

Deputy Rafael Graulau



This is an interview with Rafael Graulau, retired Deputy Sheriff residing in Thonotosassa, Florida. Mr. Graulau was a Deputy with Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office for 30 years and [was] instrumental in getting the 78th Street Library built. This interview is being conducted on June 11, 2010 at the John F. Germany Public Library.

Interviewer: Tim Staton (TS), Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library Systems' Oral History Project

TS: "Mr. Graulau, welcome. Thank you for coming to speak with us today."

Rafael Graulau (RG): "Thank you very much for having me here, Tim."

TS: "It's quite a pleasure. I've got a number of questions I would like to ask you. I would like to get started with your childhood first - the beginning, so to speak. What do you recall about your childhood?"

RG: "Um. That's a tough question. [TS chuckles] Although on the surface it seems easy. I grew up, by the way, in the city of New York. I grew up in the housing projects. My family was the second or third family to move into that particular building in that housing project when it opened in 1951. I was born in 1947. And, uh. What I remember most about my childhood, I guess, is that my parents were very caring. Uh, very loving. Uh, that my father worked very, very hard. He worked as a cook at a hotel in Manhattan. I just remember my father working very long hours."

"Uh, my mother was a homemaker. I remember them struggling with the language because my parents came to

this country from Puerto Rico. And, I also remember that my first language was Spanish; and that initially when I went to first grade I, uh, barely spoke English. And, uh, learning English was an experience I remember. Um, do you have any questions to guide me through this? [TS, "Sure"] I don't want to ramble."

TS: "I understand. You said you lived in New York City. Do you remember much about the school where you went?"

RG: "Actually I do. Um, it was built in 1888. It was old then. There were no hot lunches. I just remember what lunch was every day, soup and sandwich."

TS: "Every day."

RG: "Every day. Soup and sandwich. Ahh, no bus service. It was a long walk from my home, but I enjoyed going to school. And, I was really saddened when I was about the fourth grade that the school, because of overcrowding, went to a half day schedule. And I really enjoyed a full day of school. And, uh. Yeh, it was on a half day schedule and I was out of school by 12:30. {TS, "My goodness.} I didn't like that. I enjoyed school."

"I enjoyed, um. I went through junior high school, obviously. I got into a very competitive high school in New York called Samuel Gompers - and, it was a technical school. The premise was to prepare you for both college and a trade. I went to study electronics. But, it was a very competitive process to get in. And, even after we were in, the school required you to wear a certain tie everyday, which other high schools in

the city didn't. It was quite a process. I enjoyed attending Samuel Gompers."

TS: "What did you and your siblings enjoy doing in your spare time?"

RG: "Uh...At home, I think, all of us were just avid readers, avid readers. I have a brother and two sisters. My brother is a professor at FIT in New York. My younger sister got her Ph.D. and teaches at Northwestern University in Massachusetts. My other sister has a graduate degree and she wound up in the private banking sector but, I remember all of us reading. That was the biggest thing - my mother making us read, then all of us becoming avid readers. There was one TV in the house, a little 12 inch, and we weren't allowed to come home from school and turn it on. It didn't get turned on 'til after dinner. So, if I wasn't playing outside, because it was New York and a lot of cold winter, I was reading but, it took me to all kinds of places."

TS: "That it does. Definitely does. What do you remember best about your parents?"

RG: "Hmmm, I guess how hard they struggled. Not having the language - not knowing English. And I realized very quickly that life was really tough. Because other kids in my neighborhood would be over visiting and, uh, my mother would cook dinner and be ready to serve; they would ask, 'Can I eat? Can I eat? And having been over to a couple of other kids and I realized, 'Hey, that not everybody had food.' [TS, chuckles] They would be over every night, seriously. Yeh, we were poor. I didn't know we were poor. But, yeh, my parents struggled but they provided.'

TS: "Would you say you were an obedient or a mischievous child?"

RG: "Actually, obedient. Um, as I did in my career, I always followed the rules. Um, I didn't see any reason to break them. No, I wasn't a bad child."

TS: "Did your family have any special traditions such as things that they did on holidays or birthdays?"

RG: "Well they brought over a package of traditions from Puerto Rico that are not dissimilar from other cultures that have been influenced by the Spanish. You know, uh, midnight meal at Christmas; a bunch of things like that - celebrating the fifteenth birthday - all the things that go into making that cultural aspect a little bit different in the U.S., but ... No, I...that's a hard word to say 'special.' They were normal."

TS: "Normal to you, exactly."

RG: "Right."

TS: "I understand. Do you have any family heirlooms; or any family heirlooms that you..."

RG: "No. Unfortunately, what I had, including photos of my parents who are both now deceased - and I had, as the oldest child, I had the majority of the family photos - I had a fire in 1994. That took everything. I woke up the next morning and I owned a pair of shorts. That was it."

TS: "Fortunately, no one was hurt?"

RG: "Nobody was hurt."

TS: “That was good. It’s sorry that you lost all those...but I’m glad no one was hurt in all this.”

RG: Yes, I had my umbilical cord – which has always been a Latin tradition. Now for medical reasons, it’s a modern, new, kind of modern tradition that people are saving the umbilical cords, but in a totally different way.

TS: “Stem cells.”

RG: “Yeah, but in Latin households it was a tradition to save the umbilical cord; and I was born at home, by the way.”

TS: “Really?”

RG: “Yeh.”

TS: “Was that typical?”

RG: “Very typical. And luckily also, when I was born my father was a conscientious man. You couldn’t register a birth in the town I was born in, in Puerto Rico, at the time. But my father was a conscientious man and he went three days later to the next town over where you could and registered my birth, so that my birth certificate and my actual birth date coincide. I’ve known people whose parents weren’t diligent and maybe waited until the following year and now their actual birth but their official birth date don’t coincide - which can be a problem, especially when you retire. ‘Oh, I’m 62.’ ‘No you’re not. Your paperwork says you’re 61.’ I was lucky that my father took care of business in that respect. Yeah, I was born at home, it was typical.”

TS: “How old were you when your family immigrated to the United States?”

RG: “I was three. It wasn’t that big an impact at that point in life because I was just beginning to get an awareness.”

TS: “When did you leave home?”

RG: “Oh, I joined the Naval Reserves while I was still in high school. I got called up in 1966. Unfortunately, my call up date corresponded with my graduation date from high school. [TS, “Oh no.”] So I was unable to attend my own graduation. But basically, that’s when I left home in 1966. I served in the U.S. Navy until 1968. June 28th was the corresponding date of entry and day of release from active service. When I got out of the service, I went home for a little bit. My wife, whom I love dearly, was my girlfriend then. We have been boyfriend and girlfriend since age 15. [TS, “Wow.”] I decided at that point that I wanted to get married. So I proposed to her at a Seder at a friend’s house and we got married. So, I was out of the house at 21.”

TS: “So you said you went into the Navy. Once you got out of the Navy, then where did you go?”

RG: “Well, I won a scholarship to City College of New York. Full scholarship, and because of the circumstances that I had voluntarily gotten into service, even though my call up date - I didn’t have a choice in that, but because I had volunteered to go into service as opposed to being drafted, the city university system of New York saved and honored my scholarship. So, when I got out of the service at 21, I went to City College.”

TS: “Great. Excellent. How did your life change once you got out of the Navy and went to City College of New York?”

RG: “Uh, well with all of the things that were going on...”

TS: “Getting married, too. It was a pretty turbulent time back then in ’68, ’69.”

RG: “Also the fact that I got out in June. And, they were building a brand new hospital down the street. As I went back to my mother’s for a little bit. And they were building – my father had passed away, by the way; in a car wreck – brand new hospital. I thought to myself, mom, maybe I can get a job there for the summer. So I went and asked and I was told, ‘Get out of here, kid. You don’t have a union button.’ What do you mean a union button? ‘You gotta have a union button.’ And I wasn’t going to get political. And all the faces on the construction job weren’t the faces from my community. So I had gotten kind of riled up and I had created a name out of thin air called the South Florence/Bronx Equal Employment Opportunity Council and recruited a bunch of veterans and we started picketing the construction site to get some jobs. And at that point, some people from the industry and the city of New York sat down with us and, in fact, offered to take some of the members into different apprenticeship programs. And, um, we didn’t know anything about the construction industry at that point; but I continued with the Equal Opportunity Council that we founded while I was still a student – worked more and more with the city. Worked more and more with the building trades itself,

Building Trades Council. Which worked out for me because after school, I, uh. Peter J. Brennan, was the name of a man who was the head of the Building Trades Council in New York and he was nominated Secretary of Labor by the Republican administration of Richard Nixon. And, Peter came to me because I’d been so involved with the industry and asked me if I wanted to take a position with a new program that the Building Trades Council was going to start called the New York Plan for Training, Inc. which was a way to bring minorities into the construction industry without confrontation. To, in fact, enroll them in that bureau of apprenticeship training approved training programs and integrate the industry. And, I said yes. It was a good job off of Sunset Avenue. Made good money.”

TS: “Was it successful?.Was the program successful?”

RG: “Yes.”

TS: “Did it succeed integrating the...”

RG: “Yeah. It was very successful. It was one of – at the time there were twelve. They were called hometown programs. And, actually, President Nixon had signed an executive order creating the concept. And, it was successful because the, uhh. Any construction project to this day, that involves any federal dollars, is covered by a law called the Davis-Bacon Act. The Davis-Bacon Act does include provision for training. It’s written, but it says that the prevailing wage that will be paid will be the prevailing union scale for that area. Even if that area, the state of Florida, is not a, uh, closed shop state with Florida a Right to Work state. [TS:

“Right.] Highway work, any kind of work that involves federal dollars, the prevailing wage is paid at the union rate which Nixon threatened to suspend unless the unions actively participated in the programs to better improve the representation amongst their membership. Faced with losing that ..[TS:”Sure.”] especially in a state like New York, the unions capitulated; and, uh, the program was so successful that I don’t think there’s one left in the country. They’ve all, basically, outlived their need. Because the construction industry throughout the country [TS: “Yes.”] representative of the population now.”

TS: “How long did you stay in New York City?”

RG: “Uh, I moved to Tampa in 1979.”

TS: “So, between the time when you had the job with the BAT, was that...”

RG: “I was...BAT is a federal agency. [TS: “Okay.”] I was with the New York Plan for Training, Inc. which was sponsored by the Building Trades Council of New York. They collected a half a penny per man per man hour from contractors to fund it and that was a lot of money.”

TS: “Yeah, that quickly added up. I can imagine with all the construction going on in New York, it would quickly add up. Once you got done with that position, um, what did you...what else did you... because there’s a time between when you had that position and when you came to Tampa.”

RG: “I got work.” [laughter] “I never in my life imagined, up to that point, that I

wanted to get into law enforcement. But, uh, I decided to take the test. And, being young and indestructible, I decided that I wanted to do it. So, I went and got on with the city police in New York.”

TS: “Wow. How long did you work for the city police of New York?”

RG: “Umm, about four and a half years. And, uh, at that time, my wife’s family in New York, her sisters, everybody was moving back. And my wife said, ‘I want to go back.’ So, we had been here on vacation. I really liked Tampa. I went and took the Civil Service test. The sheriff asked to meet with me, and offered me a position, which I didn’t expect – to get a job that quickly. And I said, No, I’ve got a house to sell. He said, ‘I’ll give you a firm commitment, I’ll hold the job for a year. [TS: “Wow.”] Will that give you time to sell?’ And I said, Yep, I’m sure. So I went back up and seven months later we were back down here. We never regretted it. I love Tampa.”

TS: “Didn’t miss New York, at all.”

RG: “Didn’t miss the cold. Didn’t miss the projects. No, sir.”

TS: “I understand. Did you have a family by that time? I assume...you have a couple of sons.”

RG: “Yeah. I had two sons.”

TS: “And they were both born in New York?”

RG: “Yeah, pretty much at the same time.” [laughter]

TS: “What’s the something you remember most about your time in New York? Is there anything that sticks out as memorable about your time in New York?”

RG: “Yes sir – cold. [laughter] I quickly realized that I didn’t like the cold. I guess the heart goes back to my Caribbean roots or the fact that while I was in the Navy, I spent most of my time in the Caribbean.”

TS: “Okay.”

RG: “It was warm and I loved it, and I really did not like the cold. Especially walking a foot beat.”

TS: “So you were a beat policeman.”

RG: “Oh yeah, yeah. That’s rough duty. And you didn’t have all the places like you have today. You had the blue laws back then. Businesses were closed at night. Businesses closed in the evening. There weren’t any places to go to get warmed up. You had a 7-11 around the corner or, uh...”

TS: “So you were pretty much on the street all the time? [RG, “Uh-huh.”] Oh my.”

“You said you were in the Navy in the late ‘60s and stationed in the Caribbean so you didn’t see any action in ummm.”

RG: “Viet Nam? [TS: “Yeah.”] Actually I uh, I had orders and I was on a ship which was funny for that era. I was on an LSD, which was the drug craze with LSD at the time, but in the Navy it is Landing Ship Dock. And, we were scheduled to go to Viet Nam to the Mekong Delta area to relieve the Ashland LSD-1. I was in LSD-6. We

made all preparations. We got on the way. We went through the Panama Canal. Three days out of the Canal, we blew a boiler. [TS: “Oh my goodness.”] We had a lot of casualties and the ship was severely damaged. And we came back through the Canal. When we got back to our home port, in Little Creek, Virginia, the Navy looked at the ship and decided it wasn’t worth salvaging. It was a World War II era ship. So they scrapped the ship.”

TS: “The boiler had just over pressurized; is that what had happened? Or ...”

RG: “The Board of Inquiry really couldn’t come up with any definitive conclusions. We had all kinds of scuttlebutt that guys that were in the Navy, Lifers, had sabotaged the engines because they didn’t want to go to Nam, but, no conclusions.”

TS: “Were more made one way or another about the accident.”

RG: “Right. It was an accident based on the fact that the ship was so old.”

TS: “With your 30 years with the sheriffs department, what are some of the events that stick out? That’s a fairly long career. I’m sure you had plenty of...”

RG: “Yeah, um, the sheriff offered me a position, like I said. And, after I had been on one year, he called me up, Sheriff Heinrich, and he said, ‘Put in your paperwork to go to vice.’ Okay. The sheriff tells you, you do it. So, I got transferred to vice as a detective and I worked narcotics about five years. That was a very interesting experience. And the sheriff’s view, with my accent, with

my not having grown up here, so, nobody knew me, that I would do well in undercover work. And he was right. But, I did that for a while; but it was rough. My kids were growing up. And the assignment...it was really rough. You're working every evening, a lot of weekends. I couldn't go to little league games. I couldn't get involved with my children and their lives. So I went back to patrol, even though patrol was rough then. We changed, I believe, every 28 days. We went from evenings, we rotated backwards to days, to midnights. But, because of the changes, at least I had some opportunities to be involved in my children's lives."

"I went back to patrol. And, back then, they would assign you anywhere. We didn't have any permanent assignments. And, I got assigned to a community called Claire Mel, at the time. And I worked a couple of times and I enjoyed the community. It was a really mixed community. It reminded me a lot of where I grew up. Ummm, there was an Hispanic component amid white people. A black component. And I met some really nice people there. That's how I got involved with the library project, in fact. I got involved with a group they called the 78th Street Alliance. They were working really hard to effect some positive changes in the community."

"One of the things they wanted to do was to get a library. Another thing they'd tried to get a federal grant from a federal program called the 'Weed and Seed.' And they had failed. Even though I wasn't a part of the community policing, basically, was a new concept anyway. It didn't exist then. I got involved with the group, and we, uh, lobbied very hard for a library. We didn't get the library the first go 'round."

TS: "When was that, precisely?"

RG: "I want to say about [pause]"

TS: "Early 90s, mid 90s?"

RG: "Yeah, before that. 'Cause we had a lot of disappointments. We didn't get the library. We didn't get Weed and Seed. But I continued to work with the folks and say, 'Why didn't we? Let's look at ourselves.' And the reason we didn't was we just didn't have our ducks in a row. There wasn't anybody to write the proposal. There wasn't anybody to effectively lobby. So, we had some folks who really were committed to making a change and we looked at what we needed. We had a lot of resources within the community. I undertook to write grants. And, we got some small grants. Got a grant from the Glazers for a music program that we put in through our junior high school over there. And realized, 'Hey, you know, we can get some money; we can do some things. Started working on a Weed and Seed grant that I was told by everybody, including the Department of Justice, that we couldn't get it because they had funded one in the USF area. But, when I got into the nuts and bolts, I realized their funds were coming to an end. And, federal guidelines say that they can't be re-funded. Now a community adjacent to them could be re-funded. But, because in the initial scope of their application they chose such a large area, I don't see any contiguous communities that would qualify. So, let's go for it folks. We did, and I wrote the grant and the federal government funded us for a Weed and Seed amongst other programs."

“I think I’m losing my way, Tim.”
[chuckles]

TS: “No, I think you’re doing great. Actually, you are doing very, very well ‘cause that’s what I wanted to talk to you about – the 78th Street Library and we can see how did those two initiatives you participated in...how did they improve the Palm River area?”

RG: “Well, the biggest thing was ‘what could I do?’ as one. Working with the citizens to leverage whatever resources we had to reduce crime. We quickly realized that we had the highest incident of juvenile crime in town based on the statistics produced both by the sheriff’s office, the City of Tampa 13th Judicial Circuit. We had the highest rate of juvenile crimes. So what can we do for juveniles? That’s where I () the problem. That’s when I got very, very involved with the library. And I looked at recreation and other opportunities to meet were very limited. The park at the time, () Park, was one of the worst in the system. We lobbied and lobbied and got money so that we were able to improve the park. Get a bigger center so that we could have a good afternoon program. The park and the library happen to be right across the street. So we were able to do a lot of things between the two. Uhh....again, I’m losing my way.”

TS: “No, no. I was just curious as to how you addressed that issue, and I was wondering how those initiatives helped that community.”

RG: “Obviously the community didn’t have the money. What can we do to try to bring in a program. Like, we created another one. We had a lot of our

juveniles – because we had the highest rate of juveniles on probation – suspended from school. So what are they doing? Running around getting into burglary, getting into trouble. So we looked at what we could do to keep them off the streets while they were suspended. Um, I spoke with a local church who gave me a spot. They said, ‘You can use our church meeting room.’ I spoke with the Board of Education about it and the school district said, ‘We’ll provide a teacher, if you provide the security.’ And we created a model that since that time has become “atoss”. There are something like fifteen alternative to our of school suspension programs now. That are run by the school district. They have a deputy there. The kids, instead of being on the street, if they attend the Atoss, the suspensions don’t count against them and won’t hold them back from moving on to the next grade or graduating. We started our own. And, it was a big success. And, uh, working with the parents, another thing to reduce crime – work with the kids, work with the parents. We did a lot of juvenile programs.”

“Another one, truancy, which was really bad. The Weed and Seed grant that I wrote, um, I had specifically asked for monies because I had spoken with the school district and they didn’t have money to have a truancy officer. The old-fashioned truancy officer, doesn’t exist any more.”

TS: “I did not know that.”

RG: “Yeah. So, I got the monies and we hired deputies. And, working with the school system, we got attendance reports from the schools within our

community. The deputy would go visit the parents. We ... a song and a dance about where the kids were. It was time to take families to court. But we quickly realized that really wasn't the solution because so many of the families would move. Once they move them, the kid's out of the school system. So, talking to the courts again; talking to the 13th Judicial Circuit; talking to the state attorneys office and another program called the Neighborhood Dispute Center. We came up with a way to bring the parents in to resolve this problem, to work out the problem, to get whatever help the parents needed to keep the kids in school. A very successful program. And, we reduced our truancy levels to where we were on a par with the schools in the [TS: "surrounding"] system. That had, yeah, what was acceptable – no truanancies [TS: "yeah, yeah. Exactly."] beyond acceptable levels. It was a big decrease."

"We also did another program where we got very involved with the courts with juveniles who committed crimes and they put accountability boards. They personally helped get the system going through the courts where juveniles who pled guilty were judged by people within the community. Who, in most cases, imposed stricter sentences on the juveniles than they would have gotten had they gone to court. But, uh, the juveniles really complied. The failure rate was less than one percent. It was incredible. And the juveniles saw the people in the community who judged them in the community. The people would visit the kids in the community. It's ongoing, a very successful program and has been replicated throughout the country."

TS: "And this was initiated right here in Hillsborough County?"

RG: "Yes."

TS: "I'm kind of curious. I met many police officers over the years in a casual capacity. You seem to be unusually involved [RG chuckles]. I'm serious - I mean it as a compliment – unusually involved in the local community where you were stationed. And, I was wondering if you could elaborate on what, perhaps in your background or your personal experiences, led you to become so involved with the Palm River community."

RG: "You know, I think it was growing up in the projects in New York – never, ever had a sense of community. I've always longed for, my entire life, a sense of community. 'Cause we're not islands. And I think I found that in that community. Even down to the name. You mentioned Palm River. When I started working there, it was known as Claire Mel. But Claire Mel was only one subdivision of many in that area. And it had such negative connotations. In fact, I had gone to the Board of Realties. I wanted to find out what property values were like there. And, at one point, it was the only part of the county where property values, excluding what is happening today, where property values had gone down two years in a row. That just didn't happen back then in Hillsborough County. And, one of the conclusions I came to at the time, was because the name was so negative. So I talked to the people in the community. I held public meetings. Nobody was against officially changing the name of the community to Palm River. I used Palm River because of the unifying

factor. Palm River actually does flow through the community and Palm River Road actually goes through the heart of the community.”

“So I approached the federal government about what is called a place main change. And, for census purposes, every location in America has both a census tract number and place main. And, I found out what the process was. It really wasn’t that involved. I articulated to them the reasons why I wanted the place main changed. I articulated the reasons to the Board of County Commissioners. No problems. Everybody agreed. And, officially the community was renamed Palm River. Very nice sounding.”

TS: “It does. Sounds like something a developer would name a (). Very nice. When I first moved down here, I think it was still pretty much known as Claire Mel. But, Palm River is how I have heard it referred to for many, many years.”

RG: “Yeah. Well, I was able to get it changed. People would laugh, ‘You can do that?’ Yeah, but nobody ever looked to do it. How many people do take a look to see about changing a community’s name? But, uh, it worked. The county put up signs, Welcome to Palm River.”

TS: “So with your thirty years with the Sheriff’s department, in your activities in the Palm River community, would you consider those things to be the things that you are most proud of? Because you had many, many years with Hillsborough County...I grant, that’s a lot, but.”

RG: “Yeah, the things we were able to accomplish in that community. I also negotiated with the Board of County Commissioners and we were able to bring a neighborhood service center there. And, it’s still there; funded by block grant monies. Umm, just a lot of programs. Probably more than I remember. The substation that services the community there, they would get that rent free. And, originally remodeling and everything was a community project to get the people involved. We had licensed persons. We did everything. Um, I don’t know what else to say. A lot of good programs.”

“A lot of collaborations, especially, I realized the power of the badge. And, it is a big power. Not just in the fact that I could take someone’s freedom away from them. But, um, the power when the law enforcement reaches out to both the community and to other government entities. Um, like, we started a program called ‘Big Bite.’ It’s been replicated everywhere. And again, I was looking to leverage. You know. My resources are limited.

TS: “Sorry, what was the name of the program, again?”

RG: “Big Bite.”

TS: “Big Bite?”

RG: “Unfortunately, in that community we have a lot of Pit Bulls. [TS, “Oh! Okay.”] We got together with Animal Services. But, as police officers, we don’t have the right to go in your backyard. Don’t have that right, unless we can articulate, under certain circumstances, like exigent circumstances – like I heard someone

screaming, 'help me, help me, help me,' or something like that. We're not going to invent something like that. If it's not there, it's not there. So I got with other agencies, private agencies and quasi-private agencies that have the right to go back there. One of them is TECO. TECO has the right to go on your property to check the meter. And they have utilities. Another one is Brighthouse. It wasn't Brighthouse then. [TS: "Time Warner, maybe."] Right, Time Warner. And I got with Code Enforcement. Love working with Code Enforcement. I really believe in that broken window theory. That if you have one broken window, and a second broken window, and a debt to the community. This begins to accept that. We can't have that. I worked a lot with Code Enforcement. Got all these folks together. Brighthouse, TECO was very happy because we were escorting them to go, especially locations where they suspected there was theft of service. Brighthouse theft of service. But because they do have the right to go in there if they saw something, they could invite us. [TS: "Oh, good."] Uh huh. So Animal Services for dogs that weren't being properly taken care of; Code Enforcement because we were invited in, code violations that they ordinarily couldn't address because it was in a backyard, side yard. So that was operation Big Bite. I thoroughly enjoyed doing those. The city started doing them. We had people. I had people from as far away as, uh, New Mexico and Arizona contact me and even come here to see how we were doing this project. Because the time I was with the - that we had the Weed and Seed grant with the Justice Department, the Justice Department had me traveling throughout the country. I was lecturing and talking

to other communities and community police officers about some of the projects we were doing. So I had a lot of contact with these people who wanted to know what we were doing, and we were looking at what they were doing."

TS: "How did the Weed and Seed project work in Palm River? Was that successful?"

RG: "It was very successful. The concept is very simple. The police do the weeding – removing bad elements from the community. Because the program is federal, it opened up criminals within our local community to federal prosecution. The Feds have a lot harsher laws than state governments do. For one, they have the money. In state court, for example, you could not add the proceeds of drug transactions together. You know, one, two, three. So, if I bought crack cocaine from you four times, I couldn't add the sum, the total. I could only charge you with four times of the same. And stipulations say for that one sale, each time, five years. Federal court, you add it all up, ahh, you've got a felony now where you can get thirty years. Because of the federal monies involved, we were able to do that. The FBI worked with us. DEA worked with us. Uhh, ATF. We would develop the cases. The FBI wasn't doing them. Our undercover people, our detectives, our patrolmen, we would develop the cases. Package them, following federal guidelines. Turn them over to the US Attorney's office. The US Attorney would prosecute the case in federal court. And, using the guidelines of those federal agencies, we got some people some very serious time. And as a result, we dropped crime significantly in that area. We took off the worst that was in.

Because our resources were limited, again, we targeted very specifically the top players.”

TS: “So the weeding was successful. What was seeding?”

RG: “It’s bringing in programs to help sustain the community. Such as, like I mentioned, the community service center. We worked real hard to get a bank in the community. We got a bank. We revitalized the plaza there on Palm River Road that was made infamous by Billy Ferry. That had been closed. We worked with a developer and we worked with private sector companies to come in. And, again, the concept Claire Mel, crime, bad community. Originally the sheriff’s office had located a community substation on Causeway Boulevard. I worked with the people up there. We got the space for free, and the developer was able to bring private sector companies in there because there was a police substation on site. [TS: “Sure.”] Actually, the developer made money on it, I know. ‘Cause I talked with some of the private sector people and the developer was charging 50 cents per square foot per year because there was a community substation on site. They paid it gladly for the security. Community policing can be profitable – just not for the police.”

TS: “How long have you been retired?”

RG: “About five years.”

TS: “Five years. Um, what’s the future hold for you? I notice you’re a member of an organization that you’re involved with here. Looks like a civic

organization. Can you tell me something more about that?”

RG: “Uhh, which one?”

TS: “I’m not sure about the pronunciation. Maybe you can help me...”

RG: “Oh, that’s Sociedad Marti-Maceo is a () program in Ybor City. It was back in the Jim Crow days. My wife is Cuban. Afro-Cuban extraction. And, back in the Jim Crow days the white Cubans and black Cubans couldn’t drink at the same club. So, Marti, who was the guiding light of the Cuban revolution; Maceo who was the general of the armies of the revolution. He was born in Venezuela. He’s black. So, the Sociedad Marti was a supper club. Maceo was founded by the black Cuban cigar workers. In fact, they were the first ones to start collecting 50 cents a week for medicine, so that older members could see a doctor, Etcetera, etcetera. They were the first socialized medicine in this country. I’m not making it up; documented-USF did a whole program on that. Anyway, they joined with the Sociedad Marti and created a social club for the benefit of the Cuban cigar makers. My wife’s family has been affiliated with the Sociedad forever. It was created before the turn of the last century. And, we’re members and continue to keep the Latin traditions and culture. So we’re very involved bringing a lot of musical groups from Cuba here, preserving Cuban cultural heritage. Music, I love it.”

TS: “I noticed one of your hobbies is Latin percussion?”

RG: “Yes. My whole life I played drums, keeps my hands fluid. I enjoy music. I always have; particularly percussion instruments, and Latin instruments – jazz.”

TS: “Is there anything else you would like to add? We’ve been talking here for a pretty good while today. You’ve spoken about, umm, about the Palm River community and the creation of the library. And you spoke about your life in New York and here in Tampa. Is there anything you are looking forward to doing? You spent thirty years in the Sheriff’s department. You’re retired, but I imagine there are still some other things that are probably on your burner someplace; on your priority sheet. Is there anything else you might be interested in?”

RG: “Well, again, at this point in life, I’m just enjoying life. I’ve been traveling. My wife and I have good health. I just qualified, which means I could be a deputy for another eighteen months. That should take me to about sixty-five. [TS chuckles] So, we just went to the Middle East for a month. Enjoyed that. We were in Egypt. Visited a friend in Kuwait and Dubai. Looking forward to going in the fall, which will be spring, to Argentina and Chile; spend about a month down there. Enjoy time with my children.”

TS: “Grandchildren?”

RG: “I have one, granddaughter. My kids haven’t been very prolific. I don’t think I’m going to have more than one granddaughter. So I’m enjoying all I can with her.”

TS: “I understand. Well, I want to thank you for taking your time to speak with us today. It’s been very informative; it’s been very interesting. It taught me quite a bit that I didn’t know. And I’m sure that other people will enjoy hearing it as well. Is there anything else you would like to add?”

RG: “No, Tim. I’m honored that you have chosen to interview me; and, if anyone is interested in working on grants out there, I still like to keep my hand in. You can get in touch with me through the library. I’m still working as a part time police officer, so I really don’t want to get on my home phone. [TS: “I understand.”] But, I would be willing to help. [TS: “Wonderful.”] And that’s that.”

TS: “Well, thank you so much. It’s been a pleasure. Thank you very much, and we have certainly enjoyed it. Thank you.”

END OF INTERVIEW