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Augustine Martinez and Mary Martinez oral history interview by Catherine Cottle, August 16, 2008

Augustine Martinez (Interviewee)

Catherine Cottle (Interviewer)

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Catherine Cottle: Well, today is August 16, 2008, and we are here today—my name is Catherine Cottle and we are here today with Marty Martinez and his wife Mary, and we are at Marty’s house, which is located at—you have to give me your address.


CC: Tampa. Right. Marty, I just wanted to ask you some questions about where you were born and where you grew up, and maybe we could start there?

AM: Yeah, well, I was born in Ybor City, Tampa, Florida, 1921. And I grew up in Ybor City in the south side, like Fifth Avenue, and then I went to Fourteenth Avenue, which is north, then I ended up on Twenty-First Avenue and Eighteenth Street, which is still further north, but it’s all in Ybor City. And from there I went to Orange Grove School, which was close to Cuscaden Grove [Arthur Cuscaden’s orange grove estate, now Cuscaden Park] at that time, and then it became a park later on.

CC: Orange Grove School—the one that’s still there now, the elementary school?

AM: Oh, yes, it’s still there now, but it’s not as pretty as it used to be, they have I think trailers (laughs), and one time one time it was like a ranch-type home, or ranch-type home school. There was a U-shape with a flag in the middle, real nice yellowstone beautiful building, and everybody loved it.

CC: So you went to school there from when you were little?

AM: No, I started there when I was about ten years old, and then I graduated from there and went on to George Washington.

CC: And was that a middle school, like a junior high school?
AM: George Washington was like, in those days, a middle school though the ninth grade and I lived on Eighteenth Street and Twenty-First Avenue—and Cuscaden Park, now used to be grove now, was on Fifteenth Street [2900 N. 15th Street] and Twenty-First Avenue, and that’s where we spent most of our days.

Before it became a park, and when they start tearing down the orange grove, half of it was like a vacant lot, and we used to play ball there. We used to have a sandlot ball, we build our own bases made out of cardboard and sand, and of course in those days nobody had tennis shoes or—we played barefooted or whatever shoes we had, and ninety percent of the kids didn’t even have gloves, we used to play ball barehanded. That’s why we were such good players later on in life, because we learned how to play ball barehanded, and then when we finally got gloves it was easy to field the balls. But we used to have fun all the time, no parents, no mothers, no fathers, nobody, except the kids—we were in charge. And we had two teams, one of them gave us t-shirts, and the name of the place was Honky Feed Store, used to be on Fifteenth Street and Buffalo Avenue, I believe.

CC: Honky Feed Store?

AM: Conky—

CC: Conky? Okay.

AM: —Feed Store, and they were the ones that gave us t-shirts.

Mary Martinez: Sponsored you.

CC: Yeah, they were sponsors.

AM: And those days, they had the feed stores for cows and cattles and horses, because that area of Ybor City was so wooded area.

CC: Where was that Marty, where was the store?

AM: Fifteenth Street and Buffalo, I believe it was Buffalo Avenue in those days, MLK [Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd] today.

CC: So they had cows and feed there, at that location?

AM: Oh yeah.

CC: Yeah.

AM: Everybody had—in those days, everybody had cows in their neighborhood, cows and horses. And the other team was La Paloma, which used to be a bakery, and we all—the only two teams that were in the neighborhood, and there was just kids from the neighborhood that played for both—one team or the other, and we grew up together, we went to school together, we played on opposite teams, and like I said before, if we had a glove whenever you came to bat, you leave the glove out in the outfield so somebody else could use it, because we didn’t have enough gloves for everybody. And the guys that had
the gloves and the bats were always on the team, no matter how good or how bad they were (laughter). They brought the equipment so they played.

The catchers were the—always the ones that had the equipment, for some reason—one of the kids wanted to be a catcher, so his father must have been in a good position, they would buy him a mask and a mitt and sometimes they didn’t even wear a chest protection, because in those days, I mean—we were kids, ten years old, eleven years old and we played ball. Nothing so competitive like it is today, we just played for fun. We always had good times. Like I said, nobody there would boss us or tell us—if we were doing something right or wrong, because we were all kids playing together. It’s not like today where all the parents are, they’re yelling at everybody (laughs).

CC: So, how—what do you remember, which year it was when you started playing ball?

AM: That was, like, 1930, thirty-one [1931]. I was ten or eleven years old then.

CC: And that’s where Cuscaden Park is now?

AM: Yeah.

CC: So it wasn’t Cuscaden Park when—

AM: At that time it wasn’t a park, it was just an orange grove, and I believe that the city bought it, bought the property in 1930, and they were already begin to clear the land, I guess they had plans to build the park, later on. I think the park was built, like, in 1935.

CC: So they bought the park from Mr. Cuscaden? [Arthur Cuscaden]

AM: From Mr. Cuscaden, they had a big orange grove there at one time, but as the years went by the orange groves got smaller, and they just kept clearing it out until they finally just cleared everything completely out.

CC: And that’s where you played ball? Right there in that area?

AM: We used to play ball on the—where the softball diamond is today, which is on Twenty-First Avenue, right in the same spot. And we used to just mark off the bases, mark off where were the foul lines, and that was it. No markers there, just had to take each other’s word that it was a fair or foul ball. No arguments. But we used to have a lot of fun with—of course, as then, later on in life the park was built, and that was my first home actually, ‘cause I used to go home just to eat and sleep. I left the house, if it was in the summer, at nine o’clock I was out of the house, come home for lunch at twelve, and go back to the park about one, and come back home about five, go back to the park at six, and come back home at nine. So the park was real good.

CC: What did—what kind of ball did you use, was it a baseball, or—?

AM: No, we—turned—we started playing softball then, because when Cuscaden Park was built, all the softball leagues were at Philips Shore, which is on Fourth Avenue and I think Twenty-First Street, that’s where they used to have the Philips Shore Park, and when Cuscaden Park was built, they closed down Phillips Shore and brought all the
teams to Cuscaden Park. And we had about five or six teams there, of course they had more, but I’m talking about my group, we were like the originals there.

We were the first group there that—like I said, we were like ten, eleven, twelve years old, and of course later on in life a lot more kids came in. But we were always there and we were always the originals, and, like, in the forty [1940] and forty-one [1941], before the war started [World War II], we were the old people, and the young people were eight, nine, ten, twelve years old. And so then, we were the boss (laughs), and we were in charge, by that time they had a supervisor named Tony Provenzano—

CC: Provenzano?

AM: And he, he took care of all—the whole park by himself, no—he had an assistant and her name was Mrs. Mexico, and she took care of the girls, and he handled the boys. And everything always ran smoothly, no arguments, no fights, no nothing, ’cause if you didn’t behave you were thrown out of the park, and you couldn’t come back in here at all.

CC: Was he a city employee?

AM: City.

CC: He worked for the city.

AM: City.

CC: So when you started there, in the early 1930s, it was a sandlot and then the city bought the land, and they developed it into the park that it is today?

AM: I believe that the WPA [Workers Progress Administration] built that park for the city, and in those days the WPA had jobs for everybody.

CC: Right, and then, when did they build the pool?

AM: The pool was built in 1937 and—

CC: That’s right.

AM: And today nobody knows—I’ll try to find out when the park was built, and nobody seems to understand that the pool was there after the park, but being that it’s a historical pool, that was there in 1937, and the pool was built after the park was built and nobody seems to understand that they have to find out when the park was built because they don’t have—they must have it on record but nobody can find it, so I guess it’s hidden someplace with cob—spider webs.

CC: You probably know better than anybody else, because you were there.

AM: I’ll talk to all these city employees and nobody knows anything about the park, they only know about the pool.

CC: Do you still see some of the people you played ball with, when you were little?
AM: I see some, but not too many left (laughs). I'm eighty-seven years old now, so I was born in '21, and we started playing ball like in the thirties [1930s], '31, and most of those guys that have—the only ones that are still alive are Joe Benito, who's a very good ball player, or was, he's still alive. We keep in touch, we talk by phone. Philip DeRosa, who used to play ball at one time down here, like everybody else, he went to work, and I'm trying to think—oh, Fernandos Quintanilla, who used to live right across the street from the park, Eight—Seventeenth Avenue and Fifteenth Street. He doesn't remember when the pool—(laughs) when the park was built either, he says, “It was in thirty-four [1934], thirty-five [1935], but I—” Because kids didn’t even care or anything about keeping dates or logs or anything like that.

CC: Right, yeah, it's informal, at that point.

AM: Yeah, we were just—when the park was being built, we used to go some place else and play, like, play Tarzan, up in the trees (laughs), and we used to have fun playing Tarzan too, because we used to have a lot of big oak trees and used to travel two or three blocks without getting off the trees from one tree to another from—on the branches.

CC: Really?

AM: Yeah.

CC: Where was this? You mean around the park?

AM: No, on Twenty-Sixth Avenue, right where Orange Grove used to be—is. Twenty-Sixth Avenue and Seventeenth Street. We used to go all the way to Nineteenth Street on trees, from one tree to another, and we used to have ropes up there just like Tarzan had (laughs). So we fun, and I don’t understand why kids can get bored today, we never got bored, we always had fun—we always found something to do, and some of my best friends in those days was Chelo Huerta. His name was Marcelino, but everyone knew him by Chelo Huerta and he has a big—he was in charge of the Downs Syndrome, some—on Boy Scout Road. What is it?

MM: MacDonald’s—

AM: MacDonald's Training Center—

CC: Oh, MacDonald’s Training Center.

AM: He was the president of MacDonald’s Training Center later on in life.

MM: He died.

AM: He died. And he used to live in Ybor Street and he and I used to go to each other’s houses and just call—Josephina, that was his mother, and walked right into the house and just like everything else, and he and I were in Cuscaden Park everyday. In fact, later on in life when we were about fifteen, sixteen years old, we had a boxing team and he was one of the boxers and so was I.

CC: Oh, really?
AM: Then Felix Menendez—

MM: I didn’t know that.

CC: I didn’t know that.

MM: I’m sitting here—

AM: Oh, we just—

MM: Sinking it in.

AM: We just—boxing just to keep busy, that’s all.

CC: Just for something to do.

AM: And Felix Menendez and Joe Menendez, two brothers that used to live there, I think they were Marcelinos—they were Chelo’s cousins, and they were very good ball players too, and they were one of the originals also. Chelo was one of the originals—and, I mean, I can give you a lot of names, but they—it gets out of control if I start naming all these guys.

And like that—and like I said, we used to—after the pool was built, we belonged to the—and in those days it wasn’t free, you had to pay a dime, but nobody had a dime to get in, so we had to talk our way in sometimes. Today everything is free at Cuscaden Park, I think, you can go in free and go swimming, whenever, can do exercise.

CC: As far as I know—

AM: And in my days, you had to pay to get in. Max Castro, who later on became an optometrist, used to be one of the lifeguards and friend of ours, and was also one of the originals at Cuscaden Park, but he became a lifeguard later on and so he was a lifeguard and we had a club. And every so often they had to empty the pool, in those days, to clean it—today I think you have filters—but in those days you had to clean the pool, like, every two years, and whenever they did that, we had a dance. Manny de Castro, who’s a Filipino, he was retired from the Navy, he—he had a bunch of guys who had a band, a Filipino band, so being the pool was empty, he would bring the band to the pool and we had a dance party.

MM: You never told me that.

AM: Well, Mary, you never asked me (laughter). And we used to have dances there, and some of the girls in the neighborhood would come, and in fact Max Castro married one of the girls that used to live on Fourteenth Street, and there were three sisters, beautiful women, you know who they are (speaking to Mary). The guy that owned the grocery store on Nebraska Avenue.

MM: Oh, yeah.

AM: American Beauty.
MM: Yeah.

AM: The name of the store was American Beauty, but he had three beautiful girls.

CC: Oh, wow.

AM: And Max Castro married Mary, the oldest one of all. Up until he died they were still married, and she used to hang in the pool hall all the time just look—keeping her eyes on (laughs), on Max Castro. But we always had—we had another guy whose name was Uulese Valles. V-a-l-e-s.

CC: V-a-l-e-s—

MM: V-a-l-e-s.

CC: —e-s.

AM: He was a—he became a professional boxer and he just lasted just a couple of years, but he was a city and state champion of box—amateur boxer at one time. Now he was the president of the club, because he was a good boxer (laughs), and we had another guy, named Jesus Rodriguez. Now he was a lot older than we were, about maybe five years older than most of us, and his name was Jesus Rodriguez, but we named him Father Flanagan. Because he was a big guy and the oldest one, so we named him Father Flanagan. In Ybor City everybody had nicknames.

MM: Catherine, are you cool enough?

CC: That’s—I’m a—it’s a little humid today, isn’t it?

MM: Yeah, I’ll make it cooler.

CC: Oh, thank you.

AM: And—

CC: Marty, I wanted to mention that too, that Marty is not your first name.

AM: No, my name is Augustine.

CC: Augustine.

AM: But I have—I’m a.k.a. [also known as], five or six times at the park, they used to call me Tsin, T-s-i-n, T-sin (chuckles), capital T with an s-i-n, and a lot of guys just called me T, also, I mean, I went—

CC: But now, most people call you Marty.

AM: Marty for Martinez.

CC: Martinez. Augustine is such a beautiful name.
AM: Oh, well, Augustine—my grandmother was Augustina, my father was Augustine, and I’m Augustine, and my son is Augustine, but I think that’s the end of the line for Augustine (laughter).

CC: Did anyone call you Augustine when you were growing up?

AM: Only in school.

CC: In school, yeah.

AM: Anybody who called me Augustine, I know it goes back to school days.

MM: And when I met him he became Marty.

CC: I wanted to ask you about the—you had mentioned to me on another occasion that sometimes you didn’t have any balls to play with, when you played ball?

AM: Well, that’s when we played just, like—balls with three or four guys. We used to make our own balls, get a little rock or something, and tie it with tape and then put old socks around it, and wrap the socks around it, and at the end we’d tape it up again and we played ball with that. We just played with broom sticks, ’cause nobody had, in those days nobody had money to buy baseballs or anything, so we just made—with whatever we could.

But at Cuscaden Park, even in those days, somebody always had a bat or two and a couple of balls, maybe five or six gloves, and the first baseman always had a glove, and the shortstop and any other gloves around, you just pick it up and play with. But the catcher, first baseman, and the shortstop always had gloves. If there was five gloves, catcher, first baseman, and shortstop always got the glove, and maybe the third baseman and maybe left fielder. The pitcher always pitched without a glove. But we had fun and no problem.

CC: When the city took over, did they provide any equipment to you guys?

AM: At the beginning, yeah, that was where a lot of the bats and the balls—that was it.

CC: And if you—you had to turn everything in at the end of the day, or how did that work?

AM Well, no—

CC: Did you have to check it out?

AM: The captain of the team always collected the items and gave them to Tony, and of course he knew how many bats and how many balls were in the thing, so we had to—we—in those days I don’t think most of our kids in that group ever stole any balls and bats from the park. Now they might have stolen from somebody else’s, but not from the park (laughs).

CC: Now did you tell me one time that someone kept one of the balls, or they took it home by accident, maybe?
AM: I took one home.

CC: Oh, you took one home!

AM: I’m talking about—this is up until the, when they were playing the inter-social leagues and they had a, I think it was a int—international league sent a team down for spring practice—I forget now if it was Indianapolis or one of those teams, and of course all the kids, if they had a ball go over the fence the kids would try to get and keep it.

And course they had guys out there that would work for the city and say, No, you got to turn those ball in, because they don’t have too many balls. But somehow I got one and nobody saw me, or I thought nobody saw me, and I took it home. And Manny de Castro, who was an officer who worked for the city and keep everybody in line, and he used to be the guy that gave us the parties at the pool, somehow or another he found out where I lived—in Ybor City everybody knows everybody, or where you live—and that same afternoon Manny de Castro knocks on the door, my front door, and my dad goes out to talk to him and say Manny goes, “I just came over because someone says that your son took a ball from the—while they were playing ball, and we need those balls back.” And so my dad gave me a yelling, and I say, “Yeah, I got the ball, I mean, I thought I could keep it.” And Manny says, “Well, you—if it’s an old ball then you can keep it, most of these are brand new balls and we need them.” So my dad done give me a dirty look, and I says, “Oh, God here we go, punishment is in—I’m sure I’m going to get punished.” And Manny’s like, “Now don’t punish, don’t spank him, don’t get him a punish, because everybody does it—we just want the ball back.” So anyway, I got off pretty good that day.

CC: So the inter-social leagues would come and play at Cuscaden Park, is that right? They play there?

AM: The inter-social league was a league of Latin Club, like the Cuban Club, the Italian Club, Centro Asturiano, the Loyal Knights, let’s see, am I leaving anybody out?

Cuban Club, Centro Astur—there were about five or six teams there that would play ball on Sundays and they were very competitive. I mean, we would take tin buckets to make noise with, bang on the tin—the old tin cans, you know, the old wash bowls and all that, and we used to have a lot of fun, and it was every Sunday. And the kids in those days, I was talking about—I’m talking about fourteen years old, fifteen years old, young kids were allowed to go in free, but the older people had to pay, I think it was a quarter to get in.

But they always had a good crowd, about a thousand people there on Sunday, because all these clubs are playing ball to see who would be the champion. Cuscaden Park was a center of attention for all the kids in Ybor City, because at that time it was the only park around, for a good two to three miles, so everybody used to come to Ybor City to play ball, basketball, volleyball, football, baseball, softball, whatever.

CC: And there were bleachers?
AM: Softball diamonds had bleachers, and so did the baseball diamond, and later on they put some roof on the baseball diamond, 'cause they did have lot of big crowds coming in on Sundays. But that was again 1937, thirty-eight [1938], thirty-nine [1939], forty [1940], till the war started in forty-one [1941]. Then after that it broke up, like everything else did.

CC: That’s really interesting. It’s such an interesting time and it’s so nice that you can share that with us—

AM: It was a time where—

CC: —because a lot of people don’t know how that was—

MM: I don’t know half of this—what he’s telling you.

AM: It was—I’ll tell you it was a good life, although we were very poor, and my granddaughters can’t understand this, ’cause I tell them we were always very poor, that we were always happy and always had a good time. And of course in those days you could go any place and nobody would bother you, no—you didn’t have any problems of getting in fights or anything. I used to—

MM: Locking the front door.

CC: Right.

AM: All of our front doors were open; my dad used to sleep on the porch once in a while because it was so warm, and in those days we didn’t have air conditioning. But our life in that era, like, from twenty-nine [1929] to forty-one [1941], it was wonderful. Nobody—we had good times and all, like I tell my granddaughters, we were poor, but we were always happy, and they say, How can you be happy when you are poor? And I says, “Because we were happy!” (laughs) Nothing to worry about, we didn’t have anything to worry about, we didn’t have any money, we didn’t worry about anything.

CC: Did you take the streetcar when you were in Ybor, did you use the streetcar?

AM: Well, the streetcar was, I think it was a nickel or a dime, I forget now. But the only way you could get the streetcar, I used to ride in the back of the streetcar, not inside the streetcars.

CC: Did you jump on the back of while it was running?

AM: Jumped on the back.

CC: Yeah?

AM: With—(inaudible) jump on it. We used to go to downtown and what we did was get—jump on the back of the streetcar, and those days we didn’t have police cars, we didn’t have police men on motorcycle or anything, and the streets that were always empty, no cars around, so it wasn’t dangerous at all. But we had a lot of fun. We didn’t steal anything, we were just mischievous, but not stealing or robbing or trying to fight
with anybody. I never fought with anybody except when we used to fight in the boxing ring, in Cuscaden Park.

CC: So, I didn’t know that about you, that you boxed, at Cuscaden Park also—

AM: It was just something—

MM: I didn’t either.

AM: It was something to do, and it’s a sport, we were all involved in sports. I didn’t even look at girls until I was about eighteen, nineteen years old. We used to go to the dances and I never took a date to the dances, to begin with I didn’t have money, but whenever I got there I used to dance with all the girls because I knew them all, we went to school together so, only fools had date—fools had girlfriends in those days (laughs).

CC: ’Cause they cost money.

AM: You had to be—terrible. We went—

MM: Marty, you took two girls to the fair who had money.

AM: What, I didn’t take them; I met them there. I met them there and then, they were paid for—they knew I wasn’t—I didn’t have any money and these were girls—the family had money, so they paid for the ride.

CC: Yeah, that’s a good idea.

AM: But we stayed around Cuscaden Park and in those days not too many girls used to go to the park—once and a while to see their boyfriends or somebody they liked, you know—

CC: Mostly their guys.

AM: We were just there to play ball, play basketball, play football, whatever.

CC: So when the girls started coming was that when the pool was built?

AM: Yes.

CC: Is that when the girls started to come—

AM: When the pool opened up was when we started getting girls in, around the park.

CC: More often?

AM: More, and more often then normal, but usually the only girls that we saw around the park was the ones that live across the street. So—

CC: It sounds like a wonderful way to grow up—it really does sound nice—

AM: But—we didn’t have any prob—and now they got used to hanging around us all the time, then he got—
MM: And the Depression—

AM: And the thing was, Albert Torres, he was a very good ball player. And he played in the inter-social league later on in life, and he lived like on Fifteenth Street and just a couple houses north of Twenty-First Avenue and later on in life he became a manager of a shoe store in Temple Terrace, and he was a good golfer, but then he got killed by lightning playing golf.

CC: Oh, no.

AM: And he got killed, I would say when he was about maybe thirty years old, so like I said, there’s very few of us left of that era, of the original ones.

CC: When you were playing ball there, did you notice the grocery store across the street from us there?

AM: Oh, yes, yes, yes, that used to be a real good grocery store. It was owned by member of—I forget now what social group it was. Used to have to be members of the grocery store so you could get a discount.

CC: So that was a co-op—

AM: Recurso.

CC: El Recurso.

AM: El Recurso.

CC: El Recurso.

AM: I think that’s the name of the store, the building is still there.

MM: They own it.

CC: Yeah, I know.

AM: Yeah, in fact you own that building now.

CC: Yes, I know. Well, I [am] curious about the co-op. I understand that it was owned by the cigar workers and they all contributed money to set up the grocery store and then it was sort of like a—

AM: Like a membership thing.

CC: Like an early day Sam’s Club, where you were a member—

AM: Right.

CC: —And you could buy in bulk. Is that how it worked?
AM: No, not in bulk. The thing is if you were a member you have to—you had to—volunteer to work so many hours a week, and that way you could get a discount on the groceries. But they had a lot of members there.

CC: And was it also open to the public?

AM: Oh, yes, anybody could buy—

CC: Anyone could go in and buy.

AM: Anyone could go and buy, but like I said, they had a membership, and if you were a member then you volunteer to work five hours a week, or ten hours a week, or whatever.

MM: I didn’t know that.

AM: And then you could get a discount on your groceries.

MM: We weren’t quite as poor as them.

CC: We’re getting to you, Mary; we’re going to find out about how the two of you met. So that was the twenties [1920s] and thirties [1930s] that you were—

AM: That was—the—

CC: When you were playing ball?

AM: Up until about, I guess, up until 1939, the store was there, and then, like everything else, it changed after the war. People moved out, people died, or whatever, and the new generation didn’t follow through on the same—

MM: With the co-op.

AM: With the co-op.

CC: So you were in Tampa until you went to the Navy, is that right?

AM: Navy, I went into the Navy.

CC: Okay, where did you go to high school?

AM: I didn’t go to high school but just one year, and then I—I was going to join the Navy. My dad talked me out of it, and then during the war I joined the Navy anyway. ’Cause I had a choice, Navy or Army, so I figured, well, I always wanted to [join] the Navy and then, the thing about this is we were four brothers in the service at the same time, but we all enlisted in four different branches. I was in the Navy, my—one of my brothers in the Coast Guard, and one of them was in the Army Medical Corps, and the other one was in the Seabees [the Navy’s Construction Battalion] which is not even existing now, and we were in different parts of the world at the same time.

CC: Where did you go to high school?

AM: Hillsborough.
CC: Hillsborough High School.

AM: Washington, and one year and that’s it, and that’s all. If you don’t want to go to school, you better go to work, which I did.

CC: So, did you go from high school right into the Navy? Or did you work first?

AM: I wanted to work, about three years, or two years or whatever, and then I went and joined the NYA [National Youth Administration], which is a government program, in those days, and I went to Ocala.

CC: Oh, okay, what is the NYA, do you remember?

AM: National Youth something, I forget what it was. But it was like a WPA program [the NYA was a part of the WPA]. I went to Ocala with a bunch of guys from Tampa, and we all went to a sheet metal school work, sheet metal school in Ocala, and you could either take up—

CC: Oh my. I didn’t know about this.

MM: I didn’t know this either.

AM: (laughs) You could either take up sheet metal, or, what do you call it with the blowtorch? Welding.

CC: Welding.

AM: Welding, you could either take one or the other, and I went with the sheet metal, but it didn’t last long because then my draft card came along, so then I left and went into join the Navy.

CC: And you had three brothers. And is that all of the siblings that you had, just—?

AM: No, we were five; we were five brothers and one sister.

CC: Five boys and one girl.

AM: And we all came back from the Navy.

CC: So all five of the boys went into the service?

AM: My youngest brother went during the Korean War.

CC: Oh, so he was too young to go, during World War II.

AM: Right, well we came back, everybody came back in good health, I’m sure my mother went through a lotta headaches.

CC: That must have been tough, yeah, that’s hard.

AM: I always told her, “Don’t worry about me,” I says, “if—you might not get any letters today, but maybe a month later you’ll get it.”
CC: Yeah, not to worry. So where were you stationed?

AM: I was on a ship, well, first I went to Panama Canal.

CC: Oh, you did!

AM: Yeah. I stayed there about two years, a year and a half, I think it was. I met some very good people, we still correspond today. I mean the daughters correspond, because the old people died years ago. But there were one, four sisters, they were all younger then I was—maybe fifteen, thirteen, ten and maybe five years old, and I still write to Margret and the other one, I forget her name now. Margret, she lives in Utah now, but we still correspond, like, once a year.

MM: It’s amazing that they’ve in contact.

AM: And people can’t believe that we keep in touch, ’cause I met them in 1942 or forty-three [1943], and we still correspond, and she was a little girl when I first met her.

CC: And these were people that you met when you were stationed at the Panama Canal.

AM: Panama Canal, and they were real nice people, they were very good to me, and we always got along real nice.

CC: That’s really interesting. So when you were stationed at Panama, then were you stationed in Panama City, or were you out by the canal?

AM: No, no, Balboa, I was in Balboa, the Canal Zone. And I was in a patrol craft out there.

MM: Catherine, are you comfortable enough?

CC: I’m good, thank you. Yeah, I’m good. So when you left the Panama Canal, where were you stationed after that?

AM: Then I went to San Francisco; then I got on the troop transport ship, and then of course we went all over, we went in the Pacific and had us some battles. We went across the equator, and of course you got across the equator for the first time you get—baptized, or whatever they call it, and they’re—if they don’t like you, they’ll really punish you, but if you get along with people they don’t punish you too hard.

CC: The guys on the ship?

AM: Yep.

CC: They would sort of put you through an orientation or a sort of initiation?

AM: Initiation, they give—initiation, and the guys that initiation you are the guys are been over the equator and have been in the Navy for quite a while. And a lot of guys—I didn’t get punished too hard, but some of them really got punished. One of them got three—third degree burns from the sun, ’cause he got chained to the deck with boxing gloves on his hands, and he had to separate white and black beans (laughs).
CC: That sounds terrible.

AM: It is terrible, but I mean that’s the way the Navy is. I don’t know about today’s Navy, today from what I hear, they, it’s getting to be real—

CC: Pretty nice?

AM: Real, like you can’t do a lot of things any more, like you can’t spank your kid today; that’s a big mistake, but anyway, in my life, growing up was around Cuscaden Park.

CC: So when you came out of the service after the war, the war ended, and then you came home, is that what happened?

AM: Right.

CC: And then where did you live when you came back?

AM: Well, I lived on Fourteenth Avenue, where my mother and dad used to have a house, a home. And I lived there till—for about, maybe, six months, and then I went to Jacksonville, and I went to barber and beauty school, in Jacksonville, and I learned how to cut hair and maybe I was going to become a beautician. After I got out, I didn’t like it that well. But I spent there about a year, year and a half, and then came home again.

And at that time—that’s when I met Mary, my wife. I was helping a friend of mine who had a beauty shop, around Grand Central Avenue. Grand Central Avenue ended up there on the river or someplace, because it’s a dead end now, but in those days Grand Central Avenue became something else, and if you went—it became Lafayette when it went downtown, but this guy had a beauty shop there, and he said, “You come over and help me, and maybe you can—maybe you’ll like it.” Well, I worked with him for about six months, and I didn’t like it.

CC: Yeah. So how did you meet Mary?

AM: Well, I met Mary by accident, I met my wife by accident, her went—visited another girl that I knew—that had a re-weaving shop, in the arcade, which is not there anymore, I don’t think there—right now—in fact, the office she had was in the arcade which is part of the restaurant now, Mise En Place [Tampa].

CC: Oh, nice, right. So it was a shop?

AM: One of the—one of the dining rooms of the Mise En Place is where Mary was helping this girl—she had an office there, so I went in to see this girl, and her name was Dorothy Gullo.

CC: Dorothy?

AM: Gullo.

CC: Gullo.

AM: G-u-l-l-o.
CC: G-u-l-l-o. Okay.

AM: And I went in there, and I see this beautiful woman sitting on the desk, and I says, “Where’s Dorothy?” and she says, “She’s not here, she had to go to the bank and do some banking business.” And I said, “Well, tell her that Marty came by to see her.” And I left.

MM: Not Marty, you weren’t Marty then, it was Tsin.

AM: Yeah, I told her Marty, yeah. And I, then I said, “Tell her Marty came by to visit.” And I left, but when I left, I said, “Man, what a beautiful girl that is,” (laughs) and from what I understand, my wife Mary, at that time says to herself, “Wow, what a good looking man this is.” (laughs)

CC: Is that what happened, Mary?

MM: Yes.

AM: And—

MM: He had a shirt on and it was so nicely ironed, he ironed it. He ironed his own shirts.

CC: (laughs) See, that’s what did it, that’s what did it.

MM: That shirt did it.

AM: She saw that shirt and fell in love with the shirt, and not me (laughs). But anyway, the next thing I know, Dorothy called me, “Marty, my mother and I are—and Mary are going to the—to St. Petersburg to the Coliseum to dance Saturday, you want to come along?” I said, “No, because I already made plans with some friends,” and they were all guys, no girls, “friends to go to the Cuban Club and that’s where we go on Saturday night bla-ba-ah—” They said, “Well, if you change your mind, give us a call.” Friday night I—Friday I called her. Said, “Dorothy, I changed my mind, and I wanted to go to the Coliseum with you girls.” And her mother had a car, so she drove, I didn’t have a car, I didn’t have job (laughs). So anyway, we went to the Coliseum and that was the hook right there (laughs).

CC: Very nice.

AM: Since then, we’ve been going together, we got married six months later. No, nope, I didn’t have a job then either.

MM: Met in July, got married in December.

CC: Oh, my word.

AM: And, met in July, got married in December. Mary’s a fast worker, she was real fast.

CC: So where did you get married?

AM: OLPH, on Eleventh Avenue and Seventeenth Street [Ybor City].
CC: OL—O-L-P-H?

AM: OLPH.

MM: Our Lady of Perpetual Health.

AM: They call it our—the kids at Ybor City call it Our Lady of Poor Health (laughs), or Poor House, one of the two.

CC: I saw the pictures from the wedding. They were so beautiful, very, very elegant, beautiful, very nice.

AM: And you know what, the day we got married, you know where I was in the morning, Sunday morning, I was at Cuscaden Park playing football (laughs).

MM: I told him, “What if you had broken a leg or something?” He says, “Well, I would have limped down the—down the aisle” (laughs).

AM: That was my farewell party, in those days we didn’t have parties like they do—what do they call those—

CC: Bachelor parties.

AM: Bachelor’s party and all—in those days, nobody had money to give any parties, and we played football and basketball and softball—in the summer, we played the tomato league—

MM: No, we had a wedding.

AM: In the summer we played softball, in the winter we played football, and then at night we played basketball. So we were always busy, the only thing—and of course if you had a girlfriend you got in trouble then, cause you had to leave—go visit the girl—not going to play anything (laughs).

CC: They messed you up on your game.

AM: Yeah (laughs), right.

MM: We lived on North Boulevard.

CC: After you got married, you moved to North Boulevard?

AM: Right.

MM: No, we were there—I—

CC: Oh, you do—

MM: I bought a home—

AM: Mary had a home on North Boulevard, but she never told me she owned a home, she kept it a secret till after we got married. See how—
CC: That was smart.

AM: Mary’s smart and fast, that’s why I been married for sixty-five, sixty years now (laughs).

CC: How long?

AM: Sixty.

MM: Sixty.

CC: Sixty years.

MM: It will be sixty-one in December.

CC: Okay.

MM: So we built a bungalow in the back and my mother and my mother and father moved into the bungalow and we—

CC: And you had the house in the front, and that was on North Boulevard?

AM: Right.

MM: Between Armenia and Hopper—Armenia and—

AM: Ross Avenue.

CC: So it’s just right down the street from here.

AM and MM: Yeah.

AM: About a mile and a half.

MM: In fact my insurance man saw this house—we lived here fifty years.

CC: I wanted to ask you about that, but, just about the wedding—you had the wedding in the church and—

AM: Reception in her house, in her house, not mine.

CC: Yeah.

AM: (laughs)

CC: I noticed that you had a very large wedding party was that—

MM: Oh, yeah.

AM: Just friends and family.

CC: That was friends and family.
AM: Family, most—basically.

MM: We had a big wedding, we had three or four hundred people there, I guess.

AM: But anyway, even when I was get—I didn’t have a job then, did I? Or was I already working?

MM: Yeah, you had—you were starting at Sears.

AM: Yeah, I already had a—my father-in-law told me, “Why don’t you—” before we got married, says, “Why don’t you go and apply for a job at Sears, they’re hiring a lot of people.” So that’s—that’s what I did, I went and applied for a job.

CC: Where was—

MM: Worked there for thirty-eight years.

CC: Oh my, where was Sears, near—?

AM: Sears was downtown, on Florida Avenue, right next to the railroad tracks. I’d cross the street from Kress’s dime store. So I went and applied for a job at Sears, and I think I got the job because this friend of mine—I was taking an aptitude test—going through this test, when this friend of mine walked in through the personnel department and says, “Hey! Tsin—” The nickname way back from Cuscaden Park, “What are you doing here?” “I’m applying for a job.” [Marty] He turned around and told the personnel director, “Hire this guy, he’s a good guy, he’s a good softball player.” And the reason he said that’s because they had a softball team at Sears. And up until this day, I think that’s what got me the job, the guy saying—and they needed players.

CC: They needed you for the softball team (laughs).

AM: Yup. So they hired me and I went to work at Sears, went to work in the warehouse. The first two weeks, I unloaded tires, and if you ever work in the warehouse unloading tires that come from the factory, when you get through that day you’re black, because all the tires are new and rubber is black.

CC: Yeah.

AM: So anyway, I worked there for about three or four months, and like I always say, I’m lucky, no matter what; I always end up on the good side of everything. They call me and they tell me, “Tomorrow when you come to work, where a nice pair of pants, shoes and a tie, and a shirt, a white shirt.” I says, “Yes, ma’am.” I says, “Why is it?” “You’re going to be transferred to the men’s department store.” So they—I went back in, and the next day I reported, put them in selling clothing. Shirts, underwear, ties, socks—I worked there for like, what, another two years, and they opened the appliance department and they took me up to the appliance department. And I didn’t even ask for it, they just transferred me up there, and I worked for Sears for thirty-eight years selling appliances.

CC: Wow.
AM: I made good—selling appliances for Sears, and in those days Sears was a very good company.

MM: And I worked in insurance.

AM: Good retirement and good everything, so when I retired from Sears twenty-two years ago, I’m living on my retirement.

CC: That’s really wonderful, and you were able to support your family and have a nice life.

AM: And—and the funny part about it, I never wanted to look for it—

MM: I’m the bookkeeper.

AM: The only time I went looking for a job was as—

MM: I make ends met.

AM: The only time I ever went looking for a job was at Sears and the guy tells, “Hire this guy, he’s a good softball player” (laughs), and he used to play softball with me at Cuscaden Park, his name was Dominic Maggio.

CC: Maggio? Okay.

AM: Dominic Maggio, and he worked at Sears a long time. Then he quit and he went on his own and had a carpet business in Tampa, he’s—and he has—he’s related to the Fonte Family. His wife was Fonte.

CC: Fonte?

AM: F-o-n-t-e, an old family. West Tampa, used to have a dry cleaning business and everything else. But he worked and—he turned around and, “Hire this guy, he’s a good softball player.”

CC: Yeah, and when you played for Sears, where did you play?

AM: Cuscaden Park.

CC: At Cuscaden Park?

AM: Went back to Cuscaden Park, we played at Cuscaden Park.

MM: Yeah, but you played [for] the company.

AM: Yeah, we played a lot of places, but when ever we played a good team, like the Clearwater Bombers, we played at Cuscaden Park. I think we played them twice.

CC: Was that a team that was sponsored by a store?

AM: Clearwater Bombers.
CC: Clearwater Bombers.

AM: They were the world’s champions, for a long time.

CC: For softball? Oh.

AM: They were like the old—they were like the Yankees [New York Yankees], that’s why they call them the Clearwater Bombers, because they had two good pitchers, Herb Dudley and the other one, no I forget his name—

MM: It’s pouring out there [referring to outside].

AM: Herb Dudley was the best pitcher in the world he pitched a hundred miles an hour, a softball. Anyway, anytime we played at Cuscaden Park against the Bombers, we always lost naturally. If we got a hit we were lucky, but they always had a crowd of about three thousand, four thousand people, on the bleachers, on the side lines, and all the way out on the right field side, in the outfield. We played them twice—in fact. we played them once in the baseball diamond, because they had another tournament going on the softball diamond, and of course we lost the game, and we also played the piston, I think they used to call them Zollner Pistons [Ft. Wayne, Indiana] they were also like the second or third ranked team in the world in softball. And whenever we played the—we played them once, I think, and again they had about three or four thousand people just to watch the game. It wasn’t because of us it was because of the other team. But we were city champion for two years.

CC: Oh, fantastic.

AM: We were city champion for two years and top league, because we were in the employers leagues for about four years when I started playing, and then when we became champion in the employers league, and we had a very good pitcher, him name was Danny Diaz?

MM: (murmurs in agreement)

AM: He was the best pitcher in Tampa, so Sears hired him because he was the best pitcher, so we became champions, so then we had to jump to the top league.

CC: To the next level.

AM: To the next level, but we played a lot of games at Cuscaden Park.

CC: It sounds like it was very competitive.

AM: It was, very competitive.

CC: Very competitive.

AM: But we had a lot of fun, I mean, everything was fun in those days. Today everybody looks like everybody’s mad and in a hurry, angry.

MM: He’s watching the Rays [Tampa Bay Rays] play.
CC: I wanted to ask you about when you built your house here.
AM: This house was already built.
CC: This house was already built on Virginia Avenue.
AM: Right.
CC: Did you tell me that, the houses were just being built in this neighborhood when you moved here?
MM: Yeah, it was a year old.
CC: This was a one-year-old subdivision?
AM: Yeah.
MM: It was built by the building inspector.
AM: What was his name?
CC: The building inspector for the city of Tampa?
AM: Yeah.
CC: Was it—
AM: Going back fifty years now.
CC: Villavasenus?
AM: No, no he had kind of a German’s name.
MM: His wife got sick, she had cancer.
AM: His wife died, and so he sold the house.
CC: Oh, so the building inspector built this house for—
AM: Himself.
CC: For himself.
MM: He and his wife lived here for a year—
AM: He and his wife lived here for a year, but she died. So then he moved out.
CC: So when you moved in this was a—all, all these housed were brand new, one year old.
AM: This one was.
MM: No, not really, Olga’s [a neighbor] house—
AM: Olga’s house was already built, and so were all these three homes on this side. From this side, that way everything was ne—here already.

MM: That one wasn’t there, that house wasn’t there.

AM: Across the street, all the homes were built already.

CC: I was trying out figure out when the neighborhood was built, and I think that you told me that—

AM: This neighborhood was already plotted, years ago.

CC: It was plotted years earlier.

AM: ‘Cause I remember, I used to—when I was delivering milk, we used to come into this neighborhood and that one house here, one house on—two or three blocks away but the streets were already there.

CC: They were already plotted.

AM: The red brick streets were already there.

CC: Okay.

AM: And that was even before the forties [1940s].

CC: Yeah, yeah, so you said that you delivered milk over here?

AM: One of the homes, I forget where.

CC: Was that one of your jobs?

AM: Florida—yeah one of my jobs.

CC: When you were younger?

AM: Florida Dairy, which was the biggest dairy in the whole city of Tampa, I worked for them for maybe a year.

CC: Yeah, I was curious about what you said about this neighborhood, because I thought you had told me at one point that there were orange groves here and there was nothing.

AM: No, no.

MM: There was a laundry—

AM: There was nothing here, I mean—

MM: —where Olga’s house is.

AM: This, I think this area had pine trees all over it, as far as I know it, you remember?

MM: Wasn’t there was a laundry at Olga’s house?
AM: They say—they say has a laundry across the street, but that was before we even moved here.

MM: When we moved here (inaudible)

AM: But the funny thing about it, I—when I was digging in my backyard, I dug out some horseshoes, so they must have had some horses for buggies.Cause the laundry must have been here before anybody else was here.

CC: I was thinking that you were going to say they played horseshoes over here, but for the horses.

AM: Yeah, I’m finding a couple of things that belongs to horses, like around the neck and horseshoes and all that. In fact, I still have it out there. But there’s so many stories I mean to tell you about my life, that it’s hard to. Like I said, the biggest part of my life in those days was Cuscaden Park, that was it.

MM: And after that it was Mary.

AM: Then after that it was Mary, because I lost track of all my friends for a while because I was working at Sears, which was another section of town and of course I was off on Sundays in those days. But then we started having a family, so you get—

MM: And you had a team.

AM: So then you—everything you—you supposed to drop everything once you have a family, which I did. Devoted my time to my wife—my wife, and family (laughs).

MM: But he had a little league team.

CC: Oh, really? So did you—

MM: So the days that he worked late at Sears—

AM: Yeah, the little league team was something because of the kids, but I mean I wasn’t too happy about the little league team anyway, ’cause too many parents involved. Forget it.

CC: All the parents telling everybody what to do.

AM: Not only that, yelling at people, yelling at game, yelling at the ump [umpire]. Today they even have fights between parents. Which is terrible. And—

CC: I know there’s so much to talk about, but I just wanted to kind of get an idea about what your life was like in Ybor City, and it’s really interesting.

AM: If I ever write a book, and I’m going to name it “I was born in Heaven.” ‘Cause I mean—

CC: Yeah, you really enjoyed it?
AM: I—I enjoyed everything that happened to me, even the spankings (laughs).

MM: He got one every day, almost.

AM: No, not every day, every other day maybe.

CC: Did you tell me that you had a cow at your house?

AM: Oh, yes.

CC: Now, where did you keep the cow?

AM: In the backyard.

CC: In the backyard.

AM: Well, remember, in those days, where I lived there was almost at the end of the city limits, and everything from north of us was wooded area. Maybe a house or two here, maybe two or three blocks down they have another couple houses. We had a lot of vacant land, a lot of pastoral land.

CC: And that was at Fourteenth Street?

AM: No, Twenty-First Avenue and Eighteenth Street. And the funny part about it, I wasn’t the only one with a cow. We had about four or five guys within a block, and we all went into Orange Grove [Middle School] and we all took our cows with us.

MM: And stake them.

AM: And we used to stake them out in the woods.

MM: Across the street—

CC: You took your cows to school?

AM: Yeah, we—not into the school itself, but I mean a block from school, we staked the cows right there and the wooded pasture, and all the other guys did the same thing.

CC: Is that so the cows could graze while you were in school—

MM: Yeah.

CC: Is that why you did it?

AM: And three o’clock in the afternoon, we’d pick her up and take her back home again. We had to milk the cow in the morning and milk the cow in the evening, and all these other kids that were living in the neighborhood, in fact Felix Menendez and Joe Menendez, the two brothers that I named before, they also had a cow, and we used to meet going down the street with cows, and once a week—

MM: With a Cuban sandwich in their backpack.
AM: No, Mary, that was before.

MM: That was before?

AM: A Cuban sandwich that was, George Washington [Middle School].

MM: Okay, sorry.

AM: So we, like—the Menendez boys, the Gonzalez boys who lived down the street and Castellano brothers who lived on the corner. In fact his sister married to the bakery owner in West Tampa—

CC: Oh, the Castellano store in West Tampa?

AM: No, what’s the name of the bakery?

MM: Alessi Bakery.

AM: Alessi Bakery.

CC: Alessi—

AM: One of the sisters of the Castellano brothers [Phoebe Castellano] married [in 1938] Alessi Bakery owner [John Alessi], going back into the forties now [1940s]. But in those days they had a cow also, so, and he lived half a block from me and the other guy lived another block or two blocks. So we all met there, the wooded area, we claim our—twenty feet of chain where the cow could go on and just pasture out in the wood and eat and drink water, because they had canals there also in those days.

MM: And the cow’s name was Viru Lilla.

CC: What was it?

AM: Viru Lilla.

CC: Viru Lilla?

AM: Viru Lilla, how do you spell it?

MM: V-I-R-U L-I-L-L-A

AM: Yeah, Viru Lilla, I don’t even know what it means, but anyways, that’s what it was named, nicknamed!

MM: They sent him—

CC: And the milk provided was for your family?

AM: Yeah.

CC: Yeah.
AM: We had—we were five of us then, my one—my older brother had gone to New York to work, but we had milk all the time.

CC: What did your father do when you were growing up, Marty?

AM: Cigar maker, worked in the cigar factories.

CC: Was he part of the co-op for the El Recurso grocery store?

AM: Right, for a while there he was.

CC: And he was on the floor making the cigars, is that—

AM: Well, he used to work in the factory—cigar factories, wherever, making cigars, whatever they did. I never got involved in cigar making, so I don’t know.

CC: And then did he belong to—did your family belong to one of the social clubs?

AM: Cuban Club.

CC: The Cuban Club.

MM: His was illegal.

CC: (laughs) That’s funny.

MM: It was like that, you know—

AM: Like a what?

MM: —something, like my sister—

CC: So, where was your father from?

AM: Key West.

CC: Your father came from Key West?

AM: He was born in Key West.

CC: Okay, and his name was Augustine also.

AM: Augustine Gullemo Martinez, Sr.

CC: And he was from Key West?

AM: Key West, he was born in Key West.

CC: Okay, and where was your mother from?

AM: My mother was born in Cuba.

CC: Oh, she was, okay. And her name was?
AM: Dolores Ledon, maiden name, Martinez. L-E-D-O-N, Ledon.

CC: L-E-D-O-N, okay. And then she was born in Cuba.


CC: And how did she come to this country?

AM: Married my father. My father went to Cuba.

CC: Oh, he went to Cuba. Did he work there?

AM: And he worked in a cigar factory over there, and that’s how he met—in that small town—and that’s how he met—now she was already married and had three kids, but divorced. So when my father married her—

MM: Two years later.

AM: —He inherited three, three kids, two boys and a girl.

CC: Okay, so that was very unusual to be divorced at that time. And it just—

AM: My mother was very liberal.

CC: Yeah? (laughs)

AM: She didn’t take any—she says, the guy she married was all right to begin with and something went wrong and one thing and another, so she divorced him.

CC: And so your father went from Key West to Cuba to work in the factories, and he met your mother and that—were they married in Cuba? Or did they get married—

AM: Oh, no, they married—they got married in Cuba.

CC: They got married in Cuba, and then they came back?

AM: They came back—then he came back.

CC: How did they, did they come to Tampa for jobs?

AM: The came straight to Tampa, because at that time there—he already—his family had already been in Tampa a few years, in fact my father was born in Key West and came to Tampa when he was about ten, twelve years old.

CC: Do you remember about when they got married? The year, I’m trying to think when that would have been? It must have been around the turn of the century?

AM: Well, I was born in twenty-one [1921], so it must have been like in the twenties [1920s].

CC: In the twenties, that maybe they got married? That’s really interesting. You know it’s hard to imagine.
AM: See, in those days, especially the—all the people, the poor people they take care—then follow the history of the family, you know, you live, if you were alive you were lucky. So it’s not like a social family, they can trace the blood all they way back to the beginning of the—

MM: They tried to.

AM: Huh?

MM: They tried to.

CC: Most of us had to work. We don’t have time for all that.

MM: You’ve gone to Key West—

AM: Well, like, I tried to find out where my family came from, and it’s a dead end in Key West.

CC: So now, you and Mary and your family traveled back to Cuba, is that right?

AM: Oh, yes.

CC: Is that right?

AM: Right.

CC: When did you do that?

AM: The last time we went was in fifty-five [1955].

CC: And did you go there—

AM: How many trips did we go?

MM: Three.

AM: Three, we took three trip to Cuba. The last time we went was in fifty-five [1955], and we two, Augie and Ricky, the two boys, the girl wasn’t born yet. And Ricky was what, two years old?

MM: [Murmurs in agreement]

AM: And Augie was four, so we—

CC: So did you go there for vacation, is that why you went?

AM: To visit—to visit the family.

CC: Visit family and take vacation?

AM: Keep up with the family we had in Cuba.
CC: I saw, I think I saw, part of your home movies that you made. You were—am I right, were you all dressed up and you would—and you took your camera and you made a film out of one of your trips home? Is that right?

AM: Yeah.

CC: Yeah, I remembered that, that’s—

AM: Augie has them all now, he’s supposed to be doing something with it, but I don’t think he has much time to do it.

CC: So that was with Rick and Augie, and then your daughter?

AM: Well, daughter came back later.

CC: She wasn’t born yet.

AM: No, she wasn’t born yet.

CC: Yeah, now, see, you couldn’t do that today, you couldn’t go there on a vacation today.

AM: You don’t—you don’t want to go there today, you might get—

MM: We had planned a vacation—

CC: Oh, really.

MM: To go, but then they told us don’t come, it’s becoming—

AM: Yeah, we had planned a vacation to go to a wedding, then but they says, Don’t come, everything has changed here. You might not be able to leave once you get here (laughs).

CC: That was after 1955?

AM: That was after Castro [Fidel] came in.

CC: So that would have probably been about—

AM: Sixty-one [1961] or sixty—

MM: One of his cousins was executed by Castro.

AM: Yeah.

MM: He had family in Cuba.

AM: That was in the sixties [1960s] I guess.

MM: Had some cousins, and his grandmother.
CC: Yeah, I think the (inaudible) started shutting it down around 1959, 1960, more people where people couldn’t travel as they had before, so that was really interesting that you were able to go there on vacation and visit family.

AM: Oh yeah, oh yeah, we went three different times to Cuba, Mary and I, before we had children and then—

MM: Before we had children we went once or twice.

AM: Twice, that’s what I’m saying, then third—

MM: And then we went with Ricky and Augie.

AM: Then the third time was with Ricky and Augie.

MM: We had never—we were going to go but things changed, so we can’t.

CC: When was Judy born?

AM: Judy was born—

MM: She’s going to be fifty-one years old, July twenty—no she was—

AM: Fifty-seven?

MM: Fifty-one.

CC: She must have been born in 1958, fifty-nine [1959].

AM: No, fifty-one was Augie—

MM: She’s fifty-one, so she’s—

AM: Oh, yeah, but I mean, Augie was born in fifty-one.

MM: So figure it out, I’m not good at years like that.

CC: Yeah, she must have been born in 1958, fifty-seven [1957]?

AM: Forty-seven, no, it was—

MM: Fifty-seven.

AM: Fifty-seven, I think it was.

CC: Fifty-seven, yeah, that would be right.

MM: I guess.

CC: And so right after she was born, then you had tried to make another trip and they said no?

MM: Yeah, cause Castro came in and—
CC: It was too dangerous.

AM: Yeah.

MM: We were afraid not to be able to leave, ‘cause see, we had connections in Cuba against Fidel Castro, his cousins and it was touchy.

CC: It was too dangerous.

MM: Too dangerous.

CC: Do you still communicate with family members there now?

AM: No, because most of them, most of them, most of them came—the closest one to us to this country, they live in Miami or they live in—

MM: He helps them all in coming.

AM: Palm—West Palm Beach, and there’s [us] in Tampa. The ones who stayed in Cuba, I mean, we lost track with them.

CC: Right, so you were able to help some of your relatives come—?

AM: Oh, yes.

CC: How did you do that? How did you sponsor them?

MM: You did paperwork and claims and—

AM: Paperwork on it, and the—

MM: In other words, they would be supported by us, when they came.

AM: Yeah, Senator [Sam] Gibbons helped us a lot.

CC: Oh, really?

AM: Sam Gibbons, he helped us a lot with all the paperwork and recommendations and things like that, they let them in.

CC: Where did you got to do that? Did you have to go down to the City Hall, or—?

AM: Wrote letter—

CC: Wrote letters?

AM: No, Senator Gibbons wrote him letter, and we corresponded and that was—that probably for the visa for all that, so they came.

CC: Wow, and once they came they had to get jobs and—

AM: Once they came, they had to suffer for a while (laughs), but I mean, they finally ended up getting job[s] here and there—
MM: Well, we helped set them up, some, you know, as much as we could.

AM: Yeah, our family—the whole family helped get organized, and in fact, they lived with my mother for a while, because my mother had a big house then, ‘cause all the kids were gone, so they had about two extra bedrooms. So they lived there a while, in fact my mother’s home was named—

MM: Marty, show her that picture over there—

AM: El Ranchuelo, the Hotel Ranchuelo.

CC: Hotel Ranchuelo?

MM: Marty, show her that picture over there, with you—

AM: Because everybody from Ranchuelo used to come and stop at her house. [To Mary] What were you saying?

MM: That picture was your grandmother and you as a little boy.

AM: Oh, yeah. See this one, we were little, that’s me [pointing to picture], and that’s me here, that’s me here, my grandmother and my father.

CC: Oh, wow!

AM: That’s on Fifth Avenue and Nineteenth Street; the houses are still there.

CC: Oh, very nice.

AM: See, in those days, like, my mother had to take a look at it, and it was all tore up and banded over and twisted.

CC: And all of you are so beautifully dressed, very nicely dressed. See, that’s where Mary caught you, she was looking at how nicely dressed you were (laughs).

MM: That white shirt, nice mannered.

AM: Buster Brown haircut. Thom McAn shoes and a Buster Brown haircut (laughs).

MM: Catherine, he still has his handkerchiefs.

CC: That’s nice, very nice.

AM: That’s still going? It’s amazing how people—different things attract different people like a—when we went to North Carolina, we were talking to this lady—this is going away from Cuscaden Park, but anyway—We were talking to this lady, and, who her husband dropped her off, so she could go to Jacksonville for an operation and he was, like, a colonel in the Air Force and he was—she was going by herself, and we were talking about different things, then all of a sudden—I’m—my nose was dripping, so I took my handkerchief out, and she says to me, “Who irons—who irons those beautiful
handkerchiefs you got there?” and I says, “Well, I do, why?” says, “Today you do guys—men wearing handkerchiefs that are ironed, all bundled up—winkled up.”

MM: He folds them like that.

AM: So it’s amazing what—different things that attract different people, you know.

MM: He folds them exactly like that.

AM: She noticed that right away. You could tell he was a little higher society, cause Air Force, at—retired colonel or whatever.

CC: I noticed that you were always so beautifully dressed, in your pictures from your marriage in this picture from when you were younger. Did your parents shop in Ybor City, or where did they shop?

AM: Well, as long as they had to shop in Ybor City, they didn’t have any money to shop anywhere place else, but we—I mean, we always dressed up, but our—we had clothes to go to school with and clothes to play with, and clothes to go out with. So when we got home from school we changed our clothes right away.

CC: Take those off. So your parents did most of their shopping—

AM: Yeah, on Seventh Avenue.

CC: Groceries, everything on Seventh Avenue?

AM: Yeah, right there, you didn’t have to go any place. When I used to go downtown, it was going to another world. That’s how different it was.

CC: Exciting? Did you ever—did you tell me that you would go to the Tampa Theatre?

AM: Oh, yes.

CC: Yeah.

AM: You want me to tell you the story?

CC: Yeah, yeah.

AM: The secrets of the Tampa Theatre (laughs).

MM: I found this out this year.

AM: We used to go to the Tampa Theatre, and of course we didn’t have any money, and what we did was, we used to walk downtown, from Ybor to Downtown was what, two miles, maybe two and a half miles at the most. So we used to just get on the railroad track and walk downtown, and we just have enough money for one guy to go in and pay his entrance to the theater, and of course we always said No.

The first thing you do when you go in there, and we were fifteen, fourteen, whatever. You down to the men’s room, don’t do anything, just go down in the men’s room and
wait for a while and then, when nobody’s—because they had ushers in those days, and they always checked every thing out and then you go back to the Florida Avenue entrance, so I’d sit and open the door for us and sneak in.

So, three or four guys would pay a quarter or thirty cents, or whatever it was in those days, and he would go in a wait a little while, we’d go around the back part on Florida Avenue and he would open the door for us and we’d sneak in that was it. We were mischievous, but we weren’t angels, but we weren’t mean either. But we had good times. We never got caught, the only time I got caught—was my dad, and in Ybor City.

MM: I was going to say, are you going to tell her this story?

AM: Did I tell you the story about Ybor City?

CC: What’s that?

AM: I was begging for a dime, okay. We were about three guys and we—none of had a dime, so we were going to beg for a dime to get in and—

CC: Beg to get to the—

MM: The movies.

CC: To the movie theater?

AM: Yeah, to get into the movie theater at the Ritz Theater.

CC: Oh, at the Ritz.

AM: At the Ritz, when they used to have cowboy movies every Saturday, double—double feature, so here we are right there around the Ritz Theater on Seventh Avenue, so this guy is coming down the—and I said, “I’ll go ahead and ask this guy, see if he can give me a dime.” So I went to the guy, “Hey Señor, please can you give me a dime ‘cause I don’t have money to get into the theater, and I want to get in and I want to see the cowboy movie.” He gave me a dime! And I said, “Ooooh boy, he gave me a dime, nice.”

So then we waited and said we have to wait till we get thirty cents, a dime for each and we waited about ten or fifteen minutes. By that time I see my dad coming down the street and he says to me “What are you doing, begging for money?” So he says, “Come on home!” and he grabbed me by the belt—by the pants, and said, “Wait till we get home.” Well, when I got home I got a good spanking and went to bed (laughs).

MM: And he never begged again.

CC: Nope, no begging for money. No begging for money.

AM: No, and my dad said, “You don’t beg for money.” And I said, “Dad—that’s better than stealing or trying sneak in.” he said “Okay, we’ll find out, when we get home.” I knew what was coming, punishment, spanking, and go to bed.

MM: No Cuscaden Park.
AM: And no Cuscaden Park for about two or three days (laughs). But anyway, we had fun.

CC: Good story, that’s a good story, yeah.

AM: And that’s why they say in Ybor City everybody knows everybody. Because I didn’t know the man, but the man knew me, and knew who I was, and knew my dad.

CC: And knew your dad, and so he got your dad.

AM: So he went and told my dad.

MM: To keep him from begging, which was good.

CC: Yeah, yeah, that’s right, it’s no honor in that. You know?

AM: Well, I mean, you know, today everybody begs, even the firemen are out there begging for money, for—

CC: I know, I saw the fire truck on the side off the road and the firemen are asking people for money at the intersection.

AM: Yeah.

MM: Well, I got a letter the other day—

AM: That’s for something, what is it, for cripples or—

CC: Something—

AM: Blood or—

MM: Give somebody quarters, to—(inaudible)

CC: Yeah, I couldn’t see the sign, but I was so surprised to see the firemen out there on the corner asking for money. I thought maybe they need it for the fire department.

AM: Yeah (laughs). But, anyway, anything else about anything?

CC: That’s interesting, one other thing I wanted to ask you about, Marty, is dominos.

AM: Oh, yeah, dominos.

CC: Now you have to tell us how did that start with you? You started playing dominos?

AM: When I was young.

CC: How old were you when you played dominos? Because that’s something that I don’t know anything about.

AM: It’s tradition—

MM: Kids always [play] dominos.
AM: It’s usually a—

CC: Do kids all play dominoes?

MM: My kids.

AM: It’s traditional with the Latin people anyway, but I play—I used to play dominoes, I guess—I remember starting when I was about fifteen, sixteen years old.

CC: Where did you play?

AM: At home, or somebody else’s house.

MM: But you know where they play at [the] Cuban Club.

AM: But all the Latin Clubs—

MM: All the old men.

AM: All the Latin clubs have dominos games and card games, and at the cantina they play dominos—

MM: They still do.

AM: But when I—I never did go to those places, because most of those places they play for money, although they don’t show the money but they play for money. Now they use matchsticks or whatever.

CC: Oh, so they settle up later?

AM: Yeah. But anyway I used to play right there, and the—when I used to live in Fourteenth Avenue, which was our last home that we had, and where my mom and dad was during the war [World War II] I—I grew up in that neighborhood when I was maybe nine, eight years old, and I used to go to this place and they always played dominos there, a little café in the corner. But I never played; they wouldn’t let me play, I was too young.

But I watched them play, but then later on in life, when I was about seventeen years old, eighteen we live on Fourteenth Avenue, there right next to the café, about two houses down and I used to go there on the weekends on Sundays or Saturdays and they always play dominos, but now today I play dominos every Saturday morning and we go to the Vicente Cigar Store.

CC: Is that the one on—

AM: On—on—

CC: Is it on Armenia?

AM: Ar—Armenia, right.

CC: Vicente Cigar Store.
AM: Right on Armenia, we play there every Saturday morning.

MM: Is it Armenia or Howard?

AM: Armenia.

MM: Oh, okay.

AM: No. Howard. I’m sorry, Howard, Howard, Howard [Avenue].

CC: Oh, okay, and you go every Saturday morning and you play with the same guys?

MM: Oh, yeah.

AM: It’s always the same guys, and maybe sometimes we get different guys come in, but the owner is Mario Garido. Now he’s been in the cigar business since he was a teenager because he worked in factories and he owns a shop now, but he’s also a supervisor at Hav-A-Tampa [cigar company]. He’s a big supervisor at Hav-A-Tampa, he knows a lot about mixing cigars, tobacco and things like that.

CC: And what’s his name?

AM: Mario, M-a-r-i-o, Mario, Garido, how do you spell it? G-

MM: G-a-r-i-d-o, Garido.

AM: G-u-a or G-a you go rido, anyway.

CC: Okay.

AM: He’s one of the owners, and the other one is Joe Lubrano. Now he’s the one who owns that house on Ridge and Columbus Drive. That house has been there for years, has a white fence around it now. Joe Lubrano, he’s from an old, old family in Tampa. But Mario is—both owners, and they always—we out there, they both play good dominos, and then we have Charlie Miranda, the [Tampa] city councilman, he comes in.

CC: Is it all men?

AM: Yes, no women.

CC: (laughs) Oh, so do the women stop by?

AM: Women stop by and buy cigars, but they’re not allowed in the back where we play dominos. We play back in the back, in the kitchen. Which is—

CC: Let me ask you, does anybody, do you think, play for money back there?

AM: No, it’s all fun.

MM: Only for fun.

CC: Just for fun.
AM: Just for fun.
CC: That’s good.
AM: In fact we have a couple police come in once in a while who come and play.
MM: And there is some young guys coming in.
AM: And the young guy—
CC: You mean the policemen when they’re on duty?
AM: No, no, off duty.
CC: No, no (laughs).
MM: And some young guys have been coming in.
AM: Well, we have some younger guys come in, but the old guys like Vicente, he’s dead already, but he was one of the best players they had, and Mario is very good and so is Joe Luprano, and then we have, like, Charlie Miranda comes in—
CC: Charlie?
AM: The councilman—
MM: Miranda.
AM: The city councilman.
CC: Oh, all right.
AM: And Tony Lubrano, which is Joe’s brother, and down there, and Prado, what was his name, Aurelio Prado. Prado is Tino Martinez’s father-in-law.
MM: Oh, wow, the lights went out.
AM: The lights went out again. [singing] When the lights go out again, all over the world—
CC: So you’ve been playing dominos there for quite some time, huh?
AM: Oh, yeah, I’ve been going there, now, how many years? [to Mary]
MM: Oh, at least four or five.
CC: Yeah.
AM: But before that they used to own a cigar store in Ybor City but the Interstate [I-275] bought them out.
CC: Right.
AM: So they moved to West Tampa, but we have a lot of the guy that come in from time to time, and younger guys—but the regulars are those guys.

CC: Did you tell me that you meet up with a bunch of guys at the McDonald’s [restaurant] on Spruce Street?

AM: We used to go McDonald’s, but they [are] all dying (laughs).

CC: And who—was that the same group of guys, the guys you play dominos, or who did you meet?

AM: No, the ones who used to be at Cuscaden Park, there’s not too many left now.

CC: Okay.

AM: In fact, one of them lives in Temple Terrace and he—and he has a problem, so he’s not driving this far out, and the other lives in West Tampa, but he can’t drive—he can’t—eyesight, so I mean the Cuscaden group was—the originals are ruined, going to the other world, to Heaven, but I’ve been in Heaven all my life (laughs).

CC: Good story, Marty, thank you.

AM: It’s crazy, but I mean, that’s the way I feel about it.

CC: Yeah, I’m happy to hear that, that’s so—

AM: And like my granddaughter says, “What’s a matter, you always.” Since, I always happy, no money you’re poor, “How can you be happy?” (laughs) “No air conditioner, no TV.”

CC: Sounds like you had a good life, a good life.

AM: We didn’t have a radio, I’ll tell you what, we didn’t have a radio in our house till I was about maybe thirteen years old, that’s when I started hearing Jack Benny and all of the old comedians on the radio.

MM: That’s when somebody threw a pie at him.

AM: No, that was later on in life. That was after the war [World War II], we were—after the war we were all home for a while there, and my mother gave us a big dinner and we were all kidding and my sister was sitting from across the door—table from me, and I always liked lemon pie—lemon meringue pie, that was my—and my mother had bought a pie and we were all kidding with Daddy, and I said, “You all better keep quiet or I’m going to get this piece of pie and throw it at you.” She says, “You better not!” So I did, and she ducked, and the pie landed on the radio, and it was one of these big consult radios and it had a lot of delicious (laughs)—and my dad had a fit (laughs.) He starts screaming, “Ah, what are you, crazy!” So I had to clean off the radio (laughs).

But I mean, when you have a big family you have good times and bad times, but it’s always good. We always had good times. At first we had a lot of spanking but we still had good times.
MM: It’s all down to just two of them now.
AM: Yeah, there’s only two of us left.
MM: And one of them (inaudible) the season.
AM: There’s only three my sister, and two—and another brother.
MM: Where does your sister live now?
AM: My sister lives way out in Temple Terrace, and so does my other brother. So—
CC: Yeah, that’s a drive from here.
MM: Well, they—it’s a different life.
CC: What are their names?
AM: What?
CC: What’s your sister’s name?
AM: Hortense.
CC: And your brother?
AM: Reynaldo.
CC: Reynaldo.
AM: He—she was the next to the oldest, and he was in the middle. I’m a year—two years, three years younger then he is, three. So he was the last son—my mother had with her fist husband. And I’m the first one with the second husband. But we had good times.
CC: Well, thanks Marty, that’s really interesting, really interesting. I really appreciate you sharing that with me.
AM: No problem, any—
CC: It’s just whenever we talk about Cuscaden Park, you and I have gone down to the city offices and we’ve tried to track down things, you and I have come up with information that nobody has had.
AM: Nope, that’s right.
CC: So, yeah, it’s really been—
AM: I still have all those papers—in fact, I have a card that I was looking at this morning and this lady is supposed to be charge of historic events, or things in town, and I think I talked to her, but she couldn’t give me an answer about Cuscaden Park at all.
CC: And the only thing that they all told us was when the pool was built.
AM: Yeah.

CC: Because they have documentation from those WPA dollars.

AM: Yeah, but the—

CC: But they couldn’t tell us when the park was built.

AM: Maybe one of your friends can check into it over there at the university.

CC: Well, I’ll ask them at the university because they have some records about Tampa that other people don’t have. So it would be nice to—

AM: Especially—that was done by the WPA—in fact, when I went to the library one day I asked a girl to check—it says one the WPA—says, “I didn’t find anything about Cuscaden Park.” She went by herself, back there to check and—she probably didn’t even look, ’cause she said that she couldn’t find anything about WPA and Cuscaden Park. But I understand that was built by the WPA also.

CC: Yeah, yeah, that’s a good idea also. We’ll have to ask some more but I think you probably know more about it then most people.

AM: And another thing that this man told me, in fact I think it was [Judge] E.J. Salcines told me, check on the—on Tony Provenzano, who was the first director that Cuscaden Park had. See when he was hired by the city, if you can—if they have any records on him.

CC: Oh, that’s a good idea.

AM: He says that should be in what do you call it?

CC: In the personnel records? Or the—

AM: They call it something else.

CC: The archives for the city?

AM: Well, no, that’s—he’s said something about people who work for the city, they have a record of all the people who work for the city.

CC: Like the personnel records?

AM: I don’t know what’s its called, personnel records or not, but he said—he named—he said something else. He says that should be on something like this, but he was the first one that—that was hired—that ran the city till after the second World War, because after the second World War, when I came back home he wasn’t there somebody else was there.

Which I knew where he was a very good ball player and the inter-social league and his name was Espolita, and they used to call him Tiger Espolita. He played in the inter-social league and then he became the director for the park, and he was well known in
Tampa because of the way he played ball and used to be a cigar maker also, when he was a young man but he was such a god ball player that he played. In fact he used to go and coach in Cuba and coach in Mexico, that’s—he was a good ball player. So they used to call him, and he used to work and be manager for the teams, Espolita.

CC: Espolita.

AM: Then he became the director of Cuscaden Park.

CC: You probably know more about Cuscaden Park than anyone in the population today.

MM: Yeah, because he kinda checked—as far as he could.

AM: Yeah, and we all kept in touch—we always kept in touch with the all the—people that—

MM: But you also had been checking for the dates, and you pick up stuff on it.

AM: But say, we had friends that we still keep in touch with because we were the original gang at Cuscaden Park but like I said, everybody’s dying. I’m still here, but you never know.

CC: Okay, thanks Marty, that’s nice.

AM: But it’s—it’s fun to—we talked about—I called Joe Benito up, and I called Bralio Ramil. In fact, Bralio Ramil is a couple of years younger then I am. His son is the CEO for Tampa Electric [COO John B. Ramil] and so we keep in touch, and Philip DeRosa, who lives in West Tampa, I give him a call once in a while.

MM: Did you see all my pictures here, Catherine?

CC: I’m going to turn this off now, okay?

AM: Okay.

CC: Thanks Marty, I really appreciate it.

AM: Anytime if you need anything else, I don’t know if I can give you any more help—

CC: That’s okay; that was good.

[Transcribers note: The audio continues for approximately thirty seconds after the completion of the interview]

*end of interview*