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Aurora Fernandez and Maria Fernandez oral history interview by George Pozzetta, April 24, 1980

Aurora Fernandez (Interviewee)

George E. Pozzetta (Interviewer)

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George Pozetta: Aurora Fernandez.

Aurora Fernandez: Aurora.

GP: Aurora.

AF: A-u-r-o-r-a.

GP: Oh, dawn, yes?

AF: Fernandez.

GP: Fernandez, yes. Where were you born, Mrs.—

AF: Cuba.

GP: In Cuba. In Havana?

AF: In Havana. Right in Havana.

GP: When was this?

AF: Nineteen eight-one [1891].

GP: Nineteen eighty-one [1891]. Yes, do you remember anything about Havana?

AF: Yes. I remember that a lot of hungry—(laughs). I lived in a room this size. Only one.

GP: One room.
AF: My mother and my father and seven kids. Can you imagine? I make everything over there; cooking, sleeping, peepee, everything.

(phone rings)

GP: (laughs) What did your father do for work?

AF: My father made buildings.

GP: A carpenter.

AF: No, no carpenter.

GP: A contractor?

AF: Albañil. Albañil; you know, made the block between (inaudible).

GP: When did he come or when did you come to Tampa?

AF: In 1909.

GP: The whole family?

AF: The whole family.

GP: Why did the family leave?

AF: Leave Tampa?

GP: Why did they leave Cuba?

AF: Oh. Because that—you got a lot of kids and you got no-

GP: No work?

AF: Yes, he's a worker. He made a dollar fifty a day and my mother had to wash a lot of clothes for people.

GP: What did you do when you came here to Tampa?

AF: Helped my mother.

GP: You helped your mother?

AF: Yes, she washed clothes.
GP: She washed clothes here in Tampa, too?

AF: And I had to, too.

GP: How about your father, what kind of work did he do?

AF: He, Father, go to the—that room where they had to—Seventh Avenue and Nineteenth Street. *Hora.* You know? *Hora*; he go to the different wines to the people.

GP: Oh, you say the wine deliverer.

AF: Yes, wine deliverer.

GP: So, he did not work in the cigar factories? Your father?

AF: Yes, he worked with a (inaudible) the cigar part. That’s how you know (inaudible).

**Maria Fernandez**: Oh, he was the doorman porter.

GP: The doorman porter for one of the cigar factories.

MF: Of Regensburg.

GP: Oh, Regensburg, yes. Did—

AF: (inaudible)

GP: You did.

MF: She went to the factory at thirteen [1913].

GP: What year was that? Do you remember the first year you went to work in the factories?

AF: What year?

GP: The year.

MF: *Qué año*?

AF: I coming over here tonight? About eleven—but twelve, 1912 or 1913.

GP: Mr. Diaz was describing the 1910 strike, the seven-month strike, for us. Do you have any memories of that?

MF: And that was the other—another strike.

AF: Ten months.

MF: Ten-months strike.

AF: My husband went to Cuba.

GP: Your husband went back to Cuba?

AF: No, he was going to work over there, you know.

GP: This was in 1920 during the ten-month strike?

AF: Yes.

GP: Did many of the Cubans and Italians leave Tampa during these strikes?

AF: Yes.

GP: Some went to Cuba?

AF: No, a lot of people go to Detroit [Michigan].

GP: Detroit? What did they do in Detroit during the strike?

AF: Worked at machines, making automobiles.

GP: Oh, they worked in the car factories, the automobile factories. Did many of those people return to Tampa after the strike was over?

AF: Yes, they had their family over here.

GP: So this was this just something temporary?

AF: Yes.

MF: They left the families and went there, I guess, during the strike.

GP: What did they do, say in 1910, before the car factories existed? Where did they go in the seven-month strike?

AF: I don’t remember exactly to tell the truth.
GP: Maybe that's a little too early? How about the neighborhood that you lived in when you first came to Tampa? What kind of a neighborhood was it?

AF: Good, very good. I lived over there on Thirteenth Avenue, between Tenth [Street] and Twelfth [Street]. No, Twelfth and Thirteenth.

GP: Were there other Cuban people living right around you?

AF: Mm-hm.

GP: Only Cubans or were there Spanish?

AF: Spanish.

MF: Spanish and Italians. (inaudible) They were all mixed.

GP: Mixed, mixed together.

AF: But I’ll tell you the truth; that people back then [are] better than now. It [was] more close. You don’t—the people today—

MF: Do you understand that?

GP: Yes.

MF: They were a lot closer than they are now.

GP: Did many people used to walk up and down Seventh Avenue? What kind of things happened on Seventh Avenue?

AF: On Seventh Avenue (inaudible) movie pictures and they had music.

GP: You do?

AF: All the young people would go to Seventh Avenue to find boys and girls. Me, too. (laughs)

MF: That's where they used to go to find their boyfriend.

GP: Is that where you met your husband?

AF: No. I met my husband in the factory.

GP: In the factory. But others—

AF: Yes. All the people go to Seventh Avenue on Saturday night.
GP: Describe a Saturday night on Seventh Avenue for me. Tell me what it was like.

MF: (inaudible)

AF: Like Gasparilla Day. (laughs) Like Gasparilla Day, a lot a—a lot of people. I loved that time.

MF: (inaudible)

AF: No.

MF: (inaudible)

AF: No, (inaudible).

MF: El padre, no?

AF: No.

GP: So the girls and the boys went walking alone by themselves or with their mother and father?

AF: Or the sister or the aunt, somebody else.

MF: They always had to have somebody. Their brother or sister, aunt or somebody.

AF: I remember one night (inaudible). My husband and I—no, I’m single, you know, he’s my boyfriend. I don’t know where he told me, too, but he told me something was wrong with the people in the country. I said, "Oh, you don't like it, don't take it." Wow! He [was] mad, he’s gone. He left me completely alone.

When I got home I [was] thinking, Well, I’ll do it better. No, no, I got to find him. Well, I’m crazy. And I tell my aunt, “You bring me to”—this is Saturday. “You bring me tonight to the Seventh.” “No, I can’t.” Yeah, you can. “All right.” And she took me. And I go to the grocery store and he made me a fan. When I go to Seventh Avenue and Fifteenth Street and a guy over there (inaudible). I saw him over there and I gathered the pin the he had made like that. He looked at it and he— (laughs) Oh, I’m so happy!

MF: Her and her big mouth.

AF: I’m so happy, we and we carried on.

GP: So you got back together that night?

AF: Yes. But I got to call him.
GP: How do you remember the different people, the Italians and Spanish and the Cubans getting along together?

AF: Yes.

GP: Did they get along together or were there—

AF: I got a lot of good friends [that are] Italian.

MF: Los italianos y los cubanos y los espanoles se llavan bien.

AF: Sí. The padre—the only thing that the Italian father don't want is for his daughter to marry a Spanish or Cuban boy.

GP: Why was that do you think? Why? Por qué?

AF: I don't know.

GP: Were Italian and Spanish boys marrying Cuban girls at this time?

AF: Yes.

GP: But not the other way around?

AF: A lot of Italian girls marry a Cuban man or a Spanish boy, a lot. The father don't want what she wanted, you know, but she don't say nothing. She took the clothes and one day go to the court and marry and then the father (inaudible).

GP: Trouble.

AF: Wants to kill him.

GP: Did you belong to any of the clubs here in Ybor City?

AF: Yes, Centro Asturiano.

GP: Centro Asturiano. The women took part in the activities also? The picnics—

AF: Oh, those were beautiful; the Sulphur Springs, the picnics, oh, Sulphur Springs.

MF: You were saying something yesterday about going to the Sulphur Springs. What do you do there?

AF: Los picnics.
MF: Oh, the picnics.

AF: You no tell (inaudible) about the Fourteenth Street to Fifteenth Street; the sidewalk is wood.

GP: In these early days you’re saying there’s wood sidewalk.

MF: (inaudible)

AF: There was a lot of sand. Like that the sand.

MF: The what?

AF: *La arena*.

MF: Oh, the sand.

AF: The sand; that high.

GP: (laughs) I read in old newspapers, I read a lot about *bolita*.

(phone rings)

AF: *Bolita*?

GP: What was it?

AF: (inaudible)

MF: Oh, *bolita*. You know, they had—

AF: It's gambling.

GP: Gambling? Was this common in Ybor City?

MF: They used to—

AF: No, no, like Tampa.

GP: In Tampa, not Ybor City, you're saying?

AF: No, in Ybor City, too.

MF: In Ybor City and the whole city of Tampa, mostly. Most of the people in Ybor City participated in it. Their number was called in Havana, in Cuba. That's why they called it Cuba, and *bolita*. It's like bingo.
AF: I have bingo over here every night.

GP: Bingo here? I see. Was bolita very popular in the early days? Did everybody play it?

MF: Yes.

AF: I play a lot of bolita.

GP: Did you ever win?

AF: Plenty.

GP: Oh, you won plenty?

MF: They'd have greens to play, numbers with the greens. They told me that.

GP: Yes.

AF: That's right.

(phone rings)

MF: Every number means something to them. They have a meaning for every number.

AF: One time I needed money to buy my daughter a dress, and I dreamt of one number. I played and I got it. (laughs)

GP: How long did you work in the cigar factories yourself?

AF: I started there in 1913 and I finished in thirty-seven [1937]. But then I worked in another place, too.

GP: Yes. Which factories did you work in?

AF: I worked in the Regensburg.

GP: Regensburg.

AF: And Fiore de Cuba. And then Corral y Wodiska.

GP: Oh, yes, Wodiska. In general, why did you change factories from one to the other?

AF: Because I wanted to make more money.

GP: More money, yes. Did some factories pay more than others?
AF: No, the cigar.

GP: Oh, the type of cigar.

GP: What kind of cigars paid the most money?

AF: *La regla*. Good cigars, you know.

GP: They're the bigger ones?

AF: Expensive.

GP: Expensive. So you got more money when you worked on expensive cigars—

AF: Sure, they paid more.

GP: The less expensive ones paid the least money?

AF: I worked with El Coronado. I made good money at that time. I made forty-eight dollars a week during that time.

GP: When was this, in the twenties [1920s]?

AF: Twenty-seven [1927].

GP: Nineteen twenty-seven [1927]. What were the cigars that paid the least money? Do you remember?

AF: (inaudible)

GP: Did you belong to the cigar workers union?

AF: Yes.

GP: Were you in the five hundred union?

AF: Yes.

GP: Were you in the five hundred union?

AF: Five hundred union, yes.

GP: Mr. Diaz's union.

AF: Young Cubans belonged to the five hundred union.
GP: Many Cubans belonged to that. Was the other cigar maker union for Italian and Spanish cigar makers mostly? Not too many Cubans?

AF: Yeah, everybody. You can't work in the factories if you don't belong to a union.

GP: Oh, there were not workers who did not belong to a union?

AF: No.

GP: Everyone who worked belonged to one of the unions?

AF: Roosevelt came to be president; he put the law [into effect].

GP: Oh, yes. How about before that, before Roosevelt? Were there—

AF: Disastrous.

GP: Disastrous. In the early days, were there workers who were not union members working in the factories? There were, yes.

AF: All (inaudible) wanted unions.

GP: Do you remember the IWW, the Industrial Workers of the World?

AF: Yes.

GP: What were those people like? Do you remember that?

AF: No.

(phone rings)

Pause in recording

GP: If you remember, I asked Mr. Diaz what it was like during the Depression here in Ybor City. What was the Depression like for you? The thirties [1930s]?

AF: Don't ask me that. I don't want to remember.

GP: You don't want to remember because it was very hard.

AF: Very hard.

(phone rings)
GP: Did things get better after the war?

AF: Yes. It was when Mr. Roosevelt became the president. Then everything changed.

GP: When did you come here to Hacienda?

AF: In 1970.

GP: Nineteen seventy [1970]. You've been living here for ten years now?

AF: Yes.

*End of interview*