October 2007

Sandra Rodriguez oral history interview by Miguel Rodriguez, October 24, 2007

Sandra Joyce Rodriguez (Interviewee)
Miguel Luciano Rodriguez (Interviewer)

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/flstud_oh
Part of the American Studies Commons, and the Community-based Research Commons

Scholar Commons Citation
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/flstud_oh/21

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Digital Collection - Florida Studies Center at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digital Collection - Florida Studies Center Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
COPYRIGHT NOTICE

This Oral History is copyrighted by the University of South Florida Libraries Oral History Program on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the University of South Florida.

Copyright, 2011, University of South Florida. All rights reserved.

This oral history may be used for research, instruction, and private study under the provisions of the Fair Use. Fair Use is a provision of the United States Copyright Law (United States Code, Title 17, section 107), which allows limited use of copyrighted materials under certain conditions. Fair Use limits the amount of material that may be used.

For all other permissions and requests, contact the UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA LIBRARIES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM at the University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, LIB 122, Tampa, FL 33620.
Miguel Rodriguez: This is Miguel Luciano Rodriguez, and the date today is December 24—

Sandra Rodriguez: (whispers) October.

MR: October 24, 2007. And I am here with Sandra Joyce Rodriguez. Mrs. Rodriguez, I have your permission to record this interview today?

SR: Yes. Yes.

MR: All right. Well, let’s just start with some biographical information. Like, just tell me where and when you were born.

SR: July 5, 1943. I was born in Baltimore, Maryland. My parents just happened to be there at the time. My mom had been born in Tampa and they just happened to be there. I was back here by the time I was three months old, in Tampa

MR: Do you know why they were in Maryland?

SR: Some kind of job my dad had at the time.
MR: And what did he do for a living?

SR: I believe he was a steel worker, I’m not sure. I think he was a steel worker at that time.

MR: All right. And did your mom work?

SR: No. Not at that time.

MR: And what’s your mother’s and father’s name?

SR: My biological father’s name was John Hill. My stepfather’s name was Lane Carlton, and my mother’s name was—her maiden name was Cornelia Muriel Sullivan.

MR: And your mother was born in Tampa?

SR: Yes.

MR: Where in Tampa was she born?

SR: At her home.

MR: Well, like—what area of town? Do you remember? Do you know?

SR: No, I don’t. I don’t want to say, ’cause I might tell you wrong.

MR: All right. And what about their parents? Were her parents from Tampa as well?

SR: Her mother and—my mother’s mother and father were both born near Kissimmee.

MR: And what about your father, where was he born? Your biological father?
SR: My biological father was born in Ohio. I think his mother was born in Ohio, I think, and his father was born in Ireland.

MR: All right. Your grandparents, do you know anything about their occupations or what they did?

SR: My mother’s father was the business agent for the theatrical union in Tampa. He was instrumental in helping to bring it to Tampa, the first unions. And he was a projectionist at the Tampa Theater when I was a child. And my grandmother did not work.

MR: Just tell me a little bit now about you. You were born in Tampa?

SR: No, in Baltimore.

MR: No, I meant you were—

SR: Raised in Tampa.

MR: When you guys came back—at three months of age, yeah?

SR: Yes.

MR: Where did you live?

SR: On Gomez [Avenue], which was in North Tampa, just off of Waters and Dale Mabry [Highway].

MR: Can you tell me a little bit about your life and your adolescence as a child in that area of town?

SR: It was very rural at the time. Waters Avenue, which is now a very busy intersection, was a dirt road. It was a very rural community; it was on a lake. There was only two other
houses on the lake at the time, and we had very few neighbors. It was very enjoyable. We had chickens, and we used to go fishing all the time. We had one neighbor that I used to play with, and cowboys and Indians was the main game. And one Christmas I got a beautiful, beautiful bride doll, and I thought it was terrible because I didn’t get a set of guns and all the boys did. But we had a very nice childhood.

MR: When you say that there was only two houses on the lake, is that including the neighborhood area, the street?

SR: There was only two houses in the whole neighborhood. Up the street they built another house, but that was when I was a teenager. When I was a child, though, there was no other houses there. On the next street over, east of us, there was a couple houses on that street. That’s Twin Lakes Boulevard: there was a couple of houses on that street at the time.

MR: Do you remember, like, did you ever go with your mother to the grocery store while you were a child?

SR: Yes. My mother, my grandmother, my aunt. I used to go with them.

MR: How far away did you have to go?

SR: It was a long way. I think the closest grocery store was at Florida [Avenue] and Waters at the time, the regular grocery store, and that was quite a ways. Everyone used to have to go to downtown Tampa. There was no subdivisions—I mean, no shopping centers. They were built when I was a teenager, also. The first one in Tampa was Northgate, and that was built when I was about twelve or thirteen, I think. And everybody used to get dressed up on Saturdays and everybody used to go downtown. Most the time we took a bus—occasionally we drove—and we used to meet my grandfather for lunch every Saturday near the Tampa Theater.

MR: What type of ethnicities—what were the type of people that lived in your community in the area that you lived in? Were there Latin or Hispanic people?

SR: No, I don’t think so.

MR: Was it Irish?
SR: It was like a mixed group, but I don’t think there was any Latins in the area at the time. The last name of the one house—I take it back. I said there was two other houses on the lake: there was three. It was Kissner, who owned a real estate company; Welch, who lived across the lake, who had lived there since my mother—when my mother moved there she was ten, and when she moved there they were there. And the people next to us, which was about ten acres away, was Pocock. That was the only people there at that time.

MR: And did you guys have any religious practices? Did you go to a church?

SR: Methodist church.

MR: You went to a Methodist Church?

SR: Yeah, we went to Oak Grove Methodist Church, which was up on the corner just about a few blocks away. I used to walk as a child. I have all the little bars that they give you in the Methodist Church when you go to Sunday school every Sunday.

MR: What’s a bar?

SR: They give you a pin, and you get a bar for each year where you go to Sunday school and you don’t miss so many days and stuff. They give you these—like a medal, but it’s just a bar is what it is. It’s just a reward.

MR: What did you guys study in Sunday school?

SR: About Jesus and God. They had our Girl Scout meetings there. Our religious was there. It was, you know, just an all around good community place to go.

MR: The Methodist church that you attended, what type of people—or, like, the origin of people that went there, was it mostly white?

SR: Yes.
MR: Irish?

SR: It was a mixture. It was a mixture, but they were all white and they were almost all what we call Cracker people, country people, ’cause like I said, that was a very rural area back then. It was a little wooden church; now they’ve got a big church in its place. It was a little wooden church. And I went to Twin Lakes Elementary, which was the old school when I went there. It was little, and they have since torn it down and replaced it with a much larger school.

MR: That was Twin Lakes—that was an elementary school?

SR: Uh-huh.

MR: And is that where you attended elementary school?

SR: Mm-hm.

MR: Tell me a little about Twin Lakes. Like, tell me what did you do at Twin Lakes? How’d you get there?

SR: Walked. It was close, it was close. We just walked. It wasn’t far at all: the other side of the lake. I used to walk to and from school every day. I used to go pick up the boy who live next to me and we would walk together.

MR: What was his name?

SR: Lance Pocock, and we’d walk together. His father was a projectionist also. My stepfather was a projectionist. My step-grandfather lived on the same piece of property; he was a projectionist. Everybody in the family was. And the school was just like a country school. It was really nice. My mother, of course, belonged to the PTA and would go to the PTA meetings. We were always involved with the school and with the church.

MR: What type of—what was your curriculum like in elementary school? What do you remember—what did you learn?
SR: You didn’t change classes like they do today. We stayed in the same room. You had one teacher for the whole year. I remember that’s the first time I heard of *The Wizard of Oz*, was in elementary school there when my teacher read it to us.

MR: You said earlier that when you went—at the church, the Methodist church that you guys attended, the people that attended there were Cracker folk. Was that term used? Did you hear that in normal conversation when you were a child? Did you hear that word? When was the first time that you remember hearing that word?

SR: I think I did hear it as a child. They would talk about being Florida Crackers.

MR: So your family?

SR: Yes.

MR: You would hear it from the people that lived around there?

SR: Yes, I’m sure I did. I don’t remember consciously the first time I heard it, so I’m sure I had to be a child when we talked about it.

MR: All right. At Twin Lakes Elementary School, was it the same type of people, ethnically, that attended your church that would attend the same school?

SR: Yes

MR: So it was like a close knit—

SR: Right. Yeah, it was a close knit community because everybody lived in the area. You didn’t travel as much back then as you do now. More people lived close to where you went to school. You had—they didn’t bus people out. You went to school in your neighborhood. You went to church, mostly churches in your neighborhood. If you belonged to a club or anything, you usually went in your neighborhood. And the only time you would travel would be to go downtown, and that was a big deal to us because we considered that far away. I don’t know how long it took then; it used to feel like it took forever. I know it didn’t, but it used to feel like to me that it didn’t. But now, it wouldn’t take probably more than fifteen minutes in a car from there to downtown.
MR: So were there any—did you go to school with any Italians or Latins or African Americans in elementary school? Do you remember?

SR: I think there was a couple of Latin people. There was no black people. I really don’t remember that much. First, my grandfather’s good friend was Leon Cazin, so he was Latin, and that was a good friend of my grandfather’s. Mike Shimon was another good friend. So it was a very diverse group.

MR: So when you say Latin, were they Italian or Spanish?

SR: Leon Cazin started the Latin American Fiesta; he’s the one that started that in Tampa. So I’m sure he was probably Spanish, although Cazin doesn’t sound it, but I’m sure he was. Shimon was from—my husband can tell you where he’s from. He knows the little island he’s from. I can’t think of it.

MR: What about—where did you go after Twin Lakes Elementary?

SR: Well, I went to Twin Lakes for four years, then I went to Lake Magdalene [Elementary School] for two years ’cause we moved from the lake to another house for a few years. And then I went to Oak Grove Junior High School and then Chamberlain High School.

MR: What about your junior high school experience? Tell me about your junior high. What type of people?

SR: It was a more diverse group, I would say, in junior high. I would say yes, a much more diverse group in junior high. And in high school, of course, it was really diverse.

MR: So you attended junior high school in the early fifties [1950s]? What was it, like fifty-one [1951], fifty-two [1952]?

SR: Yeah, somewhere around there ’cause I was—no, I was older than that, ’cause I was—and let’s see. Probably fifty-five [1955], probably fifty-five [1955], fifty-six [1956].
MR: What about your high school? How old were you when you went to Chamberlain High School?

SR: When I went in, I was fifteen.


SR: It had only been open one year when I went there.¹ It was a very new school. They did not have a senior class. The year I went was the first year they had a senior class, although I was a sophomore, and they didn’t have ninth grade in high school then like they do now; they just had tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade. So, that was the first year they had tenth, eleventh, and twelfth.

I had a good learning experience there. The only bad thing I can remember is I had an algebra teacher that I couldn’t do the work the way she wanted, and so she tried to fail me. But I went to another teacher for help and he said I didn’t need any help, and at the end of the year I made such a good grade on the test she couldn’t fail me, ’cause I could do the work, I just couldn’t do the work the way she wanted it. That’s the bad thing about high school that I remember, ’cause I’d always done very well with my studies.

MR: Can you tell me when—like, when and where did you first meet your husband now?

SR: I met him at a girlfriend’s house. He worked with her mother at the time, and a bunch of us students went over there that night, and he was there and we met.

MR: And how old were you?

SR: Fifteen.

MR: What is your husband’s name?

SR: Luciano Rodriguez.

MR: What did you think? How’d you feel the first time you met him?

¹ Chamberlin High School was opened in 1956.
SR: It was love at first sight. We’ve been together ever since that night. He was with another girl that night, I was with another guy, and we left together and we’ve been together pretty much ever since.

MR: How did you guys make plans to see each other again?

SR: He called me right away. We saw each other, I believe, the next day at Colonial Beach. That night, in fact, we went to Frisch’s Big Boy, a bunch of us together, the night we met. Then the next day I think it was at Colonial Beach where we saw each other.

MR: What is Colonial Beach?

SR: It was a place they used to have dances once a week. He and I used to go to all the dances.

MR: It was a beach? With water, outdoors?

SR: Uh-huh. It was on—right now I’ll tell you what’s there is Lake Magdalene Apartments, right where Colonial Beach used to be, on that lake.

MR: So it was a beach on a lake there?

SR: They used to have—(coughs) excuse me. They used to have paid beaches, where you could go to the beaches and you paid like thirty five cents to get in, and you could go swimming. That’s where they would have all the—they had Colonial Beach, they had Ralston Beach, they had Lake Carroll, they had Lake Ellen. That’s what the children—teenagers—used to do most of the time.

MR: Go to those lakes?

SR: Right. Go to those lakes or go to dances.

MR: Would you like some water? All right. We’ll take a little break.
MR: You were talking about Colonial Beach and Lake Ellen.

SR: Yeah. Ralston Beach and Colonial Beach were on the same lake, where Lake Magdalene Apartments are. Lake Ellen was on another lake more north—same area, but more north—and Lake Carroll was on another lake just south of Lake Ellen. That’s where Carrollwood is now. There’s two lakes out there, and that’s where.

MR: And when you say they used to have dances, what type of dancing?

SR: Jitterbug, mostly. Waltzes and jitterbugs.

MR: What is the jitterbug?

SR: A fast dance that we used to do.

MR: What music would you guys—like, how was the music played? Or did you guys dance without music?

SR: No. It was music. It was like—I’m sure you’ve heard the song, like “Jailhouse Rock,” “My Way.” So those are opposite ends.

MR: Those were on record players? What were they played on?

SR: Mostly they were records.

MR: What else? Anything else?

SR: Sometimes they had a band, but mostly it was records. Occasionally they’d have somebody with a band, or you’d go to the Hellenic Center, which was downtown. It was mostly records, but sometimes they had a band. They had the Palladium in downtown.
Tampa for teenagers, and [we] used to go there and dance. They had a lot more things for teenagers to do, good activities for teens to get into.

MR: Are there other places that you and your husband now would go to—on dates—besides Colonial Beach?

SR: To the movies. We’d go dancing, or to my mom’s. We went to his mom’s for dinner a couple times, to my mom’s.

MR: When’s the first time that you guys—that your family met your husband?

SR: The first day I met him. He met my mom that night.

MR: And how did you introduce him to her?

SR: I don’t understand what you’re saying.

MR: Oh, sorry. Like, how did they meet?

SR: Because he took me home. He and a girl that it was her house took me home, and I introduced them that night, introduced him to my mom that night.

MR: And what did she say?

SR: Well, she was all right, but my stepfather wasn’t so all right.

MR: Why not? Well, what do you mean by all right?

SR: Well, because—well, let’s put it this way. We got married—we knew each other less than two months—because my stepfather told me I had to break up. My husband and I were going steady at the time, and he told me I had to break up with him or he was gonna do it for me. So, my husband looked at me and said, “You want to get married?” and I said yes. Two weeks later we were gone.
MR: What year is this?

SR: Nineteen fifty-nine [1959].

MR: How did you guys plan to get married? Where did you get married at?

SR: We got married in Georgia. We borrowed one brother-in-law’s car, Bertha and Mac’s car. Poncho went with us, his brother-in-law, because back then a girl just didn’t go someplace with a guy like that. So Poncho went with us. My mother passed away in ninety-nine [1999], and she never knew that Poncho went with us when we got married ’cause we didn’t want her to be mad at him.

MR: How did you guys plan to go to Georgia? Would you say you eloped?

SR: Uh-huh. We went and got our blood tests ahead—you had to have blood tests back then. We went and got our blood tests ahead of time and took all that with us. We took Cuban coffee in a thermos with us. We changed in a garage up in Georgia when we go there. I had a dress that my Aunt Margaret had made me for Easter that year; I wore that. We started in Savannah, that’s how far we got by the morning. We went in Savannah and we went into a restaurant there, Poncho, my husband and I, and had breakfast and then started trying to get married. We didn’t get married till that evening, though, till about four-something that evening.

MR: Before you guys left—where did you leave from, or what were you doing? How did you sneak away?

SR: All right. I had spent the night at a girlfriend’s house, my mother thought, and I was supposed to go to the piano lesson the next day. So, she didn’t realize I was missing until after we were already married and she went to where I took piano lessons to pick me up and I wasn’t there. Then she went to Chano’s [Luciano] parents’ house and he wasn’t there, and so then she kind of knew that we had run away together. His parents knew we were going before we went, ’cause his brother-in-law and all went with us, and we used the other brother-in-law’s car. They knew about it, but my parents didn’t. Then when my uncle—she called her brother, which was my uncle, my mother did, and had him go over and look for me. He took his brother-in-law with him. Well, when he got there and saw whose house it was, he said “Oh, she’s fine,” because my husband’s sister was my uncle’s brother-in-law’s goddaughter. So it all worked out. He was Italian, and my husband that I married at the time was Spanish.
MR: How was it planned? How did you know that you needed to spend the night at a friend’s house in order to leave? How did that come about?

SR: Well, we knew that he couldn’t pick me up at home, and we couldn’t just leave like that. My mother would know something was going on. So I had just packed my bag like I was going to Margie’s, this friend of mine, to spend the night, which we did often. Margie would spend the night at my house or I would stay at her house. We did that a lot, so it wasn’t anything unusual. And then I used to take a bus to go piano lessons because it was all the way across Tampa in South Tampa. I’d either take a bus, or Chano would take me occasionally, or pick me up sometimes. So it wasn’t anything out of the ordinary for me to do that.

MR: Was it your idea to spend the night at the house?

SR: I think so. I think it was my idea, I really do. You’re asking me questions and making me think. I don’t remember. I’m sure it had to be my idea to spend the night. I’m sure Margie and I discussed it and we decided that was the best way to do it. There was very few people who knew we were gonna run away. Margie, of course, was one of them. Chano’s family knew, and then a friend of our family, Gary, I had told him. That was the only people that knew we were going to run away.

MR: And were you with your husband’s family when they knew you guys were going to leave, when he told them that you guys were planning to get married?

SR: I don’t know if I was. I don’t think I was with him when he told them, but we left from there when we left.

MR: And who was at the house when you left?

SR: Tilly, his sister, and Bertha and Mac, all of them were there, and my mother-in-law and father-in-law. And we went to a restaurant—I can’t remember the name of it now, a restaurant in West Tampa, and got Cuban coffee and Cuban sandwiches and stuff to take with us, and we left from there. We just drove all night until we got—not all night, but you know, the few hours that it took. And we went far as, like I said, Savannah.

MR: And you were talking about changing in a garage. What do you mean by garage?
SR: A filling station. We just went into the bathroom at a filling station and changed our clothes.

MR: Where did you get married?

SR: It’s in Long County, Georgia, at the courthouse. Poncho was one of our witnesses, and we just got somebody else that was at the courthouse for the other one.

MR: And what happened at the courthouse? Like, once you got married, what did you guys do?

SR: (laughs) Got back in the car and headed home. That was about all we could do. We were kind of afraid of what was gonna happen when we got here.

MR: Why do you say that?

SR: Because I knew my parents were gonna have a fit. When we got here, Chano called my mother, and my uncle was already over there. Of course she said for me to come home. He’ll tell you his side of that, what he said. We didn’t go there that night, needless to say. We went to his mother, and I can’t remember now who else was with her took us to his sister Ondina’s house. We went there and then we went to a motel on Gandy Boulevard. That’s where we stayed the first night, looking out the window all night long ’cause we were afraid my mom was sending the police. We didn’t even have a car. Ondina and a friend of hers came after us the next morning and we went to her house. Then we got a car. I don’t remember which car we got now; Chano will, of course.

We were supposed to go to the brother-in-law that was with my uncle when he came to Chano’s house. We were supposed to go to his house that night, and we didn’t want to go because we were afraid that they would annul the marriage. So, we didn’t go. The only person we told that we weren’t going was Chano’s father. We told him we weren’t going, and everybody else went over there to meet. We went to the Sarasota-Bradenton area and stayed that night because I was afraid that my parents were going to annul the wedding—the marriage—but my grandfather wouldn’t let them. I found out afterwards that my mother and father did want to have it annulled, but my grandfather stopped them.

MR: Which grandfather?
SR: William Sullivan, the one that was the business agent.

MR: What did he do?

SR: He was just—he was not somebody—he was a very businesslike man. He was always in a suit. He was always dressed like that; the only time I ever saw him not dressed like that, it was out in his yard. He was very influential-like, and he just told them that they weren’t going to annul it. That was it, that I was married and they were going to leave me alone.

MR: How did you find out that he did this?

SR: They told me later on. Not then, but they told me later on. We ended up going to my mother’s the next day. We got my husband’s preacher, who was a Baptist minister, and my preacher, who was the Methodist minister, and took them both with us to my mother’s house. The preacher told my husband on the way, he said, “You know you’ve done something you shouldn’t have done. So if she wants to slap you, just turn your face (laughs) and let her hit the other side.” Of course she didn’t, but that’s what he said.

MR: Who said?

SR: The preacher.

MR: Your preacher?

SR: No, Chano’s preacher, the Baptist minister.

MR: So, who was at the house when you went over to your mother’s house?

SR: My mother and my father and brother. I literally—I didn’t want to hear it. I was not a person for confrontations, never have been. So I literally went in the front door, kissed my mother and father and everybody, said hello or whatever, and I went next door to my aunt. My aunt lived next door and I went next door to her house.
MR: Whose aunt? Who was she?

SR: Margaret, my mother’s sister.

MR: And she lived next door?

SR: Uh-huh.

MR: Was she one of the two houses that were your neighbors?

SR: When we were on the lake, yes. We lived on the lake next to each other, but now we were over on Dartmouth [Avenue] next to Chamberlain. We only lived there for a few years, but they moved in the house next to us over there. So, we always lived next to each other.

MR: Where did you guys—where did you and your husband stay after you went and told your parents and then you guys came back? You were married. Where did you guys live?

SR: We stayed with his sister Ondina for a couple weeks only, and then we moved to his mother’s house, and then we bought a house out in East Tampa.

MR: Where did Ondina live?

SR: Ondina lived in South Tampa on Fielder [Street], and Chano’s parents lived in West Tampa on Lincoln [Avenue].

MR: And that’s next to MacFarlane Park?

SR: Mm-hm. Sure is.

MR: It’s right across the street, I think.

SR: Right up the street, just about a half a block up the street.
MR: How long did your guys stay with your mother and father-in-law?

SR: Just a few months, while we saved for the house, and then we moved to the house we bought.

MR: Did you work when you lived at the mother’s house?

SR: No. I never worked until the kids were bigger.

MR: What was your day-to-day life like over there in West Tampa?

SR: Cooking and cleaning. I used to cook a lot and clean a lot. Work in the yard.

MR: Were these the same things that you did at your own house before you were married? What was different?

SR: Well, I used to go to school before. Now I didn’t go to school, so I had all day to do those things. And you had to iron clothes back then, where we don’t iron so much now. Everything that you wore had to be ironed, just about. We used to iron the sheets, the handkerchiefs, and everything. And we used to hang the clothes out to dry. So, I used to wash and hang the clothes, and cook, and work in the yard. I used to do a lot of yard work.

MR: What type of foods did you cook?

SR: I learned to cook the Spanish food that my husband liked.

MR: And what is that?

SR: Mostly meat and rice: palomilla, which is a Spanish cut of steak, pork chops, white rice, black beans. He did not like very many vegetables. I had to sneak those in.
MR: And who taught you how to cook these things?

SR: Believe it or not, my father-in-law couldn’t cook, but he taught me how to do it. I pretty much learned how to do all the Spanish dishes from there.

MR: Did you eat a lot of these foods before you even met your husband, before you were married?

SR: Well, sometimes, because it was—one of the big things that Latin people make is crab chilau. We used to always do that, also. Friends of my parents lived right up the street from them, from where my parents lived—from where his parents lived on Lincoln. We used to go there sometimes. We used to go to the Causeway and have the different Latin foods. My uncle that went to Chano’s house when we first eloped, his wife is Italian, so we already had those, you know.

MR: What were—your family and your community, your church, school, were there any—that were their feelings like in that community towards people of different ethnicity, like of Spanish background, or Italian. Was there any confrontations? Did you see any fights, or were there any problems?

SR: No. I never—I could have—I must have lived in a cocoon, because I hear about them now, but I never actually saw them. I heard about them after my husband and I got together; he told me where they could go and there would be a fight or whatever. But I personally never saw it. I just lived in this little cloistered world, I guess. We didn’t have it.

MR: And so—

SR: My stepfather was very prejudiced against anything if they weren’t all white. He was very prejudiced, but I think that’s why I grew up so much the opposite because I didn’t like it so much.

MR: Where did you guys move to after you stayed at his mother’s? You only stayed there for two months?

SR: Yeah. We bought a house in Clair-Mel City.
MR: Where is that?

SR: East Tampa.

MR: And how long did you guys live there?

SR: Oh, a few years. Then we moved to a little house in back of his mother’s house. There was a house back there. We lived in there for a little while, and then we moved to a house on Hale [Avenue], which was near Hillsborough [Avenue] and Dale Mabry, and that’s where Mike started elementary school. Then we moved to Odessa. We bought five acres out in Odessa, and that’s where Julie started school at Citrus Park [Elementary School].

MR: What did you guys do in Clair-Mel? Did you work?

SR: I didn’t.

MR: Did your husband work?

SR: He did, he always worked, but I didn’t work till the kids were much older. I just raised the children. I used to sew, cook, clean, do ceramics, paint.

MR: Tell me a little about—like, what holidays did you celebrate before you got married? Like, did you celebrate Christmas?

SR: Oh, yeah. My parents always had a big Christmas Eve party. We celebrated Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, all of them.

MR: Tell me about your Christmas Eve party. Who was there? What did you all eat? What happened?

SR: Oh, my mother would cook everything you could think of: turkey, ham, coleslaw, potato salad, spaghetti and cheese, different cakes and pies—my aunt would bring pies sometimes—string beans. She always had a whole big feast.
MR: And who would attend?

SR: Family and friends. We always had a houseful; that’s the best way to put it, because I couldn’t begin to tell you all who was there. It was my mother’s brother and their families, and my father’s brother and cousins and their families, and then friends.

MR: And then your Easter, what was that like?

SR: It was always more than one set of grandparents. I had, like, four sets of grandparents, I guess, because my mother’s parents were divorced and remarried. Well, my grandfather, my mother’s father, didn’t remarry till my grandmother passed away. But both sides of the grandparents would always come, and we would always have—you know, go to church first. Sometimes we went to sunrise service, but sometimes we didn’t. But sometimes we’d go to the sunrise service, and then we’d have family over and food again, and Easter egg hunts.

MR: Once you got married, did your family, did you and your husband go to the Christmas Eve party that your—

SR: We’d go to both. We would go to my family first and then we’d go to his, or we would go to his and then we would go to mine, whichever. It didn’t matter. We’d go to both of them.

MR: Was there any confrontations when you guys were there, or everything was just fine? What happened?

SR: No, ours were—it was always pretty nice. One year his sister got mad at him because he was throwing the presents or something, I think. But that’s already when the kids were grown and big.

MR: Once you guys were married, what differences—what felt different to you, or foreign, being married and in a Latin family, compared to your family before? Was there anything that felt different or foreign to you?

SR: I guess I felt a little left out, because I didn’t speak the language. My father-in-law
always tried to make me feel a part of it, and one sister-in-law was really good about it, too, but I felt a little isolated because I didn’t speak the language.

MR: What language did they speak at home?

SR: Spanish

MR: And they spoke that all the time?

SR: Not all the time, but a lot. Not all the time, but just a lot.

MR: Once you guys were married, did you attend a church or did you go to any religious practices?

SR: I started going to his Baptist church.

MR: And where was the Baptist church at?

SR: In West Tampa, over at—I’ll tell you what church it was. It’s over—where’s the new studio over there?

MR: On MacDill [Avenue] and Columbus [Avenue].

SR: All right. Where that church is right there.

MR: Right there, on MacDill and Columbus?

SR: Mm-hm. That’s where your father went to kindergarten first, too.

MR: At the church?

SR: Mm-hm.
MR: Was there lot of—what was different about going to that church than going to the Methodist church that you went to?

SR: I didn’t find that much difference in them, believe it or not. I really didn’t.

MR: Was it different people? Was there a lot of Latin people?

SR: Yes, there was more Latin people because it was in West Tampa. So there was more Latin people at this Baptist church—although the majority of Latin people are Catholic, but there were some at the Baptist also.

MR: A lot of Spanish?

SR: Uh-huh.

MR: Did the preacher speak English or Spanish?

SR: No, he spoke English.

MR: Tell me a little bit about once you moved into the back of your mother-in-law’s house. Do you remember what year this was, around?

SR: Oh, my goodness. I don’t. It was around when Julie was born, I’d say, right around there. So, she was born in sixty-three [1963], so around that time.

MR: In your day to day life, were there any particular characteristics that your husband or your husband’s family portrayed to you as fitting a stereotype, or something that you learned about before you met your husband, like a Latin stereotype? Was there any that you thought of?

SR: I don’t know. I’ve been married so long, I don’t know. I think—
MR: Do you understand what I’m trying to say?

SR: I know what you’re saying. I’m trying to think what it would be. I can’t think of anything that would be that different than what we did. Really, I just think that people think of them as different, ethnic things as different, but so many of them are the same. But they just don’t realize it, that the other people are the same.

MR: What is the same?

SR: I mean, you do the same things. You get up in the morning, you eat, you clean house, you cook, you wash clothes. Everybody does pretty much the same thing.

MR: When did you guys—when was my father born? When was your first child born?

SR: In May of the following year. We got married in June of fifty-nine [1959]. Mike was born in May of sixty [1960].

MR: So he was born while you guys were living in Clairmont [sic]?

SR: Yes, in Clair-Mel.

MR: What was that like, having a child?

SR: It was good. He was a good baby. It was nice. I never got up with a night bottle, I’ll tell you that. It was awesome. We used to go—on Sundays we would go to my grandmother’s or his mother’s, because my parents would go to my grandmother’s every Sunday. So we’d go meet them there, or we’d go to his mother’s house on Sundays. One of my biggest joys was always wanting to have a baby. My whole life, that’s all I could ever remember is wanting a baby. So, I just loved it.

MR: Were there places that you guys stayed away from, that you and your husband—or, like, when you guys were married, did you guys still go to the beach lake parties?

SR: No. We didn’t do any of that.
MR: Did you go the dances anymore?

SR: No, we went to the Latin American Fiesta once a year, and that was about the only dancing we did.

MR: What’s that? What is the Latin American Fiesta?

SR: It’s—I guess like a club, I guess you’d call it. I don’t know, it’s really not a club. It is just a dance that this gentleman started, and he had—

MR: Do you want to take another break?

SR: Yeah.

*Pause in interview*

MR: So, the Latin American Fiesta, that was a weekend thing?

SR: No. Yeah, it was done on a weekend. They had girls and they were elected—they had a queen—and the way they were elected was by how many tickets they sold to come to the dance. They’d have tables in there. It was very formal. You got to dress up. And they would have a celebrity entertainer [who] would come and entertain you, and they had dancing. It was very nice.

MR: What type of—were people of all ethnic background?

SR: Yes, they all came. No, it was mostly Latin ’cause of the Latin American Fiesta, but all ethnic groups were represented, I’d say. They were all represented there. We used to even take the kids. As the kids came, we’d take the kids with us to the dances, and they would dress up and go. And it was a good experience, a good way for them to learn how to behave when you go out to a place like that.

MR: When you guys were living in West Tampa, did you know of any other couples that were of your background marrying Latins?
SR: Yes. I went to school with a girl named Carolyn. I can’t remember what her maiden name was, but her name was Carolyn. Chano was friends with a guy named Henry, and they got married right around the same time we did. And then Chano’s cousin George married another girl that I went to school with, Judy. They’re still married. They were Cracker and Latin, just like Carolyn and Henry and Chano and I. That’s just a few that I can think of right off the hand.

MR: Did you all ever go on double dates with these couples, or did you guys see them out?

SR: We’d go to their house. We’d go to Carolyn and Henry’s house sometimes. And they would go to the races with us. My husband was into stock car races a lot. They’d go to the races with us. George and Judy we’d usually just see at family functions; but Carolyn and Henry, we’d go out with them a lot.

MR: Were there any males, like white males, that you knew that married Latin females?

SR: My brother-in-law and sister-in-law were already married when we got together, Bertha and Mac: he was Cracker and she was Spanish. And then Chano’s other sister Ondina married—his last name is Barnett, but his mother was half Spanish. But he was very Cracker.

MR: Do you know when he was born?

SR: Who, Scoogie?

MR: Yeah.

SR: I’ve got it on my paperwork. I can find it for you.

MR: All right. Well, let’s see, we can stop here today if you’d like.

SR: Okay.
MR: Then we’ll carry on another time.

SR: Did you cut it off?

MR: Yeah. I’ll cut it off.

*End of interview*