that part.

AVL: Was there a lot of unemployment at that time in Ybor City, generally, do you remember how people dealt with the Depression?

MP: Really, I don't, I couldn't tell you because—I do remember—this had nothing to do with the Depression but this does have something to do with the strike of the *rezagadores*. This man, he lived up the street here and they were on strike, and we had two cows. The man used to come and my father would give him milk and eggs and cheese and butter, once in a while. But the milk, he'd give it to him every day, because they had two kids. He came home one day, because he was a selector too, he came home one day, to the house one day, and told my father, "I'm going to go to work tomorrow." He says, "What you mean, you're going to work?" "Yes, I got to have money." "Well, look I make more that you are but I'm staying home, don't go out." "Oh, yes, but you got a cow." He says, "Yes, but I gotta feed the cow." He said, "No, no, I am going."

My father told me. He said, "Look, I'll do something, I'll let you have a cow so you can have your milk," you know, that stuff. "When we go back to work, either you give me back the cow or you buy it off of me." And the man said, "You think I'm—" I don't want to say the word, *bobo*. "That I have to work and all of that, you know, milk the cow and all that." My father says, "*Bobo soy yo entonces*." It didn't sound as good. So, my father says, "Okay, I'll keep the cow and I'm not giving it to you." And he did talk him out, but that was during the strike, one of the strikes.

AVL: Why was your father on strike and why were the selectors on strike, do you remember?

MP: No, I don't.

AVL: Was he a member of the union, was he active in the Selectors' Union?

MP: Well, they didn't have a union yet. I don't think they had a union, no. The cigar makers did not have a union.

AVL: Who organized this strike?

MP: I don't know.

AVL: But you don't remember your father really belonging to the union, or being—?

MP: No. Well, he was active, but I don't remember any union. No. There were a few of them that

were active but I don't remember any union, I don't think there was a union.

AVL: How long was this strike that you were talking about?

MP: Well, I don't know if—I don't think that—

AVL: Was it one of the long ones—?

MP: See. That's where I'm a little bit confused, because they had the selectors' strike and they had another strike, it was what they called, I think it was, *la huelga de los diez meses*. I think it was *diez meses*, ten months. Now, I don't think that that was the selectors' strike.

AVL: How about *la huelga de los lectores*, do you know about that?

MP: *Lectores*, no. No, I didn't, no. Because when I went to work they didn't exist anymore.

AVL: Did you have radios?

MP: Beg your pardon?

AVL: Did you have radios, at that time, or nothing at all?

MP: Well, when I went to work the only thing that they did at work. I don't know if anybody took a radio. But during the World Series they would come in with a truck. I don't know how they worked it but I think the truck had a radio, or something, and he would relate it inside the factory and he'd put loudspeakers all over the factory and I remember once—they did that for years—now once, there was like a storm or something, and he had this panel truck outside the factory, right alongside the wall there at the factory, and he was giving us the football game and he was saying, "*Y se va la pelotica*—" And it was really, really windy and he said "*Que se lleva el truck*," you know.

He would say it in Spanish, he would give in English and translated it to us in Spanish, and boy, sometimes those Spanish—"Un fly, el fly, mira que la coje el fly." And we would hear the ball game but then we would laugh at the same time at the way he would do it. But then later on it got a little bit better when he had his own equipment and all that, but it started with the truck outside the factory.

AVL: Who was the person who did that, do you remember?

MP: I think, as a matter of fact, one of them lived back there, I think it was Beiro.

AVL: Oh, Beiro?

MP: I think so, I'm not sure but I think it was Beiro. He used to have a place—did you ever hear where the [*La*] *Gaceta* [newspaper] used to be, on 15th Street and 10<sup>th</sup> [Avenue]? Let's see on 15th Street, you know where the HCC [Hillsborough Community College] is? Is it catty corner?

No. Wait a minute, *La Gaceta* is on—HCC is on what? Well, it's around that area.

AVL: They used to have a business there, Beiro?

MP: Yes, I think it was him, the one that was there. And *la clinica del Centro Español* was right there, then *La Gaceta* was there, right next to it. It was all the same building. There are so few people that could give you so much but they're—Wait, let me go in the back.

AVL: Let's talk now a little bit about the Spanish Civil War. Tell me, what are the first memories that come to mind when you think of the war in Spain?

MP: The first members?

AVL: The first memories, the memories that come to mind. What do you remember most vividly when you think of those years?

MP: Okay, what I remember is that my mother and myself, we were going to go to Spain. Because my mother was sick and we were going to go to Spain, and we had already packed to go. It was a trunk, I remember that. But then the war started in Spain.

AVL: So you were going to leave in 1936, in that summer?

MP: Um-hm. (Phone rings).

AVL: We were talking, you were planning to go to Spain and stay there probably for a number of years, maybe?

MP: We were gonna stay there, I don't know how long, but we were gonna stay there and then this war started. But my mother was sick, so my father says, "Look." He had a sister in San Francisco, so he said, "Look, the climate in San Francisco is very much like the one in Asturias, so why don't you go to San Francisco?" So, that's what happened, my mother and myself, we went to San Francisco. My sister, my uncle and my father stayed here. They went just to visit around Christmas but, we went that summer. And I do remember when the war—in San Francisco they had some committee or something, I don't even know the name of it, but they did have some committee and they had these outdoor picnics to raise money for—

AVL: Was this Spaniards, or just—?

MP: No. Spaniards.

AVL: Only Spaniards.

MP: Yes. Because my aunt was from Asturias but all of her friends, they were from different parts of Spain, mostly *gallegos*.

AVL: I see.

MP: And they had this group. And I went two or three times to different things. Now, that is the only thing I remember there. Now, there was a family that had two nephews and one niece, and they were born here in the States but they were living in Spain, and they brought them in because they were Americans. Now, I do remember the girl—I don't remember her name, Margot, I think her name was—that her fingernails were all wavy, and I asked her one day, I says, "What happened?" She says, "The cold." And she said, I asked her, I said, "Was it bad over there?" she says, "Well, we didn't have any food, and the worst thing that ever happened to me, I was standing in line to get some food, and all at once the planes came over the top, the Italian planes came over, and they started bombarding. And I was with my friend, and my friend was standing behind me, and when the planes came everybody started to run and I started to run and when I looked back—" A bomb had hit her friend. And then she said that [the nails] was an account of she didn't have enough clothes, and they froze. That I remember. And from over there that's all I remember.

AVL: What was your aunt's name?

MP: My aunt *se llamaba* Visitación Beltrán.

AVL: Beltrán. That was her married name, Beltrán?

MP: Yes. *El era catalán*. And then I came over here and I remember we arrived in Tampa on a Saturday, and that night my father tells me, "I got your name down for *el Frente Popular*." I said "What?" Because we knew about the Frente Popular over there, see? I said, "What, I'm not going no Frente Popular." He says, "Well you're not going by yourself, you're going with Carmen Ramírez." Now, this is my own little private thing, I already told Pilar, her daughter. When I was a kid they had all these shows, stage shows at the Centro Asturiano, and Carmen Ramírez and Pilar Ramírez, they were the main—

And Carmen was real thin and I saw her over there. Now remember, I was little and I saw her on stage and she had a beautiful voice, to me, it was the prettiest voice in the world! And I admired her, and to me I thought she was so pretty! But I never had met her. Well, I grew up with that in my mind, what I had seen. So my father tells me, "Well, I'm going to take you to Carmen Ramírez's house and then you're going to the meeting with her." I was so tickled, because I was going to meet Carmen Ramírez. So, I met her and I went with her. And that first day that I went to the meeting the president was talking, you heard about this already? She was talking, and Carmen was vice president.

AVL: Who was the president?

MP: I think her name was Elisa, ask Pilar, Pili, because she knows. I think—

AVL: Elisa Morris?

MP: I think so, I'm not sure. But she was up there talking and all at once she started—I was sitting right along Pilar, because we had gone to school together so we knew one another—and

she started going, “Buh, buh, buh,” I said, “She's making fun of us,” you know, “Buh, buh, buh,” and then Carmen said, “Wait a minute.” Something was happening, she was having a stroke!

AVL: Oh, my God!

MP: I don't remember if she died right there or if she died later, but she did die. And then Carmen became president. Now I do remember that when she died they buried her at the Centro Asturiano, the old Centro Asturiano Cemetery. And we went from the Centro Obrero, we walked from the Centro Obrero we passed by the Centro Asturiano—now this was walking—I guess they took her in a hearse, *pero* we were walking. From the Centro Obrero we passed by the Centro Asturiano, walking, and then we went to the cemetery, walking. And then we had to walk back to get our cars. That part I remember.

AVL: Was there a lot of people?

MP: Yes. And another time that I remember walking. I don't remember where we started really. We had the American flag, and we were a bunch of girls in all corners and in the middle, you heard about that one?

AVL: No, tell me about it. I think I have a picture of that, it's one of the demonstrations?

MP: Yes, collecting money.

AVL: Yes, tell me more about that, what do you remember of that?

MP: Well, I remember. Where we started I don't remember. I do remember that we were carrying the flag. The flag's not here! [looking through photographs]

AVL: Yes, I have one with the flag. Have you seen that?

MP: No, no, no, no.

AVL: Maybe it's one of the ones I don't have a photograph of. Maybe I don't have a photograph of the one that you're talking about.

MP: The flag, let's say this is the flag. There was one girl here, one girl here, here, here, here, all over, and we were carrying it like this.

AVL: That's the American flag?

MP: The American flag. And as we walked people would throw money in there, change. I guess they threw some dollars, I don't know. But I know there was change because it got real heavy, and I think we were going to the City Hall with it. And, if I'm not mistaken it was to raise money to send an ambulance, or one or two or something, to Spain. I think the ambulances you got a picture of them around here somewhere.

AVL: Yes, I have one right here.

MP: See? I don't remember. Did they bring the ambulances? I don't remember whether they bought the ambulances here—?

AVL: No, they bought them in New York.

MP: In New York, that's what I thought. That part, let's see if I can, I don't think I can see that.

AVL: These people are from New York, so I don't—

MP: They are from New York? Then I don't know them. Yes, I knew that they had two or three ambulances that they bought. But I do remember carrying the flag, but not up lengthwise, I mean, spread out. And I forgot how many girls, I know Pili was there and there were quite a few of my friends. They were hauling it. We were all young girls carrying it.

AVL: Why were there just young girls do you think?

MP: Because we were the ones that could do all the walking!

AVL: Why was that?

MP: Because we could walk, and we had to walk. I think we came out of the Labor Temple, I'm not sure, I think.

AVL: So it was from the Labor Temple to City Hall?

MP: I think it was from the Labor Temple, I'm not sure about where—

AVL: What year would that be, do you think? Because you were in San Francisco in the beginning—

MP: Yes, I came back from San Francisco—

AVL: In '38, do you think?

MP: In '38.

AVL: So was this like a Labor Day demonstration or was it a specific demonstration for Spain?

MP: Yes. To raise the money for the ambulance.

AVL: I see.

MP: Now, what the date and why it was at that particular date, I don't know. No, I don't know about that.

AVL: Were there also men and women participating in that demonstration that you were telling me about?

MP: They were walking behind the flag—

AVL: Everybody was walking—

MP: Yes. Everybody who wanted to walk behind the flag, they were walking. I have a vague idea of it but I do remember carrying the flag. Now what was behind us and in the front I don't quite—I have a vague idea but not too much.

AVL: So then you took that money to the Centro Obrero, and everything went—?

MP: I don't know, I don't know where they took it or what they did. See? this was people walking. [looking at photograph]

AVL: Right.

MP: And here they—well, we were in the middle somewhere, with the flag. Yes, we were in the middle with the flag. And this was Ybor! This was in Ybor City, this picture. I think, on account of the lights, the street lights, see how they—?

AVL: Yes, that's Ybor.

MP: See the street lights? Well, we were walking down. I think it was to City Hall.

AVL: So what did you do once you got to City Hall, did you do anything there?

MP: I don't remember. I bet us girls got with our friends and then we went—I don't know what we did after that.

AVL: There wasn't like any speech, or any event, or anybody?

MP: If there was, I don't remember it.

AVL: A party, a picnic, or anything like that?

MP: Not that I know of, not that I remember.

AVL: What other things did you do?

MP: Well, we sold *churros*! We made *churros*! Let's see. We started making *churros*—I forgot where we started making *churros*. Well, I didn't make them, I sold them. But we started to make them—I don't know where—and there was a man here he had a grocery store, it was called Alfredo *y familia*, which was on the corner of Columbus Drive and 16th Street, that was Alfredo

*y familia*. And the women were making the dough by hand, and we also had a bakery, it was called La Palma. And the owner of the bakery, she was a Spaniard also, and she told the ladies that they could mix the dough in her bakery. So, they would mix the dough in the bakery.

Now when they started making the *churros*, really I don't remember when, but I do remember that the owner of Alfredo *y familia*, he told them, he says, "Look, I have an empty garage there behind the store, why don't you all use it for that?" So they did use it to make the *churros* there. And every Saturday you'd get at least, anywhere from 10 to 15 women, making them and this and that, and everything that was involved with that. And they got older people and young girls, whoever wanted to sell them. And I remember we used to go out with two baskets full of *churros*, I think they put five in each little bag. And I had 7th Avenue, all of 7th Avenue, and I went with sometimes two, sometimes three. We were two or sometimes three and we each had two baskets, and we used to yell "*Churros!*"

AVL: And people would come out?

MP: People. We walked, you were walking down the sidewalk, "*Churros!*" and maybe you stopped and gave us a nickel, a dime, whatever—

AVL: So, they knew when they bought the *churros* that it was for the Frente Popular?

MP: Yes.

### ***Side B begins***

AVL: Okay. You used to wear something?

MP: I think we had like a little—

AVL: Ribbon or something?

MP: A little ribbon. I think, I'm not sure. Now it wasn't the same flag we have now.

AVL: Right.

MP: It was orange, gold and purple.

AVL: Red, gold and purple.

MP: Yes, that was it. And I think that's what we had. And I remember—if we did have it I hardly ever wore it, because I hate to wear any of those things, even now I hate to wear it.

AVL: You didn't wear like a uniform or anything?

MP: No. Oh, for this I think we wore an apron. I think with—

AVL: For the demonstration?

MP: —with the Spanish colors. I think. I know we had an apron with the Spanish colors, and I think here we wore it. When we would walk down the street—(doorbell rings) Oh, gosh!

***Recording paused***

[Interview resumes the following day, April 19, 1997, at the Centro Asturiano]

AVL: Okay, Melba, you mentioned before about the demonstrations and you used to carry the American flag—

MP: The American flag.

AVL: And that demonstration was from Ybor City to the courthouse?

MP: To the courthouse, and people would throw money inside the flag, and when we got to the courthouse it was very heavy! I don't know how much we collected, because I don't remember, but I know it was very heavy. A lot of people didn't know what it was about. They just saw us coming. But they started asking and then they started throwing money, mostly change. There was a few papers, you could see it, *pero*, I remember it was mostly change, you know, and at that time, you know, there wasn't much to go around. So that was one demonstration that I saw, and this other one was not a demonstration, well I guess you could—I don't know, you call it what you want to, but when I first joined *el Frente Popular* the president was Elisa—I don't remember—

AVL: Morris, Moreno?

MP: Moreno or something like that, and that same day that I joined she had a stroke. So—

AVL: Was she young, what do you remember of her physically, do you remember anything?

MP: Really, no, I don't. But to me she was more or less like Carmen Ramírez. I don't know how old Carmen Ramírez was, but she was more or less. I think she might have been in her 50s or something like that. Because I was in my teens or 18 or 19, something like that. So to me she was an old lady, you know. And that same day that I went, during the meeting she had that stroke.

AVL: I see.

MP: Now, I don't remember whether she died right then and there, which I have a vague idea that she did. And Carmen Ramírez was the vice president and we went, we marched. I remember my father picked up this friend of ours. My mother was sick so she didn't get to go. But this friend of ours, myself and my father we went to the funeral. But we parked the cars and went to the Labor Temple, that's where we started walking. Now the hearse I don't remember, you know that? I remember that people, we all formed a line, and we started walking down and we passed the

Centro Asturiano and we paused there a little bit, I think.

AVL: There at the Centro?

MP: Right here at the Centro. And then we continued down to the cemetery which was on Ola and Indiana.

AVL: The old Centro Asturiano?

MP: The old Centro Asturiano, yes. And it wasn't too far from the corner, they didn't bury her too far from the corner of Ola [Avenue] and Indiana [Avenue]. Because I remember that we stood close to the fence, so it wasn't too far from there. And that's the only thing I remember about that. But I do remember picnics. We had a picnic at De Soto Park and I had some pictures. Let's say I have, let's not be negative, some pictures that I took at De Soto Park and there was a big gathering and the girls were all dressed *asturianas*. I have that picture somewhere.

AVL: Good. Let's hope I can get to see it. How about other meetings at the Labor Temple? How often did you go there, I mean, how was that organized, did people go every night or once a week, or how was that organized?

MP: Well. No, no. I really don't remember, I know it was quite often. Maybe it was once a month or every two weeks, I don't remember the time.

AVL: How did you know that there was going to be a meeting?

MP: Well, see, when I went the first time they said, "Well, we'll meet next time whatever date."

AVL: I see. What kind of things did people discuss there in the meetings, if you remember?

MP: Now, you're asking me a question! About what they were gonna do, I remember that they said, "Well, let's see if we can get together and do this picnic or pick up clothes," because they did have a lot of clothes donated, shoes, coats, dresses, whatever. And we would take it to Rosete's, they would take it to Encarnación Rosete, they would take it there and she would, if there was any mending to do I understand that she would do it, because she was a seamstress. And I remember that people would write letters and hide them in the shoulder pads, or inside of a pocket in the lining, and sew them—like a "To whom it may concern" letter—you know, whenever they donated the things over there. I know of one man that he received a letter from whoever got the, whatever it was.

AVL: What did people write in these letters?

MP: I don't know. I guess they were asking questions, different questions, and this and that and the other.

AVL: Information about relatives—?

MP: Information. Yes. I really don't know. I had an uncle that was there, and he fought and [Francisco] Franco caught him, they had him as a prisoner and they sent him to France to a concentration camp in France. And him and this other guy that had people here in Tampa, I think the name, I don't remember, I think he was *Ordieres de apellido, Ordieres*, they became friends and they escaped together through somebody from Tampa with somebody there, you know, they escaped together. Now, the Ordieres, I don't know how soon after he escaped, I don't think it was real soon, but I know he came to Tampa. Now, my uncle which was my mother's brother, he never did come into Tampa and I never met him. My sister did but I didn't. And, that's all I know about them. Now, there were people trying to get, the same way that my uncle got out, through somebody else, you know. I mean, they would hide here and there—

AVL: And people here were trying to get them out?

MP: Yes, the underworld, the underworld. Is it the underworld? Yes. I think that's what they called it.

AVL: The underground?

MP: Underground! Underworld is racketeers.

AVL: So was your father involved in any of that, in helping people get out of Spain, your father or the Frente Popular at some point, or anybody—people you knew?

MP: No, not that I know of. Well, [for] my uncle, yes, he did all he could because—that was my uncle on my mother's side, but he helped. Whatever he had to donate, money or this or that or the other, he would help and write letters to whoever was doing all of this. That part he did but I don't think he did with anybody else. But he was involved in all of this whatever, whenever they needed him, he was there.

AVL: These meetings at the Labor Temple were just for women?

MP: Yes, those were just women—

AVL: And men used to gather in other places?

MP: Yes, they used to have other days for them. Now, once in awhile, the women and the men would get together. Now I don't remember much of that because, remember, I was a teenager and when you're a teenager—

AVL: You have other things on your mind.

MP: Right!

AVL: But did you still work then with other teenagers, was that the idea that teenagers would do things together?

MP: Well, yes. Like Pilar, Carmen's daughter, was there and others—like this lady that was here, and the teenagers, we used to get together and if they told us "Take this flag over there" we used to do it. Whatever we had to do that they told us to do, we would do it. Now like *churros*, we all sold *churros*.

AVL: Who came up with the idea of selling *churros*?

MP: I don't know. I don't know who came up with that idea, but I do remember that there were quite a few women making *churros*, and it was the women. Now, when we started making the *churros*, I don't remember where they made them. That part I don't remember, maybe Pili knows. I don't remember where they made them, but I do remember that they were mixed by hand and the owner of La Palma bakery, she told them, "Why don't you mix them here in our bakery?" which wasn't too far. Now Alfredo *y familia*, the owner of Alfredo *y familia* grocery store had an old garage behind—it was on the corner of 15th Street, I'm sorry, on Columbus Drive and 16th Avenue—there was a barber shop and there was a little garage right behind it, that belonged to Alfredo *y familia*. So he told us that we could use that to make our *churros*. But before that, I don't remember where they were made.

AVL: I see.

MP: And, on Saturday, early in the morning, everybody would be there, all the women would be there. Everybody doing their own thing. And there were no captains there, everybody knew what they had to do. The worst job was frying them, because the women's hands would get red as a tomato and some of them would get swollen from the heat, you know? You had to fry them there. Now, us girls, we used to get baskets full of *churros*, two baskets a piece, you know the big ones like that? And we used to go out and sell them. Now, I used to go to 7th Avenue, you know, all around in there. And we'd start early, gee, I don't remember what time we would start but I remember it was early, and we stayed there until 9:30 until all the stores closed.

AVL: So you just walked up and down 7th Avenue?

MP: Yes, yelling "*Churros!*" I remember, I'm not gonna say where it was, it's a very popular place. And we used to go there and sell *churros*. And the men were all—they were all men, and they had their heads down, doing what they were doing at the tables. And they had their head down, and we'd go in there and say, "*Churros! Churros!*" We stopped by there and nobody said nothing! We couldn't sell one *churro*! So we went there two or three times. Every week it was the same thing. So, we'd go across the street, we're across the street, and here is this guy that used to go a lot to this particular place and he said, "Have you been in there?" I don't know, one of us says, "Yeah, we've been in there but we don't go there anymore because we try to sell them something and those men don't raise their head." He says, "What do you mean?" We said, "No, they don't buy anything from us." So he says, "Come on over." So we followed him, and we went in there and that man yelled out a scream and everybody raised their heads and he talked, and I mean he gave everybody heck!

AVL: What did he say?

MP: He says, "And I want everybody in here to buy *churros*." I mean, we finished two baskets in no time!

AVL: Who was this man?

MP: I just don't want to mention that, I hated to.

AVL: Yes. Okay, so then you sold all those *churros*.

MP: Oh, we sold the *churros*! Every week we'd go over there and sell *churros*. And we sold *churros* from 22nd Street to Nebraska [Avenue]. And if we were walking, when we started walking from where we made the *churros* to 7th Avenue, whoever we saw along the way we'd say, "*Churros!*" And very few people said no. We would get anywhere from a nickel to a dollar.

AVL: People knew it was the *churros* for the Frente Popular?

MP: Yeah, yeah.

AVL: How did they know that you were selling them for that, did you wear anything that—?

MP: I think. I have a vague idea. I think that we wore a banner at one time, but I don't remember if we wore it every time we went out.

AVL: I see.

MP: I know at one or two times we did have a banner, which in some of those pictures they have it. Then people just, you didn't even have to say what it was for. Everybody knew what it was for, you see? But, we sold! I mean, we sold! And there were not just 7th Avenue in Ybor City, people used to go to West Tampa and sell it in West Tampa, and wherever they could sell it they would sell. I don't know what other part of Tampa they went. Maybe some other people went, maybe Hyde Park, I don't know. That part I don't know, but I know Ybor City and West Tampa that we *churroed* them out!

AVL: So, that happened every Saturday?

MP: Every single Saturday! Every single Saturday! That was, to us teenagers it was a fun thing, you know? But the poor women that had to fry those things! And see? One of them went and mixed it, and then they came back. The others were ready to fry and they were using the regular *churreras*, the small ones. They weren't using the big ones like the Centro Asturiano over here. They had a *churrera* which was a homemade job, it was this big. I had it for—as a matter of fact, I still have the piece of wood that goes in to push the dough, I still have that. The other I got rid of it because it wasn't stainless steel or anything, it got corroded, so I threw that out. I said if ever I want to make it I'll have somebody make it for me, but the thing that goes inside, it's a piece of oak and it fit in there perfect.

Well, they had the regular *churreras*, the little ones, can you imagine? And where they were

doing it I think it was kerosene stoves. I'm not sure, but I think it was kerosene stoves. They had two or three of those. And those women would take turns, because their hands were real—especially one around there, she's in one of those pictures, Joaquina, her hands would get like this. Red. From the heat. They worked like an assembly, one would make the dough, and, of course, that one would come back and help, but then this one would fry, maybe two or three frying, then the other one would take them out, put them in manila paper or something to take the grease out, and then the other one would cut them, and the other one would put the sugar over it, and the other would put them in bags. You know. Like an assembly line. And then the other one would wrap it.

AVL: And then you would take them—

MP: Then we would take them out.

AVL: And you would go back and forth, once you were done with—?

MP: Once we were done selling them we'd go back—

AVL: To get more?

MP: To get some more.

AVL: And you did that until 9:00?

MP: 9:00, 9:30.

AVL: All day long.

MP: I mean, we did. Now what they did towards West Tampa I don't know, but we did. Because we were in walking distance from 7th Avenue and then, see? my father, he would be—around 7th Avenue there was a place there that was right across the street from the Spanish Casino, El Cafe Express—and he would be there, so I would walk to the cafe and he'd take me home. My sister was too small and my mother wasn't well, so it was just my father and I the ones that did the work. Now the *churros* it was just me, of my family. But there were a lot of girls and women, and older women, that Joaquina, she was an older lady. Sometimes she would say, "No, I'm not gonna fry today, I'm gonna walk with you girls." So she would walk with us, but usually it was the girls.

### ***Recording paused***

[Melba narrates an incident off the record] That's the only incident that ever happened, but I let him have it!

AVL: How about other things. What other things did you do to get money for the Frente Popular, that you remember?

MP: Well, they had picnics. And at the picnics *churros* never, they were always there! *Churros* were always there. And really, I don't know. I don't know of any other—

AVL: What would happen in a picnic? Were there any other—?

MP: There was food. Dancing, *bailaban la jota, el tamborilero, el gaitero*. Really, I don't know if there was any other fund raiser. And, see? To belong to the Frente Popular I don't know if you had to pay a fee or not, I don't remember that. Maybe you did, and my father paid for it, because I don't remember. I don't remember ever paying for that.

AVL: How about the collections in the factories, do you know about that?

MP: See? At that time I wasn't in the factory. But I guess they did have them. I assumed they had them, I don't know. I wasn't in the factory at that time. Let me think. No, I don't remember that part. There were other collections for different things, but I don't remember. Most probably there were because there were other collections for other things, you know? Fulanito, he broke his nose there was a collection, there was always collections for different things. So, most probably there were, but I can't guarantee it, I don't know.

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

MP: Yes, I been trying to find—to think—about that man. And he wrote a book, and he gave it to my father, and he dedicated it to my father. Was there such a person as Blasco Ibañez?

AVL: Yes, but I don't think he came to Tampa.

MP: Find out because that—

AVL: Oh, Marti Ibañez maybe, he was related to Blasco Ibañez, Vicente Marti Ibañez? A young man?

MP: No!

AVL: No?

MP: No. No, this was about my father's age. Well, it could have been my father's age because my father died when he was 49. But, of course, he was my father I saw him old! Blasco Ibañez, I remember that that man, he came in to Tampa and he had a jewelry collection and a coin collection. You know who I'm talking about?

AVL: No.

MP: Okay. And he came in and was it *la aduana*, immigration?

AVL: Customs?

MP: Customs! They took them away from him, and even the coin collection. He said that was his private collection. It wasn't too big, because I saw it. He took it to my house.

AVL: How come?

MP: Because my father and him they became friends. And they took the collection away from him. But they took it away from him after I saw it. He took it to my house. And I remember he brought it in one of these things where you put your jewelry and he had it in his pocket, and there were some kids at my house when they came in and I remember—am I getting this in? This has nothing to do with that, I don't think. I don't know why I have Blasco Ibañez in my mind.

AVL: What's the name of this man Buñuel?

MP: I don't remember. No, that name doesn't sound familiar.

AVL: Okay.

MP: And my father tells me, "See if you can get rid of these kids." So I got rid of them and then when we were alone he opened—brought it out of his vest—and he opened it up. He had beautiful jewelry, beautiful! Now, they had already taken the coin collection away from him but the jewelry collection they had not taken it away from him yet. And I distinctly remember a necklace that he had. It had in the center a diamond about the size of a chick pea (*garbanzo*) and then it had pearls, then it had diamonds *de mayor a menor*. It was beautiful! And then it had the clips on the side, you unclip it and you have two bracelets. And then I remember, I put it on. He put it on for me, that and the bracelets. And then, now I don't remember, I may be a little mistaken here, they might have given him back the jewelry collection and kept the coins. But I know that he sold some of those jewelry because he wanted to get his coin collection back, something like that. I have a vague idea. And this friend of mine bought a ring, it was diamonds and emeralds, beautiful! After that I don't know what happened.

AVL: Was he in jail?

MP: No, no, no, no. They said that he was trying to smuggle it in, and he says, nope, that was his private collection. And I have a vague idea that they were talking that he either had written to Spain or somebody high in Spain to verify that that was his private collection. Now, I do know that they did take the coin collection. Whether he got it back or not I don't know. And I don't remember whether they took his jewelry collection and then gave it back to him and he sold it, that part. He didn't sell it all, he sold a little bit because he wanted that collection, he wanted his collection but he had to get rid of something because he had to get money. And there was a man here that loaned him money, because he needed some more and he loaned to him. And I think the man got it back. I'm not too sure of that, but I think he did get it back. I'm not gonna mention names, but—

AVL: What happened to this—he came here to speak—?

MP: Yes, he was here to speak or he wrote a book or something. And then he came back. He

came here two or three times. Now I don't remember his name. I know that he wrote a book and he autographed the book and gave it to my father. Whatever became of that book I don't know.

AVL: Do you remember any others? Do you remember the Spanish Ambassador?

MP: Besides from the General.

AVL: Tell me about the General. You were in the picture with General Philemore and the group of women from the Frente Popular.

MP: Oh, yes. Everybody was behind the General like he was Clark Gable.

AVL: What do you remember about that day, before the picture was taken, what happened? He was there with you at the Labor Temple—?

MP: Well, he was at the Labor Temple that day, and of course everybody wanted to take their picture. But he lived *en casa* de la Fuente.

AVL: De la Fuente?

MP: Yes. He lived there.

AVL: Why, why did he live there?

MP: I don't know why. Most probably so that he wouldn't have to pay—

AVL: Did he know them already, or—?

MP: No, he didn't know anybody here. To my knowledge, he didn't know anybody here; that's why he took everybody and his uncle, because he didn't know anybody here. But, you know, he came in this uniform and the man wasn't bad looking, and the woman with her hat and, you know. He knew his stuff, he took everybody. He ate, he slept, he—

AVL: How long did he stay here?

MP: I don't remember. I do remember that my father comes in—See? Some of the men already knew that he wasn't the real McCoy. They knew it, but they hushed. That part I know because my father knew it and he came home and he said, "I'm going to tell you all something." He told me. I mean, he said it, but then he said, "And you," because he knew I was involved with it, says "I don't want you to breathe a word of this out; that man is a phony." "Why don't you—?" "We don't want to say anything because he's got a couple of days more to stay here and we want him to leave."

But, one day he comes home before it was time for him to leave and he says, "The women, they fell in love with him and they want him to stay longer." My father was so mad! He was over at de la Fuente's house, and the women were over there like this, you know? And they wanted him,

but I think he left. He might have stayed a couple of days but not what the women wanted. The men were just pushing him. What was his name? Martínez was the president at the time, of the men's group. *Creo que se llamaba* Maño Martínez. There is his son, *que se llama* Maño Martínez *también*.

AVL: The president, wasn't he José Martínez?

MP: José Martínez! And his son, his name is Maño Martínez. He might remember stuff, he might have something. José Martínez, he was the president. So, the men, I don't know if they all knew it but I know my father knew it, and a group of them knew it. Could have been that all of them knew it but they didn't want to, you know, upset him, they wanted him to just leave.

AVL: So what happened when people realized that he had taken all the money, and he wasn't—?

MP: They found out after he left.

AVL: Did they blame the people in the Frente Popular?

MP: I don't think so, I don't think so. No, I don't think they did. Don't quote me on that, but I don't think they did.

AVL: Did you like the general, did you get to talk to him?

MP: Oh, yeah. I got to talk to him. He looked good in his uniform and he talked nice, had a pleasant voice, I remember that part. And his wife was very nice. But really and truly I didn't have, us kids we didn't have too much, we just looked at him and say, "He is nice," you know? But that's about it. But the women, oh, my god, they went bananas! Of course, he knew his way. He always had his uniform on, that I remember, always had his uniform on.

AVL: So he was supposed to be from the Spanish Red Cross, that was who you thought he was?

MP: I don't know, I don't know. I know he was there.

AVL: Okay. Anybody else that you remember? Fernando de los Ríos, you don't remember him coming?

MP: Fernando de los Ríos, he came.

AVL: Do you remember anything about him?

MP: No, I know he came. I'm glad you said that because I had forgotten him. Mention others and maybe I will—

AVL: Marcelino Domingo, do you remember Marcelino Domingo?

MP: Yeah, Marcelino Domingo was here too.

AVL: He also came. Isabel de Palencia? She was one of the first women to come.

MP: To come here to Tampa? It might have been before I came from San Francisco.

AVL: Oh, when you were in San Francisco, right. Okay, how about Luis Soto, do you remember Luis Soto?

MP: No.

AVL: No. How about the volunteers, the people who went to fight in Spain? Some people from Tampa went there, do you remember anything about their families, Eladio Paula and Aurelio Paula?

MP: No.

AVL: Granell?

MP: No, I don't remember anything about that. I don't know a thing about that.

AVL: How did people who supported the Republic get along with people who weren't that supportive, you know? There must have been people who supported Franco.

MP: Well, you heard what Carmen said about the churches.

AVL: Yes. Tell me about that.

MP: Well. As a matter of fact, we knew a family that the daughter. It was the father and the daughter and they were both on our side, let's put it that way. But her husband wasn't, he was the other. And we used to ask for clothes, sometimes. Your neighbor here, "You got any clothes that you don't want, whatever you don't want?" So we would ask them, but we had to ask them in the hush, hush, so that the husband wouldn't find out. So she would, when her husband wasn't home, she'd get some clothes and put them in a bag and maybe throw it in her car or something. Or she would tell us, "Go by the house when he's not there," and they would give us the clothes and money, and whatever they had that they could afford to give they would give it. But it always had to be when her husband wasn't home. Her father and her the same thing.

And now on the corner of my house there was a little grocery store. He was a man, he didn't have any family, it was just him alone and the dog. And they would even hit the dog, yeah. And I remember—see? I have a vague idea that these places, businesses, if you weren't with the thing they would put, I think it was a stripe or something that they would—to indicate that you were against us. I think it was, maybe you ask one of the others they might remember. Because I have an idea that they would put something on the window, because I think that little old man there in the corner of my house they put something, I don't remember what it was. And he would pick it off and they would put it back on.

AVL: Oh, I see. Because I thought they would put something on the businesses that were supportive, you know, but not on the ones that weren't. Do you have the idea that it was the opposite, that they would put something on the ones that weren't—?

MP: I know the old man on the corner of my house. I don't know who did it, whether it was the committee or just people around the neighborhood, but I know that one they used to put something when the store was closed.

AVL: Right, to indicate that he wasn't.

MP: That he wasn't.

AVL: So people wouldn't buy there, was that the idea?

MP: Yes. Now, the other, you're right there; they used to do put something that you were for it.

AVL: Right, and what would that be like, do you remember anything?

MP: I don't remember, I don't remember, no. But I do remember this little store that they put something and he would take it off, and they would put it back on. Now, who did it? I don't know.

AVL: Were there a lot of people who supported Franco? How many people would you say?

MP: Oh, no, I haven't got an idea, but they were *bastantes*. quite a few of them that—well, I know. No, I couldn't tell you how many, but I knew of a few, not too many, but I knew of a few.

AVL: Did they get organized in any way to support Franco as the people who supported the other side did?

MP: If they did it was on the hush hush. I don't remember ever hearing of anything like that. They could've, but it was quiet, you know? No, I don't. And then, excuse me, with the Catholic—that—

AVL: Yes. What happened with the Catholic?

MP: Some of them, men specially, they got nasty! With the religion, oh, they got real nasty! You know? I mean, all right, they said that between the rows in the churches in Spain, the skeletons of babies, and this and that and the other. And some of the men they were very, very nasty, especially one that I knew, he got real nasty!

AVL: Against the Catholic Church you mean?

MP: Yes, yes, yes.

AVL: Tell me.

MP: There was one priest that—I heard that myself—and he started to talk to him about religion, and the man turned around and he let him have it with both barrels. Oh, but he was insulting! And I was listening to that—he didn't know I could hear him. And after he finished he says, "Now, as a man you can come visit me anytime, but as a priest don't show yourself around."

AVL: It was a Catholic priest he was talking to?

MP: And when the man left I came out, and I told him I said, "Boy, you let that poor man have it." I said, "I tell you something, if I was him I wouldn't come to visit you not even as a butterfly." I did tell him that, "*Ni una mariposa*." Boy, I mean, that man left that place, ooohph! And some of them were very, very, very nasty.

AVL: Why do you think they were that anti-Catholic?

MP: I don't know, I don't know why. Because they said, you know, the babies found in the walls and this and that and the other. And pictures came. I remember seeing one picture—I don't know where it came from, I guess it came from Spain because that was a church in Spain—and they were skeletons of babies of whoever, they were skeletons that they had found when they threw the bombs, in between the walls they found these skeletons, but that was their problem.

AVL: How about the Catholic church here in Ybor? Were they in any way supportive of Franco?

MP: I don't know, I don't know. That I don't know anything about. Well, you saw what Carmen Morales just told you, they used to throw rocks at her.

AVL: Yes. Did you know about that?

MP: No, no. Because, like she said, her father insisted that she went to Catholic school. Now, everybody else had drawn their kids out of school. She was still going to Catholic school. So, the other kids would throw rocks at her. No, I didn't know about that.

AVL: You never went to Catholic school growing up?

MP: No, no.

AVL: Your father wasn't into religion?

MP: No, no. We all believed but our own way.

AVL: How about the other communities here; the Italians and the Cubans and the Americans? Were they supportive, or neutral, or how do you remember that?

MP: The Americans I don't know, because at that time I was just only around the Latin people.

AVL: But do you remember many, like events taking place outside of Ybor City, maybe

downtown?

MP: Those other groups to raise money?

AVL: Yes, speakers or movies or something like that?

MP: No, no, I don't remember.

AVL: Nothing outside of Ybor?

MP: Well, yes. Maybe they went to a park or something. But it wasn't the Italians or the Cubans. If it was the Spaniards then the Italians and the Cubans would go, you know. But I don't think, don't quote me, but I don't think that they formed anything particular.

AVL: Right, but they would come to the events?

MP: They participated, yeah, yeah.

AVL: Pretty much they shared with the Spaniards there or was there some conflict between the communities?

MP: I don't think so.

AVL: [Benito] Mussolini, of course, was helping General Franco, so do you think that the Italians here had a different feeling that the Spaniards might have had?

MP: I don't know. I don't know. That part I don't know. I know Mussolini was helping Franco, because of that girl that I told you, they dropped the bombs. I really don't know.

AVL: The thing you just mentioned, was that the theater performance you told me about yesterday? Do you want to repeat that? I don't think we got it on tape.

MP: Okay. I think the show was named, the performance I think it was *Los Héores de Madrid*. And I think the one that wrote it was, I said it yesterday and I said it today and I can't remember.

AVL: Aparicio?

MP: Aparicio! I think it was him, I'm not sure. And they made the play, and it was right here in the Centro Asturiano. I remember Arturo Morán was one of the actors, he was supposed to be the grandfather. And Carmen and Pilar Ramírez, they were always in there. There was a little boy, I don't remember who it was, and Amelia Morán, Arturo's wife, was always there too. And they had this thing up here, and my father had been helping them set up the stage and he had told us when he came home, he says, "Look, I never saw this, and look at how they do it." They had a bag of something with, what is it this—?

AVL: Stucco?

MP: Oh, my gosh!

***Side A, Tape Two begins***

AVL: Okay, they would have—

MP: Like, small pieces of sheet rock, or something similar to that. And they'd put it in this particular bag, and they put it way up there in the ceiling, way up there. And the others were supposed to be bombing the village and, of course, one of those bombs exploded in this house, and the ceiling came down. And that's when it hit that bag and all of that thing fell all over the house. And they put ketchup on Arturo Moran's forehead. And the kid, he had died, and he had ketchup all over him. And of course all of that stuff fell. And Arturo gets the kid and he started crying and here comes this other. Now, this was a very, very sad scene—I'm not going to say the end!—but I knew how they had set it up. And everybody was crying.

AVL: Except you, you were laughing.

MP: And, as I say, I knew that everybody—I mean, there wasn't a dry eye in the place, except mine. And I was laughing, can you imagine? After that, really, I felt bad. But it tickled me so much, because I knew, my father had explained everything that they were gonna do: drop that thing, put ketchup on that. And I saw it, and I wasn't thinking of—

AVL: The meaning of it.

MP: —of the meaning of it, I was just thinking that that thing fell, the ketchup, and everything and I started laughing. Loud, low. I even stuck a handkerchief in my mouth. And I remember, this girl was looking at me, she says, "You should be ashamed of yourself!" The more she told me I should be ashamed of myself, the more I laughed. I really was embarrassed but I couldn't stop laughing! I had the giggles. And when I told my father!

AVL: He wasn't happy about that.

MP: Don't tell me you laugh! I said, "Well, you shouldn't have told me what was going to [happen]" I'll never forget that part! You're not going to print that, are you?

AVL: Yes, it's okay. So, the play was about the bombing of Madrid? What do you remember about it?

MP: Yes. I don't know. It was in a village. I don't know where it was, it was someplace in Spain. Most probably it was, because the title of it was *Los Héroes de Madrid*. Now, I don't remember if that one was the one that Carmen Ramirez's—Pilar—daughter was in it too and we had to sing *el "¡No Pasarán!"* And I remember we were all dressed up in uniforms, and Pilar was always the last one to come in, so she got the big one, they had to pin her.

And the pianist was Larueda. And we were all in line—I don't remember if that was the same

play—and we were all in line, and the pianist would get cross-eyed, stick her tongue at us and make funny faces at us so we would laugh instead of, you know? We were supposed to be serious and singing but, you know, with that thing down there making funny faces at us we couldn't sing. We'd go like this once in a while. And Pilar was next to me and she was singing, "I hope that old lady shuts up," and singing like if we were singing. I'd say, "Yeah, I hope so too." And nobody knew that we were talking, but that's what the pianist was doing to us. And I didn't think that was too nice, because we were trying—

AVL: You weren't supposed to do that.

MP: No, we were trying to sing. Now I don't remember if that was the same play or not.

AVL: You would sing these songs we were listening to today?

MP: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

AVL: “*¡No Pasarán!*” Was that pretty much the song—

MP: Oh, that was it! That was it!

AVL: —at every performance—

MP: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And I think it was with our left hand, I'm not sure.

AVL: With the fist raised?

AVL: Yeah. And another thing, I don't know how far back after the war, I think it was quite far, they made a movie *For Whom the Bells Toll*. I don't know what year, what year did they make that, do you remember?

AVL: It was after the war, maybe '40 or '41, something like that.

MP: In what year?

AVL: '40, 1940 or 1941?

MP: It was fairly after the war.

AVL: Yes. The war ended in '39, in March or April.

MP: Of what, 39?

AVL: Uh-huh. And that film was made later.

MP: With *La Pasionaria*. Wait a minute, wasn't there a woman by the name of *La Pasionaria*?

AVL: Um-hm.

MP: And that movie was about her? I saw it not long ago. It was somebody by the name of La Pasionaria.

AVL: Right. Yes, there was a woman in Spain called Dolores Ibárruri, and they used to call her La Pasionaria. She was a very good speaker.

MP: Did she used to fight too?

AVL: Yes.

MP: Then I think that that movie was about her. Because she was very active, she used to fight and everything.

AVL: Yes, a strong woman.

MP: Yes, I think that was—I saw it not long ago, I think it was the end of last year, it was on TV, with—

AVL: Gary Cooper—

MP: Gary Cooper, yes—

AVL: —and Ingrid Bergman.

MP: Yes, yes, Um-hm.

AVL: Did you watch any films related to Spain during the war, you know, newsreels or anything like that?

MP: Whenever we went to the movies they used to have the—news, and whatever they showed on the news, that's what we used to watch.

AVL: What was the reaction of the public, if you remember, when you would see whatever was happening there, I mean, did people say anything, or—?

MP: Well, some of them would yell, "Waaaaay." But not too much commotion, no. And then, sometimes, over here at the Centro Asturiano, they would come and talk, different men would come and talk, you know, that came from different places, but, to my knowledge, they weren't those big—you know? And of course I used to come. Whenever I had a chance I used to come with my father, but that's about all I can think of.

AVL: How about the radio, did you have a radio at home?

MP: Yes.

AVL: Did you listen to news from Spain, do you remember?

MP: No, my father did. I don't remember. Maybe of something that happened, you know, and my father would say, "Hey, wait." And we'd listen to it, but really I don't remember anything. But my father did.

AVL: Did you get in touch with your family in Asturias while the war was going on? Were you still communicating, corresponding? You lost contact with them during the war?

MP: Yes. No, after that, yes, but not during that. To my knowledge, let's put it that way. Because my mother's brother, when he escaped from the concentration camp he went to France. And then from France we don't know where he went. All we know, the last we heard of him he was in Mexico. And that's it, we don't know whether. I guess he died or something. We haven't heard any more from him. He would never keep in touch with us at all. And the other, Ordieres, I know he got married here, because I went to the wedding. Now whatever became of him, I don't know either.

AVL: Why do you think, Melba, that people here were so supportive of the Republic? How would you explain that to somebody who didn't know anything about Tampa?

MP: No, I don't know. I guess because it was, I don't know. It was from Spain and it was full of poor people and, I don't know, I really don't know. I just, my father told me and I went and I did what, you know? I really don't. Remember, we were teenagers and teenagers don't go too much into all this other stuff. But what I heard, *tu sabes*, there's always the good people and the bad people, the white hats and the black hats.

AVL: So your father, for instance, thought that the Republicans were the good side—

MP: Yes. That's what the majority of the Spaniards here in Tampa thought. And the others they said it was for the rich people. Like the Republicans and the Democrats mostly. I'm using that as an example.

AVL: What happened here when Franco won the war, what was the feeling like here?

MP: Do you know that I don't remember? I don't remember one word. I do not remember. You would think. I'm not going to say it in this thing [the tape recorder].

AVL: Do you want me to stop it?

MP: It's a nasty word what I'm going to use.

***Recording paused***

[Melba explains off the record]

AVL: So people were upset at the thought of Franco winning the war?

MP: Yeah. I remember that. That part I remember, including my father, and he never used cuss words.

AVL: So they were calling Franco names?

MP: They were calling him names, but I wanted to tell you *exactly* what they said.

AVL: Exactly, bad names. Did the people in the Frente Popular disband?

MP: Yes.

AVL: So, there wasn't any more activity—?

MP: No. I don't know if it disbanded, I don't remember if it disbanded right away or when, but it did disband.

AVL: I see. So the war in Spain disappeared from Tampa?

MP: The what?

AVL: The war, I mean, the situation in Spain disappeared once the war ended?

MP: Um-hm. But they did send a lot of clothes, wuff.

AVL: Later? After the war?

MP: Well, I guess after the war they sent it to their own relatives, but during the war, whoever. And they were putting those, like I told you, those little notes and letters in different places.

AVL: What did people in Tampa think about the United States' policy not to help any side, neutrality? Do you remember people discussing that in meetings or something? Were they happy with the way the United States was responding?

MP: No, I don't remember any of that. As a matter of fact, I don't think they even discussed that. I'm not sure.

AVL: Do you remember any reaction here when Franco died in 1975? Do you remember people reading newspapers or the news and saying or commenting on anything?

MP: No, I don't. The only thing, it came in the papers, and he died. Maybe somebody, some of the older people might have said the same thing I just told you when this was all—He died.

AVL: Right.

MP: You know what I mean? And that's it. But I tell you now. That, I'm not gonna put it on there.

***Recording paused***

AVL: Okay. Melba, before we conclude this interview I would like to ask you is there anything else you would like to add, or some aspect or questions that we haven't dealt with that you think should be included here?

MP: No, I don't think so. I think I said more than—I didn't know I had so much that would interest you.

AVL: Yes, you do. Okay, this concludes the interview with Melba Pullara and I want to thank you very much, Melba, for participating in this project.

MP: Okay. Well, I enjoyed it and I hope to see you next Saturday.

AVL: I hope to see you there too.

MP: Well, if I can get somebody to go.

AVL: Thank you very much.

***End of interview***