



Samuel Proctor Oral History Program
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences



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The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program (SPOHP) was founded by Dr. Samuel Proctor at the University of Florida in 1967. Its original projects were collections centered around Florida history with the purpose of preserving eyewitness accounts of economic, social, political, religious and intellectual life in Florida and the South. In the 45 years since its inception, SPOHP has collected over 5,000 interviews in its archives.

Transcribed interviews are available through SPOHP for use by research scholars, students, journalists, and other interested groups. Material is frequently used for theses, dissertations, articles, books, documentaries, museum displays, and a variety of other public uses. As standard oral history practice dictates, SPOHP recommends that researchers refer to both the transcript and audio of an interview when conducting their work. A selection of interviews are available online here through the UF Digital Collections and the UF Smathers Library system.

Oral history interview transcripts available on the UF Digital Collections may be in draft or final format. SPOHP transcribers create interview transcripts by listening to the original oral history interview recording and typing a verbatim document of it. The transcript is written with careful attention to reflect original grammar and word choice of each interviewee; subjective or editorial changes are not made to their speech. The draft transcript can also later undergo a later final edit to ensure accuracy in spelling and format. Interviewees can also provide their own spelling corrections. SPOHP transcribers refer to the Merriam-Webster's dictionary, Chicago Manual of Style, and program-specific transcribing style guide, accessible at SPOHP's website.

For more information about SPOHP, visit <http://oral.history.ufl.edu> or call the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program office at 352-392-7168.

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PCM-033

Interviewee: Marguerite Zumbado

Interviewer: Candice Ellis

Date: July 8, 2011

E: This is Candice Ellis with Marguerite Zumbado on July 8—

Z: Zumbado.

E: Zumbado. On July 8, 2011 at the Panama Canal Reunion in Orlando, talking about life in the Zone.

Z: Right.

E: We begin at the very beginning with how you came to be at the Zone or how your family did.

Z: Right. My grandparents both arrived, I think 1920, on both sides of my family, maternal and paternal. My maternal grandfather was at sea. He was the chief engineer on one of the ships that wasn't going through; it was just out in the ocean. Somebody killed the ship's cook, so they had to look for the nearest American jurisdiction to try him, which was Panama. When they got to Panama, for some reason—and we don't know why—he just decided to go to work for the tugs division right there in the canal. He became the chief engineer for the tugs at that time. That was in 1920. Then a few months later, he brings his family down to join him, and at that time they had only four children. The last two were born there in the Canal Zone. When they first got there, they lived in, I think it was, Pedro Miguel, and then they moved to Gamboa. In Gamboa, a train would come

in once a week with groceries, and my grandmother would go down to the train station, and all of the people were there. That's where they bought they bought their groceries. They'd just go there and get them. You can stop this every now and then, right?

E: Oh, yeah, if you need to pause.

Z: Anyway, then they finally moved in—I'm not sure when—over to Cristóbal, to New Cristóbal. I think they stayed there; for as long as I can remember, that's where they lived. They lived in the same house as far as I can remember. When my parents were divorced, I went to live with them for like four years in that house. With my other grandfather, he came down. He was working in Costa Rica. He worked with the railroad. So, he's working there and he decides that maybe he can get a job in Ecuador. He heard of some openings in Ecuador. So he hops a ship, gets on a ship going through the canal. He's talking to the gentlemen below who are putting the ship through, and they say hey—imagine—the man who was the dispatcher just died last night. So, he jumps ship and he's able to get that job. Then he remained there. Both of my grandparents worked there anywhere from twenty-five to thirty years. Now, my maternal grandfather, he had five children, and only his last one was born in the Canal Zone. All the others were born in the States, my father included. My mother also, on my maternal grandparents' side, was born in the United States in Maine. All of them were born in Maine in both sides. My maternal grandparents, when they came

down, they stayed for three years and then they went back for their vacation. They spent a couple of months in the States, which everybody usually got. Every couple of years, you'd get a free paid vacation back to the United States. So they went back there, and when they returned my grandparents never ever left the Canal Zone until he retired. When he retired, he retired to the state of Washington, all the way across the country.

E: Totally different environment, too.

Z: Right. Nobody in the family knows why he decided to do that. As far as we know, everybody got along. When I was living with my grandparents, the housing there—one of the questions is about the housing. Most of the homes that I lived in in the beginning were the old French-style homes that were built up on stilts. They had large overhangs from the roof and just screened windows. They all had transoms on all the outside, above the windows and below the windows. They had an opening with a screen also, so that the air would circulate. Even sometimes between rooms, there would be transoms. So it wasn't really what you call private. I think that's what caused the very good cross-ventilation, so you really didn't—the French really had a good plan there.

E: It wasn't too hot, even with no A/C?

Z: No, it was very comfortable because the air circulated so well. It made it comfortable. When I first got there, we all had iceboxes, and the ice truck would

come around. They would deliver the ice, and all the kids would run out in the street. There's always some leftover chunks, and they'd always give us a few pieces. We enjoyed that. Underneath the houses, they always had an area that—those houses that were built high on stilts always had like a concrete base, and they very often had an extra room, which was considered to be a maid's room, and a bathroom, and laundry tubs for doing the laundry. In those days, most people didn't have—I know my grandmother eventually, before I left there, she got herself one of these washing machines. You wash in it and then you use the tubs, too. It wasn't like the washers that we have today. Underneath those houses, there was always lots of room for playing, like when it was raining or for hanging clothes or for giving parties. When I was young, we used to give a lot of plays. We'd make up plays and have plays. Sometimes, you'd give a dance recital or whatever. Then you'd go out and sell tickets, of course, to all your neighbors, friends who would feel obligated to come and buy them. [Laughter] Since I lived there from when I was probably four until I was seven—and that's the Atlantic side—my grandmother and I, every time we went to the grocery store we would walk through Colón, which really was a nice walk, go to the grocery store, pick up the **Carametta**, which is a horse-drawn buggy, to come home.

[Editor's Note: This concludes the interview.]

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