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Modesto J. Garcia (Interviewee)
Ana M. Varela-Lago (Interviewer)

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Ana M. Varela-Lago: This is an interview with Mr. Modesto Garcia. Modesto, I would like to start by talking a little bit about your family. Where did they come from, and why did they come to Tampa? Could you tell me?

Modesto Garcia: Well, my grandparents were from Asturias, Pravia, in Asturias. And they first migrated to New York—to the United States—to New York City. The length of time there, I'm not very sure, but at least, it must have been about six, seven years, I believe.

AM: What did they do there in New York City?

MG: My grandfather was a cigar maker. And, what little there they were, they had two children, Armando and Josefa. When they were still very young they migrated to Argentina, to Buenos Aires. Also because his brother-in-law, my grandfather's brother-in-law, was—pretty well off, and he opened up a, helped him open up a cigar store. Where, well, a tobacco store—where they sold cigars, and that's where the rest of the family was born—I think he had ten more children, some died at birth. But—so roughly around 1901 or 1902 they migrated to Tampa. And, the reason, same reason was—cigar, followed the industry. And the break up in Argentina was—my grandfather was against the Catholic religion—he was not, even though the children were baptized and everything, he was not, what you'd say a good Catholic, or, Catholic at all. He was—

AM: Why do you think that was the case?

MG: He believed in spiritualism. At that time it was kind of proper then, I believe. So that's what he believed in, he didn't believe in—and he had a break up with his brother-in-law and—so he packed up the family and came to Tampa.

AM: What was his name, your grandfather's?
MG: Manuel Fernandez. And my grandmother was Pilar Alvarez Fernan—I mean, that was her maiden name, Pilar Alvarez.

AM: So, they decided to come to Tampa—

MG: Yes, he came here.

AM: —around 1901?

MG: In 1901, 1902, that time of—I really couldn't tell you, to be honest with you, but—

AM: Did they know already somebody here, or—?

MG: He had relatives. And my grandmother had relatives here in—No, I think my grandmother is the one that had relatives here; see, I don't know, I'm not sure about him. But my grandmother had relatives here in Tampa.

AM: I see.

MG: I'm not sure if they was brothers, or—I believe it was a brother.

AM: So, what did they do in Tampa? They settled in, where?

MG: Settled, pardon?

AM: Where did they settle? In Ybor City?

MG: Ybor City.

AM: And they started working in the cigar industry?

MG: Right. Well, of course—my grandfather was, they had the house an 15th Avenue and 16th Street. And it was known [as] La Casa de la Manzana. Because—and they used to have room and board. Then my, well of course when the children got older, they went to work in the cigar factories at a very young age.

AM: So your grandmother took charge of the boarding—

MG: Right.

AM: —and your father worked in the cigar factory?

MG: And my grandfather worked in the cigar factory.

AM: Grandfather.
MG: And then of course when the kids got older, they gave it up, and they would work in the cigar factories, and they had to have a form of income.

AM: Okay. Why did they call that house La Casa de la Manzana? Could you tell me?

MG: It had, like, a rounded porch. And that's why they called that, I remember they'd mention it, you know, it was known as La Casa de la Manzana. I never—I saw it, in fact, later on in years it became known, Cafe Mercedes was there.

AM: Cafe Mercedes?

MG: And then became a—a restaurant. Cafe Mercedes. And the house was still there, but they'd fix it somehow where you, you could eat there; I mean, they added rooms, whatever—but the house was burnt down—I forget now, in the '60s I believe, it burned down.

AM: I see. Now these were your paternal grandparents or your maternal grandparents?

MG: Maternal.

AM: Maternal? How about the other side of the family? Do you know about that?

MG: The other side of the family—my father arrived here from, I believe it was from Grado, in Asturias. And—he must have arrived here around 1910, or that time around—1910, 1908, I believe—I really don't know; I should know. And—

AM: Did he come through Cuba?

MG: He came through Cuba.

AM: Was he also a cigar worker?

MG: He also, yes, he learned the trade here.

AM: Did he come alone? Or with others—

MG: Yes, he came—well, the trip he made alone. He had a brother. He had a brother—Faustino was here.

AM: Faustino Garcia?

MG: Garcia.

AM: And your father's name was Modesto? Like yours?

MG: Modesto. And he also had cousins, quite a few cousins here.
AM: Why did they leave Spain? Do you know?

MG: Hm?

AM: Why did they decide to leave Spain? To leave Asturias?

MG: Well—I think it was —there was, let's see—I think it was about—I think it was two girls and eight boys in the family, and I guess the farm was not big enough to—that and I think they were drafting them into the army too, in those days. Shipping them off to Africa, I believe—something like that. So—the ones who could get out, could.

AM: So your father was young when he came—

MG: Draft dodger, or whatever.

AM: Right.

MG: But, no, that's, and he had this thing here, and, well of course, during World War I he signed up for the military, the draft, and the same thing in World War II. I mean, at a certain age you had to sign up and he signed up. But it was a different type of war, I guess.

AM: Was he a citizen at that time, already?

MG: No. No he was not. He didn't become a citizen until—he died in '61—I think he became a citizen in 1958, '59. And that's another story which, turn it off on me, just a minute.

AM: Tell me a little bit about how your parents met, if you know, how did—they were both living here, in Ybor City?

MG: Yes, in Ybor City—

AM: Did they belong to the Clubs?

MG: Centro Asturiano?

AM: That was the—

MG: Yes.

AM: Was your father involved in the Centro Asturiano, in the board of directors, or active—?

MG: Well, he used to tell me—well, no, no, no, he wasn't that. He was very, he backed it, you know, any way he could, moneywise and everything—any benefits that were given, attending, dances whatever, he would, you know, back it up. As a younger man he used to set the ball pins,
the ball, the pins at the bowling alley. Because he was, I think he was 15 when he came here. Roughly.

AM: When did your parents get married?


AM: And they stayed in Ybor?

MG: No, not really.

AM: No?

MG: No. No, then they split up. They split in 1944. My mother went to live in New York, and, of course, he stayed here in Tampa.

AM: So your father was in the cigar industry all his life?

MG: All the time, yeah. Both of them—

AM: Did she also work in the cigar industry?

MG: She worked in the cigar factory also.

AM: Oh, I see. What factories did they work in?

MG: Hm?

AM: Do you remember the factories? The cigar factories they worked in?

MG: Well, the ones I remember, that was Perfecto-Garcia Brothers, that's where they were working when I was born. And—then my dad went to work for, I think it was Sanchez y Haya. I believe that's what it was—they called it La Pila, that's—Perfecto-Garcia brothers are known as El Paraiso. And I think that Sanchez-Haya was known as La Pila.

AM: I see. What do you remember of the great depression—the 1930s. Here in Tampa?

MG: What do I remember? Mostly no money. Well—well, families helping each other out, if one was not working, maybe the other was working, so it was—one hand washing the other. When you know—ones that had it, help out and, that's the way we went through it. Heck, they were going through many, sometimes, I believe six months out of the year, maybe less sometimes. So, everything went dead—

AM: Did your family remain here, or—?

MG: Hm?
AM: Did your family stay here in Tampa during those years?

MG: Yes. Although, well, see—like my Aunt Teresa and Aunt Ines and their husband, daughter, and daughters—I mean, they each had a daughter—they—that's one of the family that moved to New York in 1931. Believe that's in '31 they went up. '30 or '31. They drove—they drove from Tampa to New York; back in those years. In fact—not too long before she passed away, my cousin Vilma, at that time she must have been—about three years old—I asked her, I said, "Do you remember anything how—where'd you all stop back?"

Because I recall in those days—I mean, we had a lot of, there was some automobiles, but not like, you know, like—today, and the highways were not like they are. So, "Where, where would you all stop?" I mean—she says, "I asked my mother that and she says that they would—there were homes along the way." They would rent rooms.

AM: Oh, really?

MG: And you can spend the night there, and sometimes they gave you breakfast and everything then. Yeah, things were pretty rough then and she said there was farmhouses, they would put you up, give you breakfast. I don't know how long it took them to get up there. Imagine three, four days—maybe about four, five days, I guess.

AM: What did they do once in New York? Did they—work—?

MG: They had a cigar store. Yeah, they were all, all in the—

AM: They were? Did they remain in the cigar industry?

MG: In the—well, my Aunt Ines, she was the youngest of the family. She was the youngest on my mother's side. She was more of an accountant. You know she took care of books, bookkeeping. But she also, that's what she did mostly for the cigar store. And I think she worked out in some other company there in New York City. But her husband, Rafael, Ralph; he had, he's the one that opened the cigar store. And they had it all the way up to—I think up to 1938 or '39 and then he elect secretary of the union, of the cigar makers, in New York City. He closed shop. And he stayed with that post until he passed away or retired. And the ones here in Tampa—Paco, Francisco Diaz, he was, back in the '50s he was—in the '40s he was—he had been secretary of the—the cigar packer's union. And then became president in the '50s. And he was one that was very involved with the—with the Spanish Popular Front.

AM: What did he do? Do you remember?

MG: And he was from Havana, Cuba—he was not—

AM: Oh, he was born in Cuba?

MG: —in Cuba, yes.
AM: What did he do? Do you remember? In the Popular Front? What exactly did he do?

MG: I don't remember. I know he was, you know, with the Centro Obrero, he was very involved with that. I don't know what he—it was collection, collecting money or what, but he was very involved with it.

AM: Do you remember how the Comité Popular, the Popular Front got, how did it get organized?

MG: I have no idea.

AM: Who was in charge with—? No?

MG: I have no idea. The only thing I can imagine, it would be the—I imagine it was the—the unionists there at the Labor Temple. Because they, you see, they had all the, besides the cigar makers, I think they also had the waiters, the bartenders and waiters' union was there also, I believe. I forget, I don't know if they had any other more unions. But, they all used to meet there.

So they could have—I mean, I think that's, that's where it started, I really don't know. To be honest with you.

AM: What do you remember most of those years? You know, the years of the war in Spain?

MG: Well, the shock that I still get is, I still remember—is still implanted in my mind—I'm not sure if it was from a picture in a magazine or in the newsreel. When they were bombing the City that—an elderly man holding a little girl and looking up. And that, I'll never forget that. And, another one was after the—the Rebels were practically winning the war, some of them were crossing through the Pyrenees— trying to get into French Basque, or France itself—another man holding—I don't know if it was a boy or a girl—on his lap. And he would put his hand over the fire, the flames to warm it and they rubbed the kid's legs with that. That I remember also—and then some of the—bad feelings that sprang around some neighbors.

AM: Um-hm.

MG: Yes.

AM: Was there a lot of conflict between people? Discussions and—

MG: Well. In the neighborhood I lived, I didn't see too much of it, but I heard of, you know, of other places, you know. There were some bad feelings towards Italians, among some people you know and—I mean, they didn't have no say-so about it, it was —but—some friends of mine—were taken out of Catholic schools on account of the—the Church views in favor of the Rebels. That's about it, Ana, I don't know what else to tell you.

AM: You mentioned before the newsreel. Do you remember looking at films?
MG: Yes.

AM: Or a newsreel. Where? Did you—?

MG: At movie theaters—you know, they used to give you a—like to go to the theater was—popular around here—I think it was, well for me it was five and then it became ten cents—but even for grownups, ten cents; they used to get two movies and the newsreels and the cartoon.

AM: So the newsreel related to the war in Spain—

MG: Yes, they showed that—

AM: — in those years.

MG: — it was like world news, you know, and they would, maybe be a minute or so of it, show highlights and then they would go to something else.

AM: Right. Now how about documentaries like movies that were brought here dealing with the war? You know. Do you remember any—

MG: No.

AM: — coming or some event—

MG: No, the only—

AM: — at the Centro Asturiano, some other places?

MG: No, I don't remember any of that. About the only one that was talked about, it was for—I mean, about Hemingway, but that was after the war.

AM: I see. How about the speakers that came to talk here, at different events, do you remember any of those speakers—?

MG: No. The only one that I remember is, the one about that, that veteran from the, that you say was blind.

AM: Um-hm.

MG: That's, that's the only one that I remember.

AM: What do you remember of that?

MG: Well, the enthusiasm that he was received, I mean the people mostly stomping their feet, because, he made a speech about the U.S. He spoke at the, I just can't—
AM: He spoke here at the Centro Asturiano? At the theater?

MG: Yes.

AM: Were there a lot of people attending?

MG: Yes, that's what I say, it was full house. That's why they were sitting out here on the fire escape, see? Trying to get to listen.

AM: How about others, do you remember the Ambassador Fernando de los Rios—

MG: No.

AM: —when he came to speak—?

MG: What was his name?

AM: Fernando de los Rios.

MG: De los Rios. No.

AM: How about news from Spain? How did your family get news from Spain? Did they do—

MG: Hm?

AM: How, how did your family get news from Spain, information about what was going on?

MG: Very little. I don't know it was, because I don't think, my father didn't hear of anything from his family until after the war. Now, on my mother's side—like, my grandfathers, my maternal grandfather, he was, the family he had left was in Argentina. So. I don't know if he even heard any more from them or if he wrote to them. And my father didn't hear from his side of the family until after the Civil War. And I think both of my grandparents in Spain were dead before the war broke out. They had passed away already.

AM: What did your parents think about the war in Spain? What was their view about it?

MG: Well, they were for the Republic, for—they hated Franco with a passion. Yeah. In fact, all the family for that matter; I mean they were very pro-Loyalist. So.

AM: Why was that, do you think?

MG: Hm?

AM: Why was, were people in Tampa so supportive of the Republic? Do, do you—?

MG: Why?
AM: Yes.

MG: Well, because, I guess the majority of them were workers, you know, laborers, unionists. Yeah, but, I guess the whole Popular Front was that. You know, so. It was strictly for that. Now, as far as religion was concerned, I believe that my sister, she kept on going to church—and my cousins, I mean, it was—you know. They weren't prohibited or anything like that from doing so.

AM: And how about the Spaniards here who were supportive of Franco. Do you remember—?

MG: I didn't know too many. I knew, because they told me so, I mean, I wouldn't know because I didn't know what, I never heard the men speak for them, but it was—oh, he lived on 17th Avenue. In fact he look, he used to remind me a little bit of Franco. He was short, and I know, he looked, he reminded me of, and I was told that he was pro-Franco. And, I really—that's about the only one that I know of. And of course then, I would hear talk, course, that the manufacturers—cigar manufacturers—were for the Rebels. The majority of them were. That's about all I can tell you, Ana, about them. I mean, you know.

AM: Were they organized in any way?

MG: You see, like I don't know, I never knew anything about this De Soto, Hernando De Soto chapter or whatever that is. I never heard of it until the last Saturday I was here and you showed it to me.

AM: Yes, so there wasn't really any organization on their part. I mean, people were not really organized.

MG: I really don't know.

AM: How about the other communities here, the Cubans, the Italians? What did they do, during those years?—Did they also participate in all these events, or that was pretty much the Spaniards?

MG: I think it was pretty much Spanish among—well, of course here at the Centro [Asturiano] it would, you know, be—but I really don't recall the Cuban Club or, actually I, they might have done it, but I don't recall them doing a benefit for the Spanish Civil War or the Italians, for that matter. I have no recollection of it. No, no. I'm not saying that there weren't Cubans involved or Italians involved, helping out, I just don't recall any.

AM: You mentioned before some of the things the children did. Could you tell me a little bit more?

MG: Hm?

AM: Could you tell me a little bit more about some of the activities the children did in the Frente Popular?
MG: No, really. I remember them—being in plays and, in what do you, glee clubs or singing groups, whatever. But not as far as—and this lady here [looking at a photograph] was Carmen Ramirez, she was—very much involved with them. The reason I say that is because later on in, back in 19—this is after the Civil War and just—prior to '41—we, I think it was for the Loyal Knights of America, we did a—I was involved with it with some of my buddies and friends from school—some son-of-a [whispers]—I even forgot but it was like a chorus and we sang and it was a play and, in fact I even forgot what that was all about but, no I really don't—outside of collecting that tin foil from the cigarette packages and—¿Cómo se llaman? Las funciones that they gave, that's about it I don't know.

AM: What did you do with the tin from the packages and the—?

MG: Put up to, make it into a ball and then, I used to give it to my uncle Pepe; he's the one that, I don't know where he dropped it off, but.

AM: What did they do with that?

MG: Willie Garcia says they made—fishing—sinks. He says they made sinks out of that and sold them; I really didn't know that.

AM: I see. Was your mother or your father involved in any way with the Frente Popular? Attending some of the events, doing—

MG: No.

AM: —something?

MG: No, not that I recall.

AM: I see. And how about the demonstrations. Do you remember any of the demonstrations?

MG: Well, outside of the one, we marched down to the City Hall. That was to get Roosevelt to lift the embargo. The arms embargo. And that, that's the only one that I really remember.

AM: Were people upset with Roosevelt and—the attitude that went—

MG: Well—

AM: —the United States—

MG: —it's hard to tell, I mean, yeah.

AM: Yes, what do you remember about that?

MG: It's hard to tell, I mean, I remember, I can see—coming up in the depression, Roosevelt was like a Messiah. Yeah—in fact that was the only president I've known until he—it looked like he
couldn't do any wrong. So, my—what do you—I'm gonna say now, how they felt about—older, I guess they were not too happy with it, you know, even though he's the one that put in 40 hours a week and he was very pro-labor when he. So. It was hard to dislike the man for not lifting the embargo and—and then, you know, for, considering the facts, what he had done for the working people. See, the unions were not recognized up until he took. Until he did, so, you know. So I imagine it was—give and take there, I imagine. I never thought about it that way. What they thought about him. And then the, well, they all paid for it later on anyway, the French, the English.

AM: Yes—what, what do you think of, or do you have any opinion on that, the embargo—?

MG: What's that?

AM: Do you have any opinion on the embargo issue? Do you think the United States should have had—a policy, or—?

MG: Well, actually even if, the way I feel about it, now that I'm older and think about it, I don't think that they could have won the war even if they had lifted the embargo. Because—the manpower was being sent from Germany and Italy and there was no manpower [that] could compare to combat that. So. Plus they were getting all the arms anyway. They would have lasted longer, maybe. They would have lasted longer, maybe; but it's, I still think they would have won. Now that I'm, you know, when I look at it now, at this time. Because if Mussolini lost what? Fifty-thousand Italians there? He would send another hundred-thousand or more. Or more, he would, they're right there next door to each other, just about. The Germans would send people over too.

AM: Do you remember any of the volunteers who went from Tampa to fight in Spain?

MG: The only one that I know—not from Tampa—the one I knew was he was from New York, and that's—his name was—he just passed away this year. His name was Samuel Nahman, and he was known as Manny Herman in the Lincoln Brigade. You wanna know that name? And he, actually, he was here in Tampa during, back in 1942, he was, then he was in the American, United States Army then—he was stationed here for about a year. And then he went overseas.

But he had been—I think he went to—he was 17 years old when he went there, I think. He was 17 years old. I think he went in 1937 or, '38 or '37 he went there. And, like I say, he passed away this year. I, his brother's married to one of my cousins, that went to New York back in '31.

AM: Was there a lot of activity in New York in support of the Republic, do you remember?

MG: I believe so. Yes.

AM: What things do you remember? What kind of things did they do?

MG: Not that I remember, it's just what I read, and—and then of course, the Communist Party was very strong there in New York. And they of course were for the Republic, and—if there
were any communists here in Tampa, they had to be very careful.

AM: Why?

MG: Well, even though you—the Constitution protects you and everything, but back then—I better say this off the record.

recording stopped

AM: So, for communists in Tampa it wasn't that easy to get organized—

MG: Oh, they were probably organized, but you, you know, they couldn't come out in the open. In fact, even up into the late '50s—the Communist Party had a newspaper in New York City called The Daily Worker. All right? They used to send a batch of it down here to the bus station. Drop it off there.

AM: Nobody would go to—

MG: And then leave it there. And nobody would go pick it up. And that, that was being watched, see who's gonna pick it up. And the Tribune [Tampa Tribune] even took a picture of the bundle of the news—Daily Worker—nobody, because, they were watched constantly. In New York they were probably watched too, but it was more open and they weren't afraid to show themselves out. But down here, down south, like I say, they'd tar and feather you. Either that, your Ku Klux Klan. It was a mess.

AM: So were people in the Latin—

MG: So you can figure the environment that the Republic—the Popular Front—had to work under. Because, I forget what stories, I wish I would have had that [the tape recorder] when I was in the cigar factory. Because, the older men, they were, they were the old, more, well practically all of them—I would say 90% of the guys that worked there in the cigar factory were, you know, the first, the immigrants. There were some there that were already first generation, like, I was, working in the factory, but there were stories they'd tell that—

AM: Like what?

MG: Like when they'd go on strike. The mayor and everything, they would get all these toughs, whatever, and come and beat them, trying to beat them back into the factories and everything. Yeah. And—this guy, Peter O'Knight, they—he's supposed to be so good and the whole bit. He had a, he and his partners made this bank, and they—back then I'd say the banks were giving 6% on your earnings, on your savings. They'd offer about 18. So of course the cigar makers, they were the ones that were really making good money in those days here in Tampa. They didn't have that—the best paid here at one time were the cigar makers in the cigar industry were making the good money. So they would deposit that money and get that 18% or 20% interest. So then, all of a sudden—
AM: Closed down?

MG: They closed up the bank, they went bankrupt, whatever. And where the money went nobody knows. So they owed these people, so there was a big hassle. And Peter O'Knight's, well, says, "Well, they're young, they can start working again and earn it." But he had swindled, but he, you know, it was just a big swindle. And he got away with it; he could. And there were stories like that, what the educated Anglos did to the workers here, the immigrants. And it was—And of course they were anti-Labor, 100%. They wanted your money over there but they didn't want you over there. You know what I mean?—

AM: And this was still going on in the '30s pretty much?

MG: Well, even in the '40s. I mean, they—I went to apply for a job. Electric. And the guy that I went to see about the job, he called up to let them, you know that he was gonna, sent me to see the personnel manager over there and he gave the name. And the man says, "Well, by looking at him you can't tell." So what does that tell you? That he's not dark, you know, or that. You know, a Latino is supposed to be a black guy or, he says, he told them, he says, "By looking at him you can't tell." So, and like I tell you, he got my name and everything about it but I knew I wasn't gonna get the job and I didn't get it.

AM: Because you were Latin?

MG: Yes. They wouldn't—I went back to the guy, I told him about it, he says, "He didn't—" I said, "Look," I says, "Why did you tell him that by looking at me you can't tell? What'd he ask you, if I was black? If I was a spic, or what, what is it?" He, "No, I'm sorry," bueno, adiós. But that, and that's after coming, after serving in the service and being in the service, the World War II, every bit. Then they love you, but. Yeah. So. It was, like I say, it was pretty crummy. They—Cómo dice el dicho? Te mastican pero no te tragan.

AM: Takes awhile.

MG: You know what I mean?

AM: Yes.

MG: Well. Now, I'm assuming there's been a lot of changes in the City and everything since then, but it was—they didn't like the idea of—the only ones that they, of course, because they were the big wheels, was the cigar manufacturers. They all lived over there in the—Hyde Park area, Palma Ceia. Very few, the only one that I can remember is Celestino Vega, he had his home here on Nebraska Avenue. Just before you got to Columbus Drive. I don't know if any, anybody else, but the rest of them, they were all, I'd say—high tone area.

AM: How about the people in the middle? Kind of the—foremen and the, I mean there were the cigar manufacturers and then there were the workers. And how about the people that were—

MG: In the middle?
AM: —better off than the cigar workers, but not—

MG: Well, you had—

AM: —as high as the cigar manufacturers, where were they?

MG: Managers—?

AM: Yes.

MG: —well, you had—

AM: Or were they pretty much also with the workers?

MG: No, they were strictly with the owners, I mean.

AM: Oh, really?

MG: Yes, management, yes. Oh, yes. Well, they had to be, otherwise they wouldn't be managers. You know, they—

AM: How about the highest paid workers, like the escogedores, the selectores, were there also a different class of cigar workers, or—?

MG: No, the escogedores, no. They were—

AM: They were pretty much—?

MG: They were, what do you call it, Republic? Republicans?

AM: Yes.

MG: There might have been some that—but very few. In fact I, I just don't know of any.

AM: Right. So were there a lot of conflicts then within the factories between the owners and the workers? I mean, the owners supporting Franco and the workers raising money for the Republic—

MG: Well, they didn't stop it, you see, because the factory doors, especially there in the, what do you call it—in the stairways, the entrance to the factory—you were, that's where, and some right, right there at the door of the factory would stand there with a box to make the collections for the, you know, and they didn't stop that.

AM: Right.
MG: But—

AM: Could there be retaliations towards workers, you know—

MG: Oh, no, no.

AM: —who gave money and things like that?

MG: They were not, I mean they were not that petty. At one time they were, I mean they would fire you for not—not liking the way you combed your hair or something, you know. But as a general rule, they were all for, most likely all for Franco, the manufacturers. And of course, they were anti-Labor.

AM: How about Americans? Were they involved in this in any way? Against, or in favor?

MG: Well, you had some Anglo-Saxons that worked in the cigar factory and I imagine they were involved in it. Of course being you know they worked with, you know, being fellow workers, but—I can't help you on that.

*Side B, Cassette Tape, begins*

AM: How about the American press, and, you know, did they comment?

MG: I believe the American press was mostly pro-Franco.

AM: Oh, they were?

MG: I believe so, yes. Because, you see, right up to attacking Pearl Harbor the country was so divided and, in fact it was mostly in favor of staying away, you know, from Europe. Not to get involved. I believe the press was against the Republic. And they, what was it, the idea, scare, that it was communism that was behind all of that. They were gonna take over Spain.

AM: What was the opinion of people here in Tampa? I mean, how did they look at the Republic, the cigar workers? Here. Were they defending communism in Spain? How did they perceive what was—

MG: Oh, they, they didn't think, if someone was socialist or whatever, I mean. But what I believe is just, they believed in the Republican form of government. What they were, the idea of what they had here would be the same over there. You know, which I think was basically what they were trying to do. But that, you know, business of a takeover by communism was so big and I guess that that hurt the cause quite a bit, too.

AM: What was the feeling of the community here when Franco won the war? What—happened?

MG: Well, despair, I guess, disgust. Weren't happy with it. My grandfather was still alive, Manuel, he wasn't too happy with it. They had taken over. And of course he wasn't happy with
anything—you know, grandparents.

AM: Had they expected this outcome, do you think, that you know—

MG: Hm?

AM: —had they expected that Franco would win?

MG: Well, I mean, already in '39 it looked like it, you know. And they were not getting the aid. You can only go so much and that's it. And the other people were getting everything. They could see the writing on the wall.

AM: Do you remember being here when Franco died in 1975? Was there any reaction at that point, or was this like pretty much—?

MG: Well—no, it just, it was not—there were so many of the old ones that had already gone, you know, that really had—worked so hard for the cause, for the Republic and —when Franco died, all of my—outside of my Aunt Maria, all the ones, the rest of the family they were all gone. There was no—now, later on—see, when you started traveling to Spain, after World War II, then they finally started going over there, and things were still rough in Spain, it was hard, and then—I think a dollar could—you could buy God knows what over there, and—but then, was in the '60s, it got better, and then—see, I think I went to Spain in '75.

AM: The very same year he died.

MG: Was it '75 I went? I wish my wife was here now. Franco passed away in '75?

AM: Um-hm.

MG: It must have been '78. Then it was '78 when we made the first trip to Spain and we took my father-in-law and my mother-in-law. He celebrated his 85th birthday there, in the house he grew up. And he used to tell me how well everything was, compared, you know, what he remembered, he said, digo, "no veo miseria." He said "No veo la miseria." So evidently he had done something right that—So. And then one time here when things were getting kind of… with the police having trouble with the thugs and all the rioting and everything say, "What we need here is another Franco."

AM: Oh, people would say that?

MG: We need a Franco to get order. And, in that way it's true —but I don't condemn [means 'condone'?] what he did in '36, you know? Or '39. It's a different story. Then we went back in '80 —but he had since then he passed—and then my wife and I went on the second trip. We had to, I had to sign papers over there to give land that belonged to my dad back to the—in fact, he had signed papers here—in the '50s. And it turned out to be it was not—not right, in other words, the land he gave to my cousin in fact was, that's the son of Faustino—the brother that waited for him
here in—'cause Faustino went back; my father stayed, but Faustino went back to Spain. And he married and had his farm up there. And he, it was Faustino, one of Faustino's sons that my dad signed the papers, making him owner of the land, but evidently they were not right.

AM: So you had to do it again or, help him?

MG: So he sent me the papers, see if I could do something with them, and I went to see Willy Garcia. And when he told me, "No," he said, "Yo no hablo español," dice, "it'll take me forever to understand it." And he says, "And your sister lives in Virginia Beach," and he says that there are very few Spanish speaking lawyers living over there, I believe. He told me so. It just happened that my sister and I—we were planning to—my wife and I were planning to go back and Willy says, "Tell your sister she can go too." She did. But then, that's when I saw the difference since '75 to '80, '86? Or '84. I went.

Anyway, there was that liberation creeping in, you could see it, and one of, Dolores's cousin, Jose, who was, he was a coal miner. A retired coal miner, en el pueblo. They're still mining there. He says, "Los chiquitos ahora, los muchachos ahora, estás caminando por la calle, no te dan paso, te quedan ahí, no se ve respeto." You know he says—"muchos cambios." And you can see it.

AM: Yes. You mentioned your uncle returning to Spain. Was that common? That people could go back to Spain after many years of having lived here?

MG: Yes, I mean, the way I have it understood, they would come here to work—five, ten years or so, make the money, save the money and go back. And—I guess, go back to being farmers up there and have that money put away or something, I just—

AM: So that's what your uncle did. When did he leave, then? I mean how long did he, was he here in Tampa? More or less.

MG: I don't know, Faustino, I really don't know how. Because, I never met him, I mean, in fact, when he left—

AM: Was he gone before you were born?

MG: Yes.

AM: Oh, okay. Now your father was never attracted to this idea of returning to Spain?

MG: No, he never, he got married and, never went back. I tried to convince him to go back and make a visit and he said no, he said, "I was young and my brothers and sister were young." He said, "The only way I would have gone back is if my parents were still alive. Have they been alive, I would have gone back but—" he said, "I don't—" he said, "I got the family here now."

And by that time we had, you know, he had the grandchildren here in Tampa and then he had three grandchildren, my daughter had—my sister had three kids. So he, "La familia está aquí."
So he didn't—I tried to talk him into going and, "No, no."

AM: Yes. But then some other people actually did?

MG: Hm?

AM: But then some other people really returned?

MG: Oh, yes.

AM: Not to come back to Tampa.

MG: Well, he has cousins that came here, and I don't think, I don't believe any of them went back either for that, primos. In fact I'm going back this year.

AM: You are?

MG: Yes. Going, we're going in July. We go back—

AM: Are you with the Sister-City program, or?

MG: Hm?

AM: No. Are you going with the Sister-City program?

MG: No.

AM: No. Some other people mentioned—

MG: No, not with that. La esposa, mi esposa es mitad francesa. La madre de ella es de Francia. En ese primer viaje que fuimos, fuimos a España y estuvimos ahí Como una semana y media y luego de ahí fuimos para Francia, y estuvimos como una semana también y media ahí.

AM: So you plan to go to France, now, too?

MG: Yes.

AM: Oh, that's good.

MG: Yes, todavía tiene primas o algo allá en Francia.

AM: I see.

MG: Y yo me pierdo ahí.

AM: You don't speak the language, French?
MG: Nada.

AM: She does? Your wife?

MG: Ella, yes.

AM: Okay. But her father was Asturian?

MG: Asturian, yes.

AM: The mother was French?

MG: Yes.

AM: Oh, and they met here in Tampa?

MG: In New York.


MG: He worked here in the cigar factory, but—things were slow here; anyway, he went to—he went to Jacksonville because they had cigar factories there also and that was not too good. Anyway, he—I think he got on a ship there in Jacksonville and he went by ship up to New York City and then he became a waiter. That's what he did the rest of his life. And that's where he met his wife. She didn't speak Spanish and he didn't speak French, and so the little bit broken English—that's how they—and then of course later on she learned Spanish. After she moved here she picked up real good and she spoke it. But he never spoke French. English and Spanish, but—she picked up Spanish real good.

AM: Okay, Modesto, before we conclude this interview I would like to ask you if there is anything else you would like to add that we haven't discussed—

MG: Hm?

AM: Is there anything else you want to add to this interview that we haven't discussed?

MG: I don't know if I've been any help to you, Ana.

AM: Yes, you have been. Is there some aspect that maybe we forgot to discuss that you think should be included in the interview? Anything at all, related to your family or, the Latin community in Tampa or the war in Spain, or any thoughts—?

MG: No, the only thing. Well, I remember as well the unity they had. Back then it's, it was very good, I mean as far as—that's all I can think about, Ana, I mean, they were very enthusiastic about it, I mean you know. What they did. And they believed in it. That's about it.
AM: Okay. I want to thank you very much for participating in this project.

MG: Yes. There's—I was going to say, I think that my wife's got your phone number at the university—

_End of interview_