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Jose Oural oral history interview by Ana Varela-Lago, March 3, 1997

Jose R. Oural (Interviewee)
Ana M. Varela-Lago (Interviewer)

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Ana M. Varela-Lago: This is an interview with Mr. Oural. And I would like to start by talking a little bit about your family. How did your family first come to Tampa?

Jose R. Oural: As I understand, my father came here in, I thought it was 1902. But, I believe it must have been in 1905. And, he worked—

AM: Where was he from?

JO: He was from—Paraños, in Lugo. La provincia, the province of Lugo. And he worked as a butcher. Well, he came in through Cuba and worked in a cigar factory in Cuba for a few months—he couldn't make any money, so he decided to come to the United States. And he worked in a cigar factory here for about a year. They used to call it La Trocha.

AM: I see.

JO: And he had to work many hours so he decided against the possibility of trying to make a living in that condition. So he opened a butcher shop. He sold meats for the rest of his life, I guess. During the first World War, I think, one year he went to Newport News, Virginia. He worked in a shipyard over there for a short time, then came back, and continued selling meats.

AM: Where was the Shop? Was it in Ybor City?

JO: Oh, yes. It was on—Columbus Drive—which was Michigan Avenue—and 16th Street.
AM: Did it have, like, a name?

JO: A name, it had El Pueblo. Carnicería El Pueblo.

AM: Do you know why he chose that name?

JO: No. I don't. I still have, I think, one of the invoices.

AM: Oh, that would be nice to have.

JO: Which, if I can find all of the pictures or invoices or, so. And he knew of my mother—my mother and him were actually related. I think he was a, or she was a second cousin or something like that. My father was quite a bit older; thirteen years older than my mother. He knew of my mother; he went, I believe, in 1919 he went to Spain, and talked to my grandmother about maybe releasing her daughter. So in 1924 he went back and they came to Cuba. And they got married in Havana and came to the United States.

AM: Was there any kind of courtship, then? I mean, how did they get to know each other if he was—?

JO: I really don't know if it's something like a medieval type of arrangement or what it was—

AM: But he knew that he wanted—

JO: Yes, they both knew of each other. They didn't know each other personally, but of each other.

AM: That's very interesting.

JO: And so, I guess he gave my grandmother a couple of cows or whatever it was that it would take to—and they were—well, until death, actually. I was born in 1925. And my sister was born the following year, 1926, here in Tampa. My mother had been, oh, quite sickly all the time, and the doctors recommended that she go to Arizona—I don't know whether she had tuberculosis or what—because that's what they used to recommend at that time. Go out to a dry climate. So they decided to go back to Spain. So she and the two offspring, my sister and I, went to Spain. My father stayed behind.

AM: How old were you at that time, when you went back to Spain, do you remember?

JO: Actually, six years. I was six when I left for Spain—I don't know what—we went to school in Spain. I guess we enjoyed the life over there, which we lived in a very, very small village—I wouldn't even call it a village; I guess a group of homes, that's all it was.

AM: Did you live on a farm? Did you do farm work?
JO: Yes, farm, yes. Most of the people there had—they rented their land from larger landlords and they had parcels of land in different places in the area.

AM: Did you go back to the area where your father was from or where your mother was from?

JO: Where my mother was from.

AM: Okay. Which was—?

JO: Which is very, very close to a—

AM: It's also in Lugo, in Lorenzana?

JO: Oh, yes. Yes, it was in—San Jorge, en Requeixo. And that's where my mother was from. And my father was from Paraños, which is probably two miles away, or—so very, very close.

AM: Were there a lot of people from that area in Tampa? Do you remember? Other families—?

JO: I don't remember, but I know that there were several other people from the same, from Requeixo—and there was one other from Paraños, and I can't remember who they were. But there were people known to each other over there in Spain.

AM: So at that point, you come back to Spain. And your father remains here.

JO: Remains here in the United States, right.

AM: So, what happened? Why did you come back to Tampa again?

JO: Why did I come? I received my, I guess, the revolution started in 1936 and in August or September of '36 I received papers to serve [Francisco] Franco. Because I was in that area of the country.

AM: How old were you at that time?

JO: Almost twelve.

AM: Twelve, and you got the papers to serve in the Army?

JO: Yes.

AM: To go to the front?

JO: And my sister says she still has the papers and I'm looking for them so I can make
copies of it and preserve it. At that time my mother wrote my father about it and my father made all the provisions for us to come to the United States. Now, while we were there we didn't see any battles. There was no battles or any, but we did see the Moors. Los Moros.

AM: Where? In your area?

JO: Oh, yes, they had gone in there, brought in by Franco's—by the army—the rebel army. And, I was very, very impressed with them. I guess I was not impressed but more or less afraid. Like, we were all forced to line the streets up. To watch them go and give the Nazi salute, the right hand salute. And, we did see two or three times we saw some airplanes flying by. Small, small planes. But there was no battles. And there were several killings. There were; in fact there were, that I know of, there were three priests that were killed, evidently by people from the Republic. When, I don't know it. And they were very, they were killed very—in fact what they did is actually they stuck a stick through their mouth and they hung them. You know, they go ahead and force them like that. Very—

AM: Were these priests you knew? I mean, priests from the churches—from parishes?

JO: From the churches in the area, yes. And that impressed me very much. But, we still, like I say, we left there in November, in December—in November. November 22nd of 1936.

AM: How did you leave the country? Was it difficult to leave?

JO: Yes. We had to go to Vigo. Well, in the first place the consul in Vigo had sent us a letter after the revolution to—if we knew anyone in the area that, any American citizen that would like to leave. So, naturally my mother wrote that we were ready to leave. And they mentioned that they would be able to help us leave the country. Even help financially to leave the country if we were American citizens. My mother was not a citizen. But she had gone and she had signed the papers saying that she would be returning to the United States, so.

And we were underage, so they had to have some kind of adult escort. We came down Portugal, to Lisbon. And we boarded an Italian ship, in Lisbon and came to New York. From New York to Tampa. Arriving here on the seventh of December. Now, I still have all the correspondence between the consul and us and the consul and my father and one or two of the telegrams that my father had sent to Washington to get things going.

AM: Did you leave alone? I mean, just your family?

JO: Just our family, right.

AM: Do you remember other people in the same circumstance?
JO: No. No.

AM: Getting out—

JO: No. We—just my mother, my sister and I. We left together. That's it.

AM: What was the feeling? I mean, did you understand what was going on in Spain as you were leaving?

JO: I think so. I think so.

AM: What do you remember? Your feelings at that point? Were you scared, or were you—?

JO: Well, definitely, I knew that if we stayed there that I would have to go and serve in the army. Whatever that was. I had no idea what the army was, but it's something that no one liked, that everyone had left the country because they didn't want to serve the King or the army.

AM: Had your father left because of that?

JO: Yes.

AM: Was that it?

JO: Yes, yes.

AM: How old was he when he left?

JO: Gosh, I don't know. I really don't know.

AM: But he was young.

JO: Oh, no.

AM: Probably, I mean.

JO: No, he was probably in his twenties, because he was born in 1882. And you had said that in 1902 he was in Villanueva, I think, taking a physical exam. So he had to be at least 20 years old.

AM: But he never served in the military?

JO: No, no. No.

AM: That's the idea, he left the country before—
JO: Yes, right.

AM: —having to go.

JO: They didn't get, they never got a chance to catch up with him.

AM: I see. So you arrive here in the United States and you come back to Tampa. What do you remember of the mood of the people here?

JO: Well, the only thing, like I told you before, I remember people speaking about collections and giving money to buy ambulances, and—

AM: Well, do you—excuse me—when you first arrived, did people come up to you and ask you, because that must have been something to have—

JO: Yes, uh-huh. We had several people come up and ask us. This was a Republican stronghold over here. And we came from the rebel side of the country. So people would come—and we were impartial to one or the other at the time—and people would ask how the situation was there, if there was any famine or if they treated the people right, or whatever. Because it was a lot of talk on both sides I guess of—cruelty.

AM: Right. Now at that time you didn't take sides one way or the other?

JO: No.

AM: I mean, had you expected—I guess at that point that the people here would be so, in favor of the Republic? Was that something you expected—?

JO: I really don't think that I gave that much thought. We were glad to get off, out of a violent environment or what seemed to be violent—and coming to a freer place, so actually I never did give it any thought. But I remember going to, like I said, going with my father to listen to speakers—one of them that I can remember plainly is Fernando de los Ríos. And that was at the Centro Obrero, the Labor Temple in Ybor City. And I know we had gone to the Centro Asturiano Club to hear others, but I really can't remember who they were at the time.

AM: Yes. What do you remember of the ambassador speaking? Anything in particular?

JO: Actually, no—

AM: Were there a lot of people in the—?

JO: Oh, no, no. It was packed. Every place anyone from Spain would come and speak the place would be—
AM: Was that mainly Latins, or just Spaniards, or also Americans who would go to these events? In your memory.

JO: I wouldn't answer that truly, but I think they were mostly what we call Latin. Spanish speaking people. But I really couldn't say. We never read the, over here the English speaking press or, at all. So we couldn't, you know, we only read the Spanish paper—

AM: Yes. How did you get your news from Spain? That's an interesting point. How did you keep informed about what was going on in Spain once you were here in Tampa?

JO: Well, through, actually the local information in Spain was my grandmother—her husband had died many years before—and friends of my mother's. And they would write continuously—and the letters were never censored—I guess there was no censorship at that time, so. But that's about the only way. And the press here in town, the Spanish press here in town.

AM: Do you remember listening to radio? Some people do mention radio. In your neighborhood, in your area? You get together—

JO: Yes. Yes, some of the radios, but it would have had to be mostly from Cuba, because there was no Spanish speaking stations here in Tampa.

AM: Did you speak English at that time? Did your family speak English?

JO: Nope.

AM: No.

JO: Not at all.

AM: You maintained kind of a Spanish culture—?

JO: Yes, the only thing I spoke was Spanish. I didn't speak any English until I went to the service here. I avoided speaking English I guess because the—well, we tend to kid each other, children would laugh at me when I would speak with a greater accent than I have now.

AM: I can understand that. You mentioned some of the events that took place here. Do you remember anything else, like the plays that people used to put at Centro Asturiano? Movies, maybe, related to the war? Anything at all—?

JO: I don't remember. I know that we had, we went to several of the plays, and operettas. The *zarzuelas* that they had, but I couldn't even—My father was always very active as far as that was concerned, and we went to several of them. That I can remember, but I couldn't even begin to tell you which show it was, or what it was. He was also active in collecting foods and things like that for the Spanish people.
AM: How about your mother? Did your mother participate in these things?

JO: I don't think so. No. My father was a little more active, he was more outgoing than, I guess, than my mother was.

AM: Did he do these things through the Frente Popular, or through some other organization, when you said he collected—?

AM: I couldn't say. No, I really don't know. No.

AM: How about, can you tell me a little bit about the church? The Catholic church here? I've heard there were some problems between the Catholic church and the pro-Republic people in Tampa—

JO: Here in Tampa?

AM: Yes. Here in Tampa.

JO: No.

AM: No?

JO: I really don't know of—

AM: Were you going to church? Were you brought up—?

JO: Oh, yes, we went to church, but we had never—we went to church—my father didn't. We went to church with my mother, so my mother never participated in any action at all, so. Evidently she kept away from every—but, no, we haven't, I'm not able to tell you anything about the church here.

AM: Now, in your home, you mentioned that your, was your mother's feeling different from your father's in that sense of supporting the Republic, or—I mean, do you remember having—?

JO: No, it was never—

AM: —some kind of conversation at home about all these things that were happening, you know?

JO: No, not, actually not, not that I can remember. My father helped. My mother never interfered in anything. She didn't help one way or the other, but, she never interfered with what my father was doing. The lady's job at the time was quite different from what it is, their role, yes.
AM: And you as children or teenagers at that point, how did you participate in these events? I mean, what do you remember, did you do something? Apart from being a member of the audience of these other events, but did you collect money—?

JO: That's about all. No, I never did. No.

AM: You didn't gather—

JO: No, I did not participate in any way. No. That was something that the grownups did and I didn't—

AM: I see. What can you tell me, for instance, about the different groups—like the Italians and the Cubans. How did they look at this support from Tampa, with regards to the Spanish Republic? Did you feel that they felt differently?

JO: I wouldn't be able to—I have no idea how they felt. We had more contact with the Cuban community than with the Italian community, but I don't remember what their feelings would be.

AM: Yes. You don't remember—I mean, there was any debate between the communities, or—confrontations, or—?

JO: Really, yes. I really don't. No.

AM: And how about people who, here in Tampa, might support General Franco? How did they deal with all this support for the Republic? Do you have—?

JO: I really don't think that they ever said anything. They were probably afraid that they were, they would be overpowered by the amount, you know, the Republic had — overwhelming power here, as far as, in comparison to—if there was any. I don't even remember knowing of anyone that supported the Franco regime.

AM: You said, you don't remember anyone? Or noticed the—?

JO: I can't. Not at this time. Maybe if someone would mention a name or something then, "Oh, yes, I remember." But not at this time, I don't.

AM: Yes. And there weren't confrontations in the community in that sense—debates maybe, in the cigar factories? Or maybe at your father's store—discussion of events, or—?

JO: No. No. No. Maybe in the cigar factories, there probably were some confrontations, but not in my father's store or anything like that; it was — there was no arguments.

AM: What do you remember of how, you know, the war was evolving? Obviously the Republic was losing ground. Month by month. And Franco finally won the war. What do
you remember of those months, when people obviously were supporting the Republic but the Republic wasn't winning—?

JO: Yes, they were losing. Actually, I just can't remember what—

AM: Do you remember, like from your own experience, a day when you realized that the war was over, or—was the war affecting your life in any way—?

JO: No, no—

AM: —were you following events?

JO: —none whatsoever.

AM: No?

JO: I was a non-participant, and—I guess I was strictly an American with no, I wasn't interested at all at that time.

AM: So once you came back to Tampa, you kind of forgot—

JO: Blocked everything—

AM: —about that—

JO: Oh, yes, oh yes.

AM: —and became involved more in—

JO: In the daily affairs—

AM: Life.

JO: —of life here in Tampa.

AM: How about your family? You mentioned that they would still correspond with your family in Spain. Did they mention how things were going in terms of—how your grandmother was doing, or other relatives? How were they experiencing the war?

JO: Not, because of the government—they were very poor—nothing could happen to them, they were just as far down as they could get, to start of, so, anything would be an improvement, for them.

AM: They never considered, for instance, leaving the country?

JO: Never. Never. Never at all. And my mother had tried to maybe get my
grandmother—her mother—but she wouldn't leave the area. She wouldn't even move from there.

AM: Once the war was over, do you remember the community still participating in some other events—?

JO: No, I don't. I really don't. That's what I said, I didn't think I had too much.

AM: How about your family? I mean once this, you know, the 1930s ended, and World War II started and Franco was in power for so long. Do you have a sense of how they experienced that part of—?

JO: See? We weren't affected by the outcome.

AM: Did your father ever go back to Spain?

JO: My father, no. My mother did, quite a few times. But we, actually we weren't affected over there or over here. With the economic conditions over there or over, you know we, it had no bearing on us.

AM: How would you say the war affected you, or your family, in any way? Now that, you know, with the hindsight of the years—?

JO: Well. I have no idea how long I would have been, had I stayed there. I think it made me better, because I came to the United States and I was able to live a better life than I probably would have over there. But I really don't think it had any effect on me.

AM: Did your father become a citizen?

JO: Oh, yes, and my mother also, yes. Uh-huh. My father, right—'40 or '41, he became a citizen; my mother later after that, yes.

AM: Why do you think the Tampa community was so supportive of the Republic? Now also with the benefit of hindsight?

JO: I really don't, I never gave that any thought at all. It's something to think about, but, I have no idea.

AM: Talking about a little bit before you mentioned that your parents became citizens in the '40s. How did your family experience World War II? Were you involved in—?

JO: In the service?

AM: Everybody was involved, I guess, but how much did the war affect your life? Did you serve in World War II?
JO: Oh, yes. I served, and they were in—they didn't like me going but they were in favor of me serving, being in the service. And I stayed several years—well, I stayed active until 1955 and I went in '43. So.

AM: Was there a lot of support from the Latin community in terms of—?

JO: You mean for the World War II? Oh, definitely, oh yes. There were quite a few volunteers.

AM: Yes?

JO: Oh, quite a few—I mean, many volunteers.

AM: And what other things do you remember about that?

JO: Well, several of our friends, the younger people volunteered into the Army, the Marines, the Navy. And, before that, they had volunteered to be in the National Guard. Thinking that they will be able to make some extra monies, like some of the young people out there with the reserves now. And they were called and they went down, most of the people from here went down, to the South Pacific. With the National Guard units there. But I don't know, I never volunteered. I volunteered one time and it was hard. No, no. But, I don't have any regrets whatsoever. And, I was called back in 1955, 1950, for active duty. And we were married, and I don't regret any time that I spent in the—

AM: Growing up—I didn't ask you about this before. When you came back to Tampa, what was your childhood experience, were you enrolled in school right away?

JO: Oh, yes.

AM: What kind of things did you do?

JO: Well, we—

AM: At that time you didn't speak any English at all.

JO: None, none whatsoever.

AM: How was it to come back here, and just having to go to school and having to function—?

JO: I didn't have any problem. We didn't have any bi-lingual help or anything like that.

AM: What school did you go to?

JO: We went to Robert E. Lee. On Columbus Drive—on Michigan Avenue. And we knew mathematics, you know, the arithmetic. We knew how to read. We may not know
what we read about. We knew the geography, so, we were promoted quite frequently. Both my sister and I, yes. Until junior high, and then it's—

AM: And what else did you do after that? I mean you kept going to school, and—?

JO: I kept going to school and I was drafted. When I was in the 10th grade.

AM: Oh, you were?

JO: Yes, because I was older when I started, so. I went in the service in 1943.

AM: You were married at that time?

JO: No, no.

AM: No.

JO: No, I married in 1950.

AM: How did you meet your wife?

JO: She came over to my father's store—her mother was buying from my father—on a Friday, a Friday or Saturday, whatever it was. And I was gonna go to a football game with one of my old teachers. So, I liked her better—

AM: So you stayed. That was love at first sight?

JO: Yes. And that's it, yes. And then, let's see, as soon as I married her I had to go back into the service, during the Korean War. And she traveled with me, and went with me. I was, most of the time in the military intelligence—which is a contradictory statement; military and intelligence, they don't go together. But she traveled with me all the time, and after we had the children she went to university and became a teacher. Good. She was a good teacher.

Recording paused

AM: Now that we're talking about people not needing English for anything, basically, your father, I assume his business catered mostly to the Latin—

JO: To the Latin, yes, the Spanish speaking people. But he spoke English. And he traded, he sold his groceries and meats through the Latin trade. So, if you'd go to Seventh Avenue, you didn't need any, everyone spoke Spanish. All the vendors and all that, they spoke Spanish and you had no need to go any place else. They had everything there.

AM: Yes. Did you belong to the clubs? Did you have a lot of—?
JO: Centro Español for a time, and then Centro Asturiano.

AM: And your father, I guess, and your whole—?

JO: Oh, my father belonged to Centro Español, yes.

AM: So the family was really—?

JO: Yes.

AM: Was there any difference in belonging to the Centro Español or the Centro Asturiano? Or was just, I mean did different people belong to the different—?

JO: Right, and—

AM: —clubs or, it didn't matter?

JO: You know, I hate to say this but they had a different feeling. The *asturianos* had the feeling that they were it. They were better quality of person than the *españoles*. The *españoles*, we were all *gallegos*. You know, whether you came from Southern Spain or Eastern Spain, whatever it is, if you belong to Centro Español, they were *gallegos*. But, that was a good club. They both had good hospitals. As far as the mutual help was. And, I belonged, oh through, oh '54, or '55 to the Centro Español. And I really don't have, Hilda, my wife, belonged to the Centro Asturiano.

AM: Although her family was also from Galicia?

JO: Oh, yes, one, half-and-half. *Un gallego* married an *asturiana*.

AM: Oh, I see.

JO: Yes, my father-in-law was from Galicia, from close to where we were. And her mother was from Oviedo.

AM: Did people marry within the ethnic groups, so to speak? I mean, Spaniards with Spaniards, Italians with Italians—

JO: Yes. They more or less stayed together. But, you would find a lot of the—Italians would marry the Spanish. The Spanish, or the *gallegos* would marry the *asturianos*, and so on. But yet, you found very little of the Cuban interaction in these things.

AM: Oh, why do you think that was?

JO: I have no idea—I really don't—it's hard to say but, you know, the *gallegos* and the *asturianos* they always fought each other. And yet, they come to the Americas, they marry. And I imagine, the Italians and the Spanish were always fighting, so they come to
the Americas and they intermarry.

AM: Right.

JO: Each other, so. But, I don't know why they did that—

AM: You were talking before about this, Acción Gallega, which was a Galician society, in Tampa, and your father was a member of it. And part of the Board of Directors for many years. Do you have a sense that there were other societies like that, from the different regions within Spain, or was this just like—?

JO: I really don't know, no. I know he belonged to the Acción Gallega and I had no idea there was anything available—

AM: Yes. You never attended any—?

JO: No, never attended. None of the—He belonged to another and I think it's the I-double o-f [Independent Order of Odd Fellows], whatever. So that'll, I'll have to check on that.

AM: Did they speak Galician at home? Your parents?

JO: No. No.

AM: And when you were in Spain, do you remember learning?

JO: Oh, yes, yes we had to learn to read and write even at that time. I don't remember anything. In fact, Angel comes in with some phrase and he has, sometimes he had to explain them to me and it's, "Oh, yes, I remember now."

AM: But being in Tampa when you were growing up, you don't remember people really using Galician in any way?

JO: No. One or two of the—women that never were Americanized, they are still living in Galicia, that's all they spoke. But, as I understand, in the Acción Gallega, I think the meetings and all that was conducted en gallego. But, I really don't—So that, I really don't have much.

AM: That's okay. Just to end the interview, I would like to ask you if there is anything else you would like to add to what we were talking about; that maybe I forgot to ask you, or you want to make sure that it's included in this interview. Some aspect—

JO: No, I think you covered it pretty well. I wish I had had a little more information that you can use.

AM: Well, every bit is useful.
JO: Yes. That way you can work out your puzzle, with little bits of information.

AM: Um-hm. Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Oural. This concludes the interview.

JO: Thank you for inviting me.

_End of interview_