

YBOR 55

Interviewee: Julia Padron

Interviewer: Susan Greenbaum and Manuel Alfonso

Date: January 24, 1986

G: This is an interview with Mrs. Julia Padron and this is January 24, 1986. Also is Manuel Alfonso, he is helping me with the interview.

P: Well, from the time I was three years old I lived in Ybor City.

G: You came from New York originally.

P: No, my father did, my father is a New Yorker. My mother is a Georgian.

G: How did they meet?

P: My father owned horses, he was reared up on the race track, Whitney's Race Track in New York. When he was twelve years old his father died and he became a jockey.

G: Your father did?

P: Yes, and then after he got grown, he became an owner of two horses and he brought them south to Jacksonville to race them. And before he knew it they had his horses pulled, what they call pulled, and they broke him in Jacksonville.

G: Why did they do that? Who did that?

P: I do not know exactly who did it, but it had to have been among those people, the race owners you know, to have his horses held back. They pay the jockey that is on, you know, if a jockey is crooked the owners of the other horses will pay somebody that is riding the horse that they want to hold back.

G: I see, so that is what happened to your father.

P: That is what happened to my father. And my mother got the first grade certificate in the state of Georgia, she was a teacher. And she had a brother that was in business in Jacksonville and during the summer she came to Jacksonville to help my uncle run his business, which was poultry and fish at that time. And they had a straw ride and my father met my mother on the straw ride.

A: He had good taste.

P: And on July 6, 1911, they were married.

G: And that was in Jacksonville?

P: That was in Jacksonville. And then in 1912 they built and opened a station here, Union Station. My father had good connections. And by breaking him he was broke. My momma said when she met him he had diamond studs, pins, everything, but they really broke him. So, then he got in with the Union Station officials and they sent him here and he is the first man to call trains here at the Union Station. On the Union Station will be seventy-four years old on May 15. We lived in Ybor City.

G: Were you born in Ybor City? Or were you born in Jacksonville?

P: No, I was born in Ybor City.

G: What year was that?

P: I was born August 16, 1912.

G: I was born August 14.

P: Oh, how about that! You know my mother used to live next door to Louis \_\_\_\_\_, the same guy that is in that picture, his cousin.

A: Where were you born? What street?

P: I was born down near the Union Station. Jesse was born at Eighth Avenue and Twelfth Street. There used to be a big double house right there.

A: Right about where the winery is now.

P: I do not know, used to be a big, you know everything has built up and changed so much, I have not even been through there in a long time. I know Jesse was born at Eighth Avenue and Twelfth Street. And we lived on Tenth Avenue and then my father bought a home in Hyde Park, way out, and we lived out there until the boom came. In 1926 he sold it. Then we moved back to Ybor City.

G: So you lived in Hyde Park from...?

P: From, let me see if I can get myself together now. I was six years old.

G: That would be about 1918 through 1926 you think?

P: Yes, so then back to Ybor City.

- G: You came back to Ybor City. Then you were...?
- P: I was in the catholic school, Saint Benedict Catholic School on Twenty-first and Columbus Drive, that is where my husband and all of the Cubans went to school. Everybody that lived in Ybor City went there.
- G: Your father was one-eighth black?
- P: Yes, see his mother, my grandmother was a Mulatta, or her mother was a Mulatta, see my father is an octaroon because his father is thoroughbred Irish. The blood was explained to me all the way down the line. But my great-grandmother had a little colored blood in her and Indian, so that made my grandmother the same, see. And then my father's father was thoroughbred Irish. Irish and Indian and an eighth of Negro blood in him that we know. Now as far as Negro blood is concerned I do not know of any in my mother at all.
- G: So, it was just this one element in your father. When you arrived at Ybor City how did you go to Saint Benedicts School that was the segregated school, right?
- P: Yes.
- G: How was is that your family was identified as a black family I guess is what I am asking since you do not appear to be?
- P: Well, we were reared up there and we just went where our friends were I guess.
- G: And how did you find your friends when you were young?
- P: I really do not know because we were taught in my home that everybody was the same, you never drew a line, you never heard of black and white, which I think is ridiculous today. But, we all played together and we met the nuns and we started going to Saint Benedicts School. I played for O. L. P.H. Church. And I met my husband in his mother's house. I had been to the school and decorated the black board because I was finishing high school and teaching kindergarden at the same time. And that Thanksgiving, which was in 1929 I went to the school to decorate the black board for Thanksgiving. At her house she was playing the piano and singing and my husband came in and that is how I met him.
- G: You knew his mother but you did not know him.
- P: Yes, I went to school with his sisters and his cousin is here.
- G: So, you went to the public high school then in Tampa?

P: No, that is the Saint Benedict. I took my classes, I finished my high school lessons there under her. And there is a lot of us that went there, just like the family we just got through talking about, you could not tell if they were white or had any colored blood in them.

G: This was at Saint Benedict's.

P: So, it was not just you who was feeling unusual about your appearance or had any kind of unusual...?

G: No.

A: Many pupils went to that school, generations and generations. My mother went to that school.

P: Some of their skin was whiter than mine.

G: So, this is how you got to know the Cubans, at school?

P: Well, no, not at school because I was reared up among them.

G: So, it was mainly in the neighborhood of each of the people that you knew and then you went to school with them.

P: And then my, well they called themselves our god-parents when my mother and then used to live on Tenth Avenue, they were all Cubans and they just fell in line that is all.

G: So, you were always Catholic, your family was Catholic?

P: My father was Catholic and my mother was really a Methodist, but she never attended Methodist Church here. We all became Catholics and in my mother's late years she became a Catholic too, so we always went to the Catholic Church. I played for the same brother-in-law at O.L.P.H., used to be a little church around the corner. When I was fifteen years old I played for his wedding.

A: A wedding church.

P: Yes, I played for his wedding and he is still living, he turned eighty-one years old last month.

G: And you played for his wedding?

P: Yes, lost his wife and son two months apart last year.

A: Who is that?

P: \_\_\_\_\_ and Nelson, \_\_\_\_\_'s wife and son.

G: So, you were always musical then. How did you get started playing?

P: Well, number one, my mother, she knew piano and she started us. And then I took music under a Mrs. Shoots, she was a finished musician and pianist. When I got older and I went to school I started taking under the nuns. I used to play pretty good. I used to sing pretty nice.

G: Did you think at the time that you would ever use the music that you had for anything but enjoyment. I mean, did you think you would be part of a band or...?

P: No, not until I met my husband. Because he was interested in music, he did not know the notes because he had taken only a few lessons. But when he met me that was the bargain that we made, the very first day we met. When I got through playing and he asked me my name and he admired the music and my singing he asked me if I would do something for him, I said what is it. He said, "I would like to make a bargain with you." And I said what kind of a bargain so he said, "I will tell you what to do if you will teach me how to play piano I will teach you what love is all about." That was my husband and he really meant that and he did that. Yes, sir.

G: How old were you then?

P: Seventeen.

G: Seventeen. So, you say you were just out of high school and starting to teach?

P: Yes, physical ed.

G: Did you give music lessons also?

P: Yes, I did. I taught \_\_\_\_\_ her first piano lesson. She is a teacher.

G: I remember when she used to come to the school.

P: I went to the doctor. One day my doctor was out here on the end of Bush, and I went to the doctor one day and I saw this woman leave and she was blind and I looked at her and looked at her and I walked up to her and I said, "Are you beauty." She said yes, she could not see me now but I told her who I was. I taught her her first music lesson too. I used to walk because you know we did not used to have transportation back then, and you taught music then for

twenty-five and fifty cents an hour. But today boy, and I can not even use my hand to do much anymore.

G: Before you met your husband did you ever do anything at the Marti-Maceo, did you go there for any reason? Did you know the people who went there?

P: Yes, they used to have what we called summer matinees, dances in the afternoon for the young people. We would go early and we would be out around ten or eleven o'clock.

G: Did you speak Spanish then when you were growing up?

P: Well, I learned some Spanish from the time that I was little. Not perfectly.

G: So, just in the neighborhood.

P: Not perfectly because when I started speaking Spanish, I wanted my mother and father to speak Spanish. My mother and father did not know Spanish so I would start crying. I would go out and have a ball with the kids and come in and felt like my mother and father should understand me. So, it kept on until my father said, we had better take her to the doctor. And they took me to the doctor and explained what was going on, you know, so he says well the only thing I can tell you, the best thing to do is move away. So, that was when my father bought the home in Hyde Park and got out of it.

G: I am not sure I understand. Why did they take you to the doctor? Why did they think you were ill?

P: They did not know what was wrong with me, I cried all of the time.

G: Because you were so depressed.

P: Right.

G: And that was because of the Spanish on the sidewalk and the English at home?

P: Yes. We were all there playing and I wanted my mother and father to understand Spanish, and they did not so I would cry. So, I remembered some Spanish from back there too.

G: So, then you were gone for awhile.

P: Yes, and then came back and here I am.

G: Now, you met your husband after you came back?

P: Yes, sure.

G: Okay. So, you went to his house, his mother's house and you met him, then how did you get started courting? What was that like?

P: Well, now let me see. How did that start. Well, he worked. He was a cigar maker and when we first started making eyes at each other I was in school and he would pass, you know. One day I went to the store--I used to have to make all the lunches for the children--and I went to the store to get all of the meat or whatever it was to fix the sandwiches for the children that could not afford to pay for them. And when I went to cross the street, he was coming down the street and I had to step back up on the sidewalk to let him by and he looked at me and smiled. He did not know who I was and I did not know who he was and then I met him at his mothers. And then, this I will never forget, his mother said to me, "Do not have anything to do with Raymond because he is a big flirt."

G: You did not take her advice though.

P: I could not. I tried, but I could not, he did not let me. No, no, no, no. We made a wonderful pair and I am very grateful to God that we got together, I really am. I think we were an example for a lot of young people. This is not bragging, but I do not think since my husband died there has ever been a dinner or party that we were not missed. We were the life of the party. We were the ones that played music and my husband loved a nice time in a nice, decent way. And we really enjoyed each other. People used to say, here comes Raymond and his queen or Julia and her king. When we would go the dances we always wore clothes to match each other. Whatever one had on, the other one matched it, we did that.

A: One of the last parties that I remember was over at the Gene Casa's. It was the old man's birthday and they had a big party out in the yard, and you were playing the piano and Raymond was singing, do you remember?

P: Yes, and then we had, we would get the piano from the Cuban Hall.

A: You got the piano from somewhere, I know you had a piano.

P: Right and then at Cukoo's house too. You know, when we would have the big dinners at Cukoo's house, here in Ybor City. We would get the piano from there, we would have the piano brought over there and I would play Maratos and Clare and he would play guitar and I would play piano and we would switch around. I had a wonderful life with Raymond I really did.

G: How was it to be a Cuban wife after not really having been raised Cuban? Was

there anything difficult to get used to in that?

P: No, sir, number one in life is love, understanding and cooperation and that will take you through life, the most beautiful life you have ever had in your life, that is all it takes. But number one is love on both sides, not a one sided thing. Then, you have to have an understanding, know what you like, adjust yourself one way or the other, and then cooperation, that is it. And anything in the world my husband wanted to do, I do not care what it was, what time of day or night it was he wanted to do it, I was right with him.

G: And he felt the same?

P: Yes. If he would wake up at three o'clock in the morning I would wake up too. Sometimes he said honey you know, I am hungry. I said what do you want to eat, oh, I feel like eating french fried potatoes or something like that, so I would get up in go in the kitchen and cook them. And I worked every day. He never knew what it was to eat a dinner in a restaurant unless he left his keys at home, forgot you know. A lot of times he would walk to work and he would forget and leave his keys on the table and then he could not get in until I got back home from work. And he never, knew during the depression time when we first married everything was very, very bad and I had to get up and I would cook dinner every day before I went to work.

G: You worked in the school then?

P: No. See, I taught physical ed, let me see it was in 1928 that I met Raymond, because in 1929 is when I come out of high school and I went to work for the city recreation department. And I worked seven and a half years, I worked the first years at the playground leader and then I worked up to supervisor of nine playgrounds. At that time we had nine Negro schools and playgrounds and I was supervisor. After seven and a half years we got into the depression and the city went broke, the banks closed and everything, the banks closed in 1929 too. They layed us off, I had my recommendation right there from my superintendant and then for awhile you could not hardly get a job anywhere.

G: Was this 1929 or right after?

P: No, see I worked seven and a half years from 1929 to I think was thirty-six, somewhere along in there.

G: So, in the 1930s.

P: Yes.

G: Let me visit that whole period, there were an awful lot of changes in the

community.

P: When that closed down, at the Florida Hotel, they had an institute there for bell hops and maids. Dr. Sheehine and Dr. Lester and so many of the doctors and women had other qualifications but they took it, you know, they took those trainings. We were all young and we were all out of work and we took it. So, Dr. Sheehine left to work for the railroad company as porters on the railroad. And a lot of the women that took it, I took it, we all finished the course and when you finished the course they gave a certificate to prove that you were capable of handling these jobs. I took the maids training and I would ask different ones at the hotels and around if they could help me to get on. I kept waiting and waiting but nobody helped me to get on anywhere. So I took my certificate one day and I went down to Temple Terrace Hotel and when the lady saw the certificate she hired me I went to work the next morning and then the people who worked in the hotel got angry with me those women you know. So, well, I started that and I would have to get....

A: That was at Temple Terrace?

P: Yes. I would get up four o'clock in the morning--and then you know you did not have a lot of canned beans and things like that like you have today--and cook dried beans and I would soak my beans and get up at four o'clock in the morning and put my beans on and rice and whatever I was going to do but at six o'clock my dinner would be done for the day. I would take I had some crockery bowls and I would fix my husband dinner. We had oil spills at that time. I would take the crockery bowl and fix his dinner in it and cover it with foil, then cover it with paper, then cover it with a towel and put it in the oven and when he would come at eleven thirty his dinner still would be hot, would not have any heat at all.

G: He was working in the cigar factory?

P: Yes, he was always working in the cigar factory from the time he was twelve years old.

G: Did he stay employed as a cigar maker or did he get laid off?

P: He got laid off from time to time. He was laid off, well for Christmas they would always be laid off, you know, for six weeks and sometimes more. That year boy I was making eighty dollars and forty cents for week seven days a week, fifteen cents an hour. That year he was out six or eight weeks and Raymond was the kind of a person if he made a dime he was going to save something out of that dime. So, I never will forget that. He went, he was laid off, and he went to the Cuban, he bought his license tag for the car and when I got home he said honey look at this, what do you think. I said well it looks like a good **boleda** number to

me, we called boleda, it was numbers you know. And so he took the tag and he went to the funeral home and he held the tag up and he said, this is what they are going to throw tonight. So, one man jumped up and challenged him and said, I will tell you what, Padron, if they throw your number you give me thirty-five dollars and if they throw my number I will give you thirty-five dollars. It was thirty-three forty-four, and they threw that number, well, you know Raymond had in his pocket thirty-five cents and he was afraid to spend the quarter so he put the dime on it, he got two hundred and seventy dollars. We got 270 dollars and we payed up our monthly bills and he had some to put in the bank.

G: How important was boleda? How often did that sort of thing happen to people that you knew about it, somehow coming in when you needed it, or coming in enough times that it made it...?

P: Well, I tell you my husband and I we hardly ever discussed it. Now he might have discussed it with his friends, but I never.

G: You did not know too much about it.

P: I did not know too much about it. I know my father used to play because, you see my father died broke because he was a gambler in his young days, he was a race horse owner, you know, on the track. And I remember one time he caught eighty dollars and he played back thirty-five of it on one number. And he lost it.

A: I would say that boldeda is Ybor City was another industry.

P: Industry, yes.

A: People used to bank, I mean the people that had money in the bank and a lot of people used to live off of that. For every seven boledas, they used to get a percentage of the sale.

P: They had them walking from door to door.

G: So, this is wide open.

P: Yes, at the time.

A: It was against the law.

P: No, at that time I do not think it was against the law because it was too public, they went from door to door and sell you boleda and whenever you called. I know my father had a man that he bought regularly from and whether he was in town or out of town he would pay the man for the number, whether it came out or

it did not, and this time the number came out my father should have had 6,000 dollars and the man told him he sold his number. Isn't that awful? You know, Baby won 6,000 dollars one time when I was young.

A: And you bought a car, right?

P: Yes, the yellow car.

G: You bought a car with that money?

P: Yes, it is another Cuban. But Raymond never played boleda no more. Because he was not a gambler and I was not either. Now I did when he was thirty-eight, I will never forget I played on a job, a man came by there and he was thirty-eight and I paid a nickel on it and I caught eight dollars. Everybody played you know, I just went ahead and played but they stopped it and they made a law because the Italian people were killing up one another and it was awful. It was just awful. Every two years you knew there was going to be a murder. And one of the ladies that rolled with my husband, her husband was in one of these big shot gamblers and bankers and he had made, twelve years she waited for him in prison. He came out and they got married and she had a baby, a little girl, and he had bought and built her a beautiful red brick home in Robus Park. When that baby was sixteen months old and Andrea was riding down the street on Seventeenth Street, and her husband was sitting aside of her asleep and she was driving the car and they shot him in the head. Shot him dead right beside her. I know too many cases. There was another one in Ybor City, near us one block in front of us. At that time my father was a plain clothes detective and he was working with the constable and this was a plain clothes detective who he was working with that night. No, he was with the constable that night, this other one, an Italian fellow that lived one block in front of us, worked by himself that night. And when he was on his way home when he went down Twenty-ninth Street going down to Eleventh Avenue, there is kind of a little hill that goes down there. They shot him to pieces right there, if my father would have been in the car that night he would have got it too. And they used to burn homes, oh my god.

G: So, these were sort of gang wars over who controlled the boleda.

P: Yes, and that is why they had to put out laws.

G: You said it was Italians, were there Cubans in boleda before, was it between the Italians and the Cubans.

P: The Italians were the bosses.

A: At the beginning the first one to bring the boleda to Tampa were the Cubans.

P: Right.

A: But then the Italians came in and started taking over, then they started to move the Cubans off the racket and then they started killing one another.

P: And burning houses. I never will forget we lived on Tenth Avenue and I had a picture back there I found this week of our house on Tenth Avenue. There was a house on the corner between us and the house opposite the street.

A: On Tenth Avenue between Sixteenth or Seventeenth?

P: No, Tenth Avenue between Twenty-third and Twenty-fourth.

A: On the other side, behind the \_\_\_\_\_ back over in that area?

P: Yes. We had some chairs on our front porch and he would come and hide behind these chairs at night, trying to catch, they has been tipped off as to what they were doing. And one night he did not come I believe, I do not know the night exactly but I do know those Italians had a bunch of children and they went to west Tampa for a visit and along around twelve-thirty that house went up, but they got there quick enough to find out what had happened before it all went down and they had big five gallon jugs of kerosene or gasoline, whatever it was all around in holes and had it set to blow up. I am telling that was just one block from us. I am telling you it was something else, they used to burn.

G: There was a lot of labor unrest in the cigar industry during the 1920s and the 1930s, especially the 1930s, do you remember your husband being involved in like the 1931 strike?

P: No, he was not in the strike. He left here in 1933 and went to New York for nine months. He did not like New York, and so he came back. They were always striking, but he never participated in any of them, whatever.

G: So, he was not active in the union?

P: He was active in the union but he did not have anything to do with the strikes. He used to say a lot of times it just did not make sense a lot of the things they struck for. They all had to become unionized but he never participated in anything like that.

G: You said he went to New York for nine months in 1930.

P: To see if he wanted to stay. He went back again in 1943, when he was in the service, to see if he wanted to move. He said well, if I decide to move just pack

up everything because we did not own a home at that time. Just pack up everything and come on. But he could not stand New York, he hated it and the weather was bad too. He went into the fur market up there. They really made good money all of his brothers and everybody was in the fur market.

G: How did he get into them? Because his brothers were in them?

P: Yes.

G: Were there other Cubans involved?

P: Yes, in New York. See, they stretched the furs and they worked with furs. And made very, very good money. Raymond could not stand it. In three weeks he said he was coming home.

G: When he was here he was a cigar maker and he also had a band, right?

P: Yes.

G: How much did he play? How often did the band play? And what kinds of events did they play for? How did that work?

P: Well, we played for the Latin people sometimes we would go into the restaurants on Seventh Avenue.

G: So, you played the piano and then the orchestra?

P: Yes, and then whenever Marti-Maceo had affairs we always played because they had no other Cuban bands.

G: How much money would that bring in?

P: Oh, let me tell you something, we used to play at the Marti-Maceo for two dollars a night.

G: A piece.

P: Each. And a lot of times we played for nothing.

G: Was that because it was Marti-Maceo, or was that a usual fee?

P: No, that was for Marti-Maceo.

A: They you used to play for the Racket Point too.

P: Yes, he played, but I do not know that was before my time.

G: So he worked all day every day as a cigar maker and you worked all day every day first in recreation and then in the hotel.

P: And then when I left that, I went in as a social. That is another thing I was going to tell you I got two government scholarships during the depression. I went to Tallahassee and I went to Daytona and I came back as a social worker. I took growth and developmental children, social work, and nursery school work and I was assistant principal in the first government nursery here. And then from that I went into social work and from that the government built this project in west Tampa, we opened that in 1941 and I was the first woman investigator they had there. I worked until the project was filled up and when the project was filled up I was terminated. So, then, I went into interior decorating.

G: As an investigator, what were you investigating? The families that were applying?

P: Right.

G: You would interview them?

P: I would go into the homes and make an investigation and verify the statements that they had given. And of course things were much different from now. Then they had to show a marriage certificate to get in there. And we had an area here where the Nuceo sub-division is now and where the government project is, runs back to, not quite to \_\_\_\_\_. That was the worst looking, dilapidated area you have ever seen in your life. When I made a home investigation there, there were two bathtubs from Scott and Nebraska all the way over and down.

A: Almost to downtown?

P: Yes, two bathtubs.

G: All together? Only two?

P: Only two bathtubs in the whole area and they could step from one porch into the other. I went into a home there, one of the animal houses.

G: Does this describe the settlement?

A: Yes.

P: And then there was another further down Garrison.

- A: At the incinerator, the jail house, all that in there.
- P: Well, the jail house was right there on Scott. I had a play ground right there where that big church is right next door to our church, that was all a big play ground, we had baseball games and everything. Well, the jail was right back there.
- A: The incinerator for the whole city.
- P: And I never forgot, I went into a home to make an investigation and I was afraid to sit down. Nothing but deep dirt, just frightened to death. Why they built that school down in there I never could understand that. That was awful.
- A: They had Booker T. Down there.
- P: Booker T. and so was that India Street school because I used to go to that school, I do not think that Booker T. was on the program. But I know that India Street, and I used to have to walk with the kids to Harlem, Harlem Academy, that is over near Franklin Street, and I would not go through that central, I would take the kids around.
- A: I know that.
- P: Lord have mercy. Well, there is a lot that needs to be torn out now still unless they have done it since I have not been able to go downtown, but the last time I worked that project, Mr. Sandy what do you want, come on, come on. He is an old man. They say he is 100 years old according to, he is going to be sixteen years old in Aril. Working with the project I delivered twenty-five baskets for Thanksgiving oh, about ten years ago I guess.
- A: You forgot something, that you were the first black to work at the.... What was that store called?
- P: Interior decorator downtown. The first woman and the first paid.
- G: How did that come about? Did you just apply?
- P: Yes. When I got out of the project I went to Lerner's and I learned draping wearing apparel at Lerner's. I worked in the display department. So, when they opened Newberry's the head of the display department said to me, Miss Sharon, one of the girls that worked in there did the pressing and went down and applied for the job and she did not get it. So, Miss Sharon said to me, she said, Julia why don't you go down and apply for the job. I was making nine dollars a week then, six days a week. And so I did and one of the girls that worked in there, her

husband was assistant manager, and she said go over there and tell him to introduce you to Mr. Mack. So, I did on the dinner hour and they interviewed me and at two o'clock he sent word for me to come to work the next day. He said do not tell them where you are going, you are just quitting that is all.

A: It was located on?

P: Franklin Terrace up to Florida, it took up the whole block. We had a big store, I had twenty-three windows and all the interior.

G: So you were responsible for all of that?

P: That was my main job. I think the best thing in the world is to learn anything you could possibly learn. I learned everything there was to learn about business in that store. I do not care where they needed me I had to leave the windows and go, sometimes I would run the whole front by myself. During the war they did not think they could find any men to work because all of the guys had gone to service. Then in the afternoon after the store closed I would get in there with my boss with a broom and I learned. He taught me and got magazines and pictures from the other stores and gave me. And I became the best window trimmer they had in the south. He just died about two months ago, my boss.

G: So, there had been discrimination in that job before the war was sent. Do you think it was because of the war that you were able to get that job both as a woman or was that never...?

P: No, Maas Brothers had women, but at that time there were very few women interior decorators, very, very, few. I only knew one or two and of course, downtown was our main shopping area too, you know.

A: What were they white or black?

P: No, they were all white, there were black assistants.

A: But the main ones were white.

P: Yes. Well number one the black people did not have any training as far as interior decorating was concerned at that time, but after they began to learn, then they stretched out. This girl right here in west Tampa, her mother became the first black woman trimmer in Lerner's, and then another girl that just died a few weeks ago, she was in Hayburs. They will say oh, I can do anything. That is the wrong statement, you can not do anything. You have to have some qualifications in something and then that is what you apply for. Now, you can say well, I really do not have anything that I can that I can really do but I am willing to learn if you

will give me a job. I need a job. That is what you have to do.

G: Also, you opened a hotel during the Depression, didn't you?

P: No, that was in the 1960s.

G: Oh, so that was quite a bit later.

P: Right, that was in 1969. My mother died November 1959 and Raymond was laid off December 15, 1959.

G: So, he had been working as a cigar maker?

P: All his life, his last job was for twenty-four years. Mine, this last job I just left I gave it was twenty years and they gave me credit for twenty-one years.

G: Let me ask you how was he able to avoid losing his job when all of the factories were closing down, how did he continue to make cigars?

P: Well, he was known to be one of the world's best cigar makers. I used to stay at Tampa and they would say no, no, no, no Padron was known to be one of the world's best cigar maker. He was a hand banchero, and he had two ladies, one on each side that rolled for him, did the finishing touch. He was known for his cigars. And they say he sang all day long, he had his own music with him, you know. And he was finished before anybody in the factory always. In twenty-four years he worked in that factory he missed two days work.

G: So, other people were getting laid off they kept him because they needed him. Is that one of the reasons you think you were able to stay in Tampa rather than having to go to New York during the depression or go somewhere else during the depression? Because his work was not as interrupted as other peoples?

P: Well, number one we mostly stayed here because of the weather conditions, he had bronchitis when I met him. And the cold weather just did not go with him and I do not like cold weather period. So, we were willing to go ahead and sacrifice and try to stay. But then in later years, in the 1940s, he felt one time we would move to California, and after we went out there we love swimming and the water was too cold that washed that, no, no, no, no. So, we stayed here and I am very glad we stayed here. It is just one of these things. I was on my last job, my boss just died two months ago. Raymond, he and Raymond used to sit on a bench at night and watch me work sometimes to ten-twelve o'clock at night. And he would turn and say you know, Raymond when Julia came to work for me, he said I had to teach her something, but he said she could teach me something today.

G: Let me ask about the band, the members of the sextet, were they always the same or did they change?

P: No, they mostly stayed together, we stayed together and we were just like a big family.

G: And who were they all, were they relatives, were they people that Raymond had grown up with, how did they get to be in the band?

P: The first man that he had, that was really before my time, they were.... This young kid here, he was much younger but you can see, you see, my husband was younger than this one and that one. I think he was even older than Raymond. Because Raymond was only twenty-six in this picture and Bel\_\_ was a kid and Chichito was along with me, sixteen or seventeen years old.

A: I think Chichito was older than Raymond.

P: I know it. Yes. Raymond was twenty-six I remember well. I have a picture of him when he was twenty-six on my dresser. And I know myself he was twenty-six in this picture. Because when they used to play, and I used to go down to Seventh Avenue, you know they used to sing in front of those stores sometimes and sit out there and I can see my husband now going there, I just loved to see him keep time with his foot. He had beautiful feet and we used to go down on Seventh Avenue and stand up and watch him play, they used to play in front of the stores on Seventh Avenue. Seventh Avenue used to be a nice place and every so often someone would rope off from what is it, Fifteenth Street, back two blocks and we would dance all in there you know.

G: The other members of the band were they cigar makers also?

P: Yes.

G: So, they worked in the factories and then they?

P: These kids here, I think they were too young.

A: \_\_\_\_.

P: Bel\_\_\_\_ was too young, he was a kid then, about twelve years old.

G: Did you ever have thoughts about making music full time or making a living just from music?

P: No, because we were not that far advanced in music. See, now if we had been

really far advanced in music then we could have done so.

G: What would that have involved, going on the road?

P: Right. We only went on the road once, my husband and I, with the Tampa Electric Company, and that was only the two of us to serenade the people at this banquet they had for all Tampa Electric. We worked one hour and we make one hundred dollars, no, we worked two hours. Thirty minutes there and thirty minutes there and in two hours we made 100 dollars and that was the most we ever made. But we worked and we practiced twice a week on Tuesday and Thursday nights and a lot of times we would play on a Saturday night all night. We used to play play this other club some time, too.

A: Down in Ybor City?

P: Yes, behind, Ninth Avenue. On Ninth Avenue, you know where the parking lot is, you could come out, the union used to be in there--not the one that used to be on Eighth Avenue. It is now.

A: In that same building?

P: Yes.

A: Where that Temple is now? It was large was it not. Everyone built that building at Cabriarro La rue. And the name of the band was the....

P: Cordordiano.

G: Was Raymond involved with Marti-Maceo other than playing there? Was he a member?

P: Yes, a member. See, they have a society like a clinic. You pay your dues and that is the only recreation they had, every Saturday and Sunday they played dominos, you know your daddy did. And the had a concession, well, it was not really a concession they did it themselves. They served some coffee and roles later on \_\_\_\_.

G: So, he went there every day?

P: No, every Saturday and Sunday.

A: On the weekend.

P: And during the war he would work in the factory and leave the factory and go to buckeye every night until eleven o'clock.

G: So, he was moonlighting in a buckeye?

P: He worked every night, he would leave the factory around two and a little bit later, and I think at four thirty or five he would go into the buckeye on Twenty-fourth Street. Close to where Martina \_\_\_\_\_ is now there used to be a buckeye there some place. He would go there and work and that is how we really got ahead. I would leave the store and go up and down Franklin Street because I became a good window trimmer and everybody wanted me to go work for them. Well, I would leave my store at six o'clock or whenever and go to the other stores and trim windows at night too.

G: So both of you were working double jobs.

P: Right and we had the band going twice a week.

G: Was that so you could save a lot of money?

P: Right, save as much as possible. We started out saving five dollars a week and we got up over a hundred dollars a week that we were able to save.

G: And how long did that last, how long were you able to keep that effort up?

P: Well, I guess we were able to keep that effort up until 1969 when my husband was laid off from the factory. And he was laid off because the cigar work went into machinery and his job just did not go back. And they do not tell you anything until they paste it up on the bulletin board, number so and so will not be coming back after the holidays. And then he came out December 15, and he found, used to call it Martito. A little short Cuban guy. Let me see, he was married to a Puerto Rican girl, they had a little boy. Real light skin with real straight black hair. But anyway Raymond saw him and he said Raymond why don't you go to the Tampa Electric Company and take the examination, they are giving exams for enumerators. Since Raymond spoke Italian, Spanish and English he went and the hired him with the government in 1960 and that is how we found the hotel. The very last block which was right, the cigar factory faced there on Eighteenth Street and this was on Twelfth Avenue, facing like that, right at the back door. So when he got there to enumerate the building and the guy that was there, the old man was sick he had cancer he had a daughter left and he wanted to give her the money from the business. He had given it to a real estate agent to sell, but they did not give anything down, no option. So, he told Raymond that he wanted to sell the building so Raymond said how much do you want for it. At that moment he told him he wanted 18,000 for it so Raymond said well, I am interested. So, he said well, I wanted cash, well he said I can give you cash if you wanted cash, if you wanted cash I can give it to you. So then he said, well

let me see what I can do, he said we have already placed it on the real estate agents hands, but my daughter works for a lawyer and maybe she can take it out since they did not give us anything on option. So, we had applied for an apartment building here on Twenty-First, a home in the back of the garage and car pool. We had planned to build an apartment upstairs and he came to me that afternoon and he said I have something I want to show you and I hope you are going to like it. They were supposed to keep that building for historical reasons.

A: Red brick...

P: Red Brick Inn. Well, I do not want it tore down, we were at New York at the time, Raymond's brother died in 1968. And we went to New York and those guys, those Negroes there in Ybor City started getting on top of the building shooting people downstairs, and that is why they tore the building down. When we came back, we were gone two months, it was all cleaned out and the man that. What was the man here that was in urban renewal in Ybor City? What was the man, the head of the urban renewal?

A: \_\_\_\_.

G: What was urban renewal that took the?

P: Ybor City, Ybor City, the whole Ybor City was torn out, was taken by a renewal. We got the building for 12,500 dollars and then we had to remodel all of the furniture because all of the furniture was very old. We set up the whole place, twenty-two rooms I had, big lobby, I laid all of the tiling there.

A: What was the little building on the side?

P: We had a little house on the side. Raymond rented that not thinking because we lived here on the Twenty-first, Fifteenth. We rented the little house and when they got ready to move out Raymond said let's fix it and move in there because you had to be there, when those people got paid you had to be there or you did not get your money. So we lived in one room, the front room five years. We lived over there five years and then we took the little house next door and Raymond took one of the rooms and made one extra large room. We had a nice little apartment. But I laid all of the tiling down the kitchen and hall in the lobby, in the bath upstairs and downstairs. When we sold it, I can not remember the man's name, he called Raymond and asked if he could bring these guys out to see the building because they wanted it for office buildings for historical reasons, and Raymond said yes. So, he said well, I am going to tell you, Mr. Padron, if you do not let us consent to have the building at our price we will condemn your building. And Raymond did not say anything, they said we will see you tomorrow morning at ten o'clock, I think he said. I got up real early in the morning, a few of

the boys had made up their beds before they left. I saw that everything was all cleaned up and all of the doors were open so when they came, there was about six of them, they went through the building in and out and when they got through they were discussing what they were going to do. They started downstairs and my husband called to them and told to them and said I would like to speak to you a minute so he came back. And he said yesterday you threatened me and you told me that if I did not accept what you offered me, you would condemn my building, well, you and nobody else can condemn my building and I know this and I do not like those threats and I do not have to take that. So, he said Mr. Padron I am so sorry. I am so sorry, now let me tell you how this goes, we work for the government, the government had two prices that they offer. If we find that you are very ignorant and you do not know the value of things we give you the lowest price, and if we find out that you are intelligent and you know what it is all about we give you the highest price, but we cannot change what we say. Now, if you do not like what we offer you can take it to court, have your own lawyer, the government pays the lawyer and we do not fight you. See, he found that my husband was no fool.

A: I had dealings with him too.

G: Did other people that you know have experiences like that where they tried, first of all be real intimidating and then?

P: Well, number one I would not think so, but see my husband was no fool. He did not have a good education as far as book and schooling was concerned but he educated himself and there was nothing in a dictionary that he could not tell you what it meant. How he acquired so much knowledge I do not know, it was just God's gift. And nobody made a fool out of him and he would tell you in a nice decent way, that is what he... His name was Fox. I knew it would come to me sooner or later. So, he apologized, oh, he was so sorry, all right we took it to court, he offered us the largest amount and we took it to court so they had their lawyer and we had our lawyer. We had Delaparte, he was our lawyer all of the time anyway. And so when we got to court we did not even have to go to court, we went in the back and according to Ybor City's dilapidated conditions we got a very good price they had offered us 43,000 or something like that. Anyway we got around 50,000 dollars out of it and they went to the back with our lawyer and their lawyer and the judge and they settled it right there, we did not have to go to court.

G: Do you remember when the Marti-Maceo was torn down? Were you here when that happened or was that when you were in New York?

P: I believe we were away when that was torn down. When was that torn down, what year was that torn down?

A: Around in the 1960s.

P: 1964?

G: 1965, I think but I am not positive.

P: Because I know we took a six months tour in 1964 and in 1965 we were gone most of the year too, so it could have been in 1965.

G: Do you remember anything about the offers that were made to the club for the building when it was taken? It seems like they got 45,000 something like that.

A: 45,000.

G: What do you think then in light of what Julia was saying about their two crises did you think Marti-Maceo got...?

P: Excuse me, not that I really know anything much about Marti-Maceo that way, but the trouble with us not getting what we could have gotten if it was in a different neighborhood. The entire neighborhood of Ybor City, Marti-Maceo and our building was in a dilapidated area see and that detracts from the property value. And that is what happened with Marti-Maceo. And we go around 48,000. I know they gave us 3,000 dollars more than what they had offered to start with but by taking it to court. Did you all take it to court?

A: No.

P: Well, see, if you had taken it to court you might have gotten more. But we would have not gotten more either if we had not taken it to court. And we had Dellaparte, who was your lawyer? I know I heard. I had to give Frank up you know, Frank almost got me in a trap, we are talking about personal friends. I changed my mind and the priest and the lawyer and everybody said don't you dare. That is what she did for me when Raymond had not been in the grave three days.

G: Let me ask you one last question, as you set up house and got involved in the community you must have come to think of yourself as a Cuban more and more.

P: Right.

G: How did you learn how to cook Cuban food?

P: Through my husband and my friends.

G: So, they taught you how to cook?

P: No, they did not teach me.

G: I mean they taught you how to cook their kind of food.

P: No, my husband bought the seasonings and I would go to his mom and dad's house and eat and I had a good judge of taste. Gerome's wife, who just died, she taught me how to make **picadillo** and Raymond bought me all the seasonings and I started cooking and I became a very, very, very good cook. He was so proud of me, anywhere we went I had to cook. I made stuffed potatoes for my brother-in-law in New York and I had to feed twenty-six that night and boy if you could have seen the food I cooked. And we went to a ball game somewhere, when we got back there was nothing left and my brother-in-law said oh, were those stuffed potatoes so good I could have stuck them in my pocket, oh boy did they eat. But you know I love to cook and if I had not been so old, because the American people do not cook like the Latin people at all. I will tell anybody being among them, marrying one, loving and being loved by a Cuban, I am Latin, that is really true. I do not have any Latin blood in me but I feel completely out of place if I have to say, I am not this or that.

A: Well, it is the same way with the Latin people in Ybor.

P: Right. And when I was in Cuba I even cut some of those guys hair. I cut my husband's hair, and I had to barber a lot while I was in Cuba.

A: \_\_\_\_\_.

P: Yes, I used to. I never forget, you know I \_\_\_\_\_, do you know Spanish?

G: A little.

P: \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_ con jamon, that is ham. One day some of them came from Cuba and they all start piling in the house I was making a big pot of \_\_\_\_\_ and they said Padron what in the world is your wife cooking. So, he told him oh, we have to some. We do not eat okra. I tell you every time I came to Tampa I would have to cook \_\_\_\_\_. And \_\_\_\_\_. The last time you were here, not the last time because you danced with me remember that night? The last time they were here when Raymond was living that was the first time they had been here since Raymond died. And they were in California when Raymond died so they did not get a chance to see his body in New York. Anyway, the last time they were here they were at the building and they came and fooled around, fooled around and after awhile around two o'clock Roy said to Raymond, your wife is not going to cook

for us today. He said no, we could go to a restaurant here in Ybor City and eat anything you want to eat, you know. So, he said, why? Raymond said, well it is just too much on her, she has to do all of this work and she is doing this that and the other and she is tired. Oh, Padron please, ask her if she will please cook dinner for us. They were playing at the \_\_\_\_\_ that night too and so he said yes, she will cook because he never had to ask me anything. If he said yes, that was it. That is right. He said yes, she will cook but I do not have enough in that box to feed thirty people, in my freezer in my kitchen so they jumped in the car and they went and I had to have dinner on the table at seven thirty, no later than seven thirty. Let me tell you I had one \_\_\_\_\_, he got in the kitchen and he cut up the chicken for me but I did the rest. I made baked pork, God knows how many fried chickens, black beans, yellow rice, and salad, everything and I had it on the table. Raymond made a big long table cloth and they had a bowl and they liked, when I cooked a big pot of yellow rice.... The crust from the rice, and they would get the pot and scrape it clean. But really I am proud because any where we went when we were on a six months tour, we have been all over the United States, Mexico, and Canada, just he and I we drove, we had an imperial, just he and I. We used to go from here on up to Tallahassee then back on back to Mississippi, to Jacksonville and New Orleans and stay in New Orleans.

A: I want to go to the big hole, the Grand Canyon I call it the big hole. That is funny, you go here and you go there and you do not go to the place you want to go sometimes and it is right around the corner practically. I have never been to the Grand Canyon and I wanted to see the Grand Canyon.

P: I hope you get to see it because it is something to see. It is just like New York, there is no other New York, there is not other Grand Canyon. Believe me, we took a six months tour, we had planned a three months tour when we retired, but instead of three months it was six months. I saw the world's fair three times, not that one year. Then when we left out of here we went in through Tallahassee and on around Mississippi right on up in New Orleans and we stopped there for a couple of weeks and crossed... And this lady where we were stopping owned a lot of property and everything in Texas, and she would take us, we would leave our car and she would take us in her car. We were blessed because you know the last trip we took, when we left New Orleans going up on through Texas right on up through Arizona right on up into California, a plane hit the furniture train.

A: How was it that you got this Cuban band to come to your house. Those were big bands from Cuba used to come, have you heard of \_\_\_\_\_?

G: And she used to come here.

P: Yes, all of them have been in my home, not in this house, but in the other home over there and in the hotel. Well, I will say this, Raymond was well liked by everybody and he was born and raised in Ybor City and he was known by

everybody and whenever they got ready to have a big dance, they would bring him in here. Well, all of the big officials there and Fernandez was the president for awhile too. All of them knew Raymond and liked him very much and all lived there together and that is how he knew they did not have any integration as far as black and white was concerned. A lot of those fellows have colored blood in them but if they are light skinned they go and they do not say nothing. If you speak Spanish you could even be black and they do not say nothing. I know that to be a fact I told you about the case downtown. And Frank, Frank speaks so many languages it is not even funny and the judge told him to come in his office and he said you know, until today I always thought you were a nigger. And he says that sounds real stupid. So, anyway they would always come to Raymond and the colored ones would stay there, we would give them the whole house, we had a studio couch in the little Florida room, and sometimes there would be extra ones so they would take chairs and make a bed and then I had two bedrooms, double bedrooms back there.

G: And they were playing at Circulo Cubano?

P: Yes.

G: Did they ever play at Marti-Maceo sort of for free because they were there?

P: No, they did not play for free, some of the bands went to Marti-Maceo, but I do not remember, no, they did not play free. I am sure they did not play free. Did they play free?

A: No, I think that, no. They would play around two pieces, but they did not charge anything, because I think they were on a contract. So they would come to Marti-Maceo to play.

P: Yes, because we really were not supposed to practice anywhere else. They would play at home you know. They would come to my house because I had the piano, you know.

A: The Cuban Navy band, who come here and visit. They would divide the band and one would go to the Cubano, and the other to Marti-Maceo.

G: So, band members who were white went to Circulo Cubano?

A: And the best ones, band, we could not go to the Circulo Cubano and anyhow the music was not good as the one we used to have. So then the white people would come to Marti-Maceo and they were not supposed to dance, the white, but then they were asked if they could dance you know.

G: In Marti-Maceo the white people were not supposed to dance? Was that their rule or was that Marti-Maceo's rule?

P: That is law, Jim Crowism, that is just Jim Crowism. In Ybor City there were whites and blacks married but that is Jim Crowism for you. I never will forget that man died Carmen's daddy, Carmen White. One of his daughters I think was married to a white guy and she was very fair. They were going to that movie on Fifteenth Street before it became that \_\_\_\_\_ and they told her they could not come in there with her, he could come in but she could not. I tell you, it was a pathetic situation.

G: You told me before about an incident when you were swimming.

P: Yes.

G: Could you tell me that again?

P: Sure, I do not mind telling you. The beach had been integrated for some time, maybe two or three years or something, and we had black people living at the place--they like to be called black because they are Americans, you know--at my hotel and they went every day. One fellow who lives right around the corner he worked for the Tampa Electric Company and he went every day. So this other tall boy that lived there, William, he and his girlfriend and Raymond and I went one Sunday and we went in. There were a lot of Spanish people there and Cubans and we were talking with them and everything and all of the sudden we look up and we saw all of these crackers, that is all they were, and cracker, to me, is not a southerner nor Yankee, to me the word cracker is the same thing as nigger, now that is the truth. The only thing is the skin is a different color, that is the only difference as far as I am concerned, that is why I call them crackers. If they were black I would say niggers, if they did the same thing. So, it is the same expression it means the same thing to me, cracker and nigger is the same. So, this time we were out there swimming and all of the sudden we saw all these crackers with black glasses on surrounding us, you know, we did not know what was going on. And when they got us right close, the Spanish guys were all talking to Raymond and they said, "get out of here," and we could not imagine what they were talking about, "we are talking to you, get out of here you get on the other side of the bridge you do not belong down here."

G: The Bente-Davis Bridge.

A: It is true. Let me explain to you past the last bridge was the area they had strictly for blacks. The Tampa side did not have nothing so that must have happened on this side.

P: On the Tampa side, yes. The beach was already integrated! The beach was

already integrated about three or more years. I am telling you.

G: The mixed couple, is that why they were upset?

P: That is right, and when we came out and the Spanish people still talking with Raymond and one of them says, Raymond I will go and get the cops. And he did, he took off and he came back with a cop. So the colored fellow that was with us and his girlfriend they came on down to our car, he sat up on the hood. The cops came right away and they wanted to know what was wrong and these crackers were all standing around. They said, "Listen this is their beach as much as it is your beach and you are not going to bother them, if you do you go to jail, we will see that you go to jail."

G: So, the police defended you.

P: Yes. And they are going back in there and you are not going to bother them. So, they said to us, you are going to have to go back in there because this is our job to see that nobody bothers you, you are entitled to that beach as much as they are. So, we went back in there and they started again. Well, it was just Raymond and I, those son of a guns would have drowned the two of us, what are they going to do then, they can not put them all in jail. I told Raymond, I said honey let's get out of here, I said we have worked too hard for what little bit we have to let these son of a guns come in here and drowned us and that is what they will do. So, we got out. I hate black glasses today, I cannot stand them. I do. Because you are always hiding behind something, when they want to do something low-down they hide behind the black glasses, I can not stand them.

G: Were they the Ku Klux Klan do you think or were they just a group?

P: Well, some of them could have been Ku Klux Klans but a lot of them did not belong to the organization but they are just as prejudice.

G: So, you do not think they had followed you down there and planned that?

P: No.

G: They just saw you.

P: They just wanted to show off that is all. They could not have followed of us, but really I was afraid they might follow us out of there but they did not. And then from then on we used to go anytime we got ready.

G: Are there any times that you remember that you were made uncomfortable because you appeared to be a mixed couple?

P: Only one other time that I can remember and that was when Raymond and I were walking down Franklin Street one night looking in the windows and this cracker came up. I was here and Raymond was here, and he looked at me in my face and then looked in Raymond's face and I turned around and I said to him, "What in the hell are you looking at?" He looked at me and took off down the street.

G: It is kind of a fearless reaction to what could have been a scary situation, and certainly it was a scary situation on the beach. Do you think that because Raymond was Latin, Cuban, rather than American that that made him less willing to back down, less afraid somehow or more insistent on his rights as a human being?

P: Well, I have got a piece back there, I think I have it, that I would like for you to read that he wrote and he read it in the Cuban Hall. Do you remember that?

A: No.

P: Raymond was not afraid but he did not want trouble unnecessarily. He knew he could not win with that kind of mess so he never looked for trouble. When we went out of here in 1964, Mississippi, Georgia, everywhere we went to have service for the car they would invite us to come into eat but we never went in one place. And they would all say, we are not going to bother you, nobody is going to bother you, please, come on in. That was after this \_\_\_\_\_ turn, but we never looked for trouble. And I was the type of person, I knew if I wanted to say that I was thorbred white, who is anybody to tell me I was not. But I never during all that time went downtown and set behind no counter because my husband could not sit back there, see. And even after, they had integration downtown, I worked in a store, I used to run the bar, not one time have I ever sat at my bar and I worked there twenty years for that reason. I had a resentment and it was just one of those things. Because color does not make you, see. I never will forget, a negro saw me behind a counter down there one day and he came in, looked at me and he went on back out, he ran on the ship with my brother. My brother was a merchant seaman, he lost his life there, in World War II. And he walked inside and he walked back outside and there he was telling them all on the sidewalk, she ain't white, she ain't white. I saw a ministers daughter one day, I was behind the counter working, doing something, and she went oh, you are going for white, huh? Another man got on a street car one day and I sat down on the side of him and he said well, I got on the street car the other day but I did not sit down aside of you because I thought you was white. It does not matter to me what you are, where you are, or where you came from, why always throw a person's color up in there face, it does not make sense to me. Do you think that makes sense? It is just stupid if you ask me. Well, I tell you when you are Latin and when you have

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color the blacks hate you and the crackers hate you.

A: There you are.

[End of the interview.]