



Alicia Oliva

Hillsborough Remembers

Alicia Oliva grew up during the '20s and '30s in an area of West Tampa known as "Roberts City". The residents of the "Roberts City" area were a close knit group who enjoyed their neighbors and their neighborhood, according to Armando Mendez in his 1994 book, *Ciudad De Cigars: West Tampa*, and from the 1920s to the 1940s held annual homecomings in Macfarlane Park. Mrs. Oliva's recollections about her childhood and married life reflect her roots in the cigar industry and in the Latin community.

This is an interview with Alicia Oliva (AO) of Tampa, Florida. Mrs. Oliva grew up in West Tampa. The interviewer was Yasmine Gonzalez (YG). This interview was conducted on March 27, 2001, for the Juniors to Seniors: Hillsborough Remembers Oral History collection project.

[START TAPE 1, SIDE A]

Alicia Oliva: I will begin in the mid 20s. As a child I remember in the area I was born was called Roberts City. It was named after the gentleman who originated Roberts Cigar Factories. My father was foreman for F. Garcia & Brothers. They used to call them "Los Cabezones" (Big Heads) in Spanish. They were very small men and had big heads. [laughter] I remember my mother telling me because this factory was about two blocks from the area where I lived and um, the young men would always be, the cigar selectors, had to be on the north side of the factory. You will notice that every cigar factory either faces



east or west. None of them face north or south. Because the north, you get your best light from the north. And that's where they selected the cigars which, the young men would get a bunch of cigars and they would look and they could tell right away the different colors, and that's how they packed them. They used to call "Pick and Pack". That's how they did it. My father was a selector. He selected the different leaves of the plant. Certain leaves would go for a certain um, what they used to call "bitola", which was a grade of tobacco. And uh, I had a brother who was a selector. And uh, they were the only two, actually, that were in the business, but everybody in my neighborhood worked at a cigar factory.

As a child, I remember that we were all family. The neighborhood was all family. If one had a problem, everybody would help, like if there was a sick member of the family. My mother, I remember, cooking soup and taking, every day she made it a point to make lunch for this family because, so they could be able to take care of the sick person. And uh, if there was anything she could do, it was done. And we all shared in our happiness and in our misfortunes and helped one another. I remember when I was a teenager, and the girls, like if I was going someplace

and I didn't have a purse to match what I was wearing, one of the girls, "Oh look!" and bring me the purse to match.

**Yasmine
Gonzalez:** Oh...



AO: Or anything we had, you know, we would share. So I grew up in a very loveable atmosphere. The girls weren't jealous and they didn't try to outdo the next. We were, um, like a big family, let's say. We were sisters and um, after, as I grew cause I always went to a private school but I had to ride the streetcar. At that time there were no buses. We rode the streetcar. I had an older brother who was four years older than I was and we used to go, now it's OLPH. It used to be St. Joseph's Academy and he would take me. I didn't start school till I was eight. I was lucky because, since I grew up with older, my older sister was sixteen when I was born. See, I was one of ten.

YG: *One of ten?*

AO: One of ten. And uh, we lost three of the boys. One was seven and one was fourteen and then a small, a baby. We were three boys and four girls. I was

the youngest and of course you know what that means: spoiled.

YG: *The youngest is spoiled, always. [laughter]*

AO: So I had a very beautiful childhood because my parents, uh, my mother was a fantastic cook and housekeeper and uh, since my first brother was born, yeah, first my brother, my dad, we had a black nanny. She was half Indian and half black, and I remember she would do the heavy work. My mother to, my dad used to say, "One thing I don't want her, you cook, okay?" [laughter] But the kids came so fast and we were, our playmates were each other, you know, one another. Since I was the youngest I used to follow my oldest, my brother that I tell you was four years older I, used to call me a tomboy. I used to fly kites, I played marbles and everything that the boys did. Then I started school and he would take me to school. I used to go to St. Joseph's Academy and I had a beautiful childhood in school. I graduated from there, by the time I graduated it was already Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Uh, I had, at that time most of the teachers, oh, the teachers were nuns, so I had no lay persons teaching me. It was always nuns. So, of course, I think all the girls that went to private school felt that they wanted to be a nun. So I thought I wanted to be a nun.

Much to uh, (laughter) the family's surprise, I graduated. I was 17 and during my high school years, the nuns got jobs for us for experience. I used to go after school to the Tampa Paper Company and uh, take dictation and I would type up the letters the next day and other days I would help with the bookkeeping and I worked every day and Saturdays I would work till about one or two o'clock. I didn't get paid, just so I would have experience, so that when I graduated and they asked me if I have experience, I could say yes. So you see, you got nothing. Today, who works for nothing? [laughter]

go to, to bring your husband over here.

AO: Well, he had to guarantee him, fill out all the papers for him so that he would come in as a resident. See, he came, he had, you had to have sufficient income to be able to bring someone in. Okay, so that, he came, he got here November 30th, 1938 and he said that when he came, my brother-in-law went to pick him up. At that time, we had boats coming to Port Tampa. See, to Port Tampa. He came by boat and he picked him up and he brought him to the office. And my husband said that when he met me and he, we were introduced, he looked at me and he says, "I'm gonna marry her."

YG: *That's true.*



AO: Then, after, well, my first real job was with my brother-in-law who, I mean, Angel Oliva, who later became my

brother-in-law. Uh, I was working with him when we filled out the papers for my husband to come from Cuba. You see, my husband was originally from Cuba and so was he. And when he—

[laughter] Isn't that funny? But he started. They had different idears, see. I used to have, like, the young men from Jesuit. We would, I was cheerleader for the Jesuit High School. They used to take one girl from each of the catholic high schools. They had one from Academy, one from Sacred Heart, and one from St. Joseph's. So we were three, in fact, last week my, Vivian wanted to go to the Goody-Goody, which was an old steak house. You know, we used to go out there after school and stuff like that when we had the chance and the best hamburgers in town were from Goody-Goody.

YG: *How was it? I mean, what kind of trouble did you have to*

YG: So it's like a McDonald's



with—

AO: Right, but it was one of the first and they used to have, you went in your car and they had the trays which they hooked onto the car, okay? And they brought you the food to the car—

YG: Oh, like Happy—

AO: And one of the young men who I used to play tennis with, used to work. They only had boys at that time. And, he, they used to wear skates. So they—

YG: So they skated to your car.

AO: Yeah, they came, skate to your car, took your order and then, and my favorite was the burger basket [laugh] cause you got cole slaw and then French Fries. But--

YG: Wow, you were into all of that.

AO: Yeah, so that part of it and we used to go picnicking with the nuns and I used to be on the basketball team. Lou Piniella's mother was also on the team. Margaret, she lives

over here. You know who Lou Piniella is? The baseball player.

YG: Uh huh.

AO: Yeah.

YG: His mother?

AO: His mother! She lives right here. Margaret Magadann was her name. And—

YG: On this street?

AO: Yeah, right here. On the corner of Cordelia and Habana. That's where she lives. And his father. They live right there, across from the park. In fact, this park is named Lou Piniella. I don't know whether you know it, but Margaret was a real, just like her son, real tough player, okay? And we were champs, state champs for the, for the private schools' division. So we used to go up to St. Augustine, cause we had the tournaments up there and to St. Pete and we used to go all over. So uh, that's that.

YG: That's something, my goodness.

AO: Yeah, yeah. He's manager for the New York Yankees, you know, now.

YG: That's very nice.

AO: Yeah.

YG: *You were a cheerleader and everything.*

AO: Yeah.

YG: *Umm...*

AO: In 19, yeah, it was in October of 1938, when my brother came, my brother-in-law came, talked to my mother, because I was young, you know, and to give me a job and so I started working with him. And like I say, I filled out the papers and my husband came. Well, right away he started, y'know, he liked me and all like this, but he was very jealous. Uh, he thought because he liked me, I had to like him and at that time, like I say, I used to go to the matinees. They used to have Sunday matinees. They started at 3:00. And they lasted until, I think it was about seven or eight but I had to be home before dark. So, that meant, I had to leave because they were out in Ybor City, which today is Centre Ybor, which is the Centro Español and all the Latins used to go there all the time, all the young people. And most of the time we were chaperoned. We used to go with chaperones. Well, I can't tell you all that went on because it would take forever, but my husband didn't want me to dance with anybody else, y'know? I said, "No! I have my friends, y'know, that I've had for all my life," and

(laughter) he used to say I was just a flirt, y'know.

So I remember one time uh, we got to the matinee. This lady used to go with us. We were about five or six girls and we sat down and this boy who I had gone to school with and his sister was in my class. Uh, he had gone to New York and he came into the, and when he saw me, into the hall, and he's, "Ooh, Alice." This is the time we had cards. You had a card, which you then hung, and you put, they had the different dances that were going to be played, whether it was the jitterbug and y'know the different...and you would put the name of the person that asked you. Hey, if you knew somebody that danced something well, you wanted to ask that person, so you would give them that dance. And, uh...

YG: *So it was like uh, reserving—*

AO: Right.

YG: *To reserve for a dance...*

AO: Right. It was a little card and...

YG: *and you hung it around your wrist?*

AO: In fact I had them, I don't know where Vivian has it, cause I've given her a bunch of my old

momentoes, y'know? [laughter]
And uh, he, this young man sat, he came over and sat with us and he said, "Well," he says, " I know you saw, this boy is with you but", he says, "can I have a dance," y'know so I says, "Of course." So he was standing, he was sitting there and he was smoking a cigar. In those days, the young men didn't, see, they grew tobacco in Cuba. My husband's family, my husband's father grew tobacco in Cuba.

YG: *So they had it—*

AO: A farm.

YG: *So they had it*

AO: They imported it. They brought it by boat at that time.

YG: *Oh, by boat?*

AO: Yes, and my brother-in-law had a leaf tobacco company. He had, he was just starting out. He started out, he used to work with Johnson Tobacco Company and then in 1934, he started his own business with two other gentlemen. One was José Suarez and his brother Emilio Suarez, who used to be brokers in Cuba, for tobacco imports. They sold most of the imported Cuban tobacco to the factories here, these two gentlemen and he started out with them. They helped him and helped him financially and he got on his feet. Started in 1934. So in

1935, he had brought my husband over and he stayed here for a year but he didn't like it cause my brother-in-law was very strict. So he went back to Cuba.

YG: *Your husband?*

AO: My husband, went back to Cuba after that. So in 1938, February of '38, his mother died and then he decides he wants to come back with his brother, cause y'know. So that's when he came and I tell you that, y'know, so um, then he, like I say, he started, and he had a cigar. I got sidetracked there. So he would blow smoke in this other young man's face. He'd go, "Phew," [imitating smoke] y'know and the other guy was just like, "Who's that?" And I said, "Oh, it's my boss's brother." He says, "Boy, he doesn't have much manners, does he?" With my husband, what you saw was what you got. So, well, time went by. It's '38, so by 1941, we were married. We became engaged on January 30th, 1941 and we were married in September 7th, 1941, nine months later. So I worked, all this time I was working with him. We got married in September and in December, the war broke out. The second World War.

YG: *In December of that year?*

AO: Of that year. So in May he was drafted and he was sent all the way to India.



YG: *He was drafted to India?*

AO: He was drafted. And he went in a boat by the name of "Ile de France".

YG: *Gill?*

AO: Ile. It's in French. Ile de France. 9,000 men were on that boat and it—

YG: *9,000.*

AO: And it took them forty-seven days to go across the Pacific. And when he landed there, he could never, see, everything was censored, and since his command of English was very poor, because when he came, he knew no English and he started going to school, to adult school over here in West Tampa, to learn English. So his captain, rather his Lieutenant used to tell him, "You tell me what you want to say," and he would write to me. Then a little later he started writing and I would correct him. Y'know, I would answer him, I

would say something and it's like this. So he was gone for forty-three months. I didn't see him. We had only been married seven months when they took him—

YG: *Oh my god...*

AO: And all this time I worked with my brother-in-law, selling tobacco and exporting, not exporting at that time, it was later, but we used to sell tobacco to the small cigar factories and to, at the time, Villazon, which is this factory here. At that time was in Ybor City—

YG: *Villazon?*

AO: Villazon. V-i-l-l-a-z-o-n. And to F. Garcia & Brothers, which was the original builders of this factory and to F. Garcia, I mean, Perfecto Garcia.

YG: *These are all the companies that—*

AO: That we used to sell to, yes. Perfecto Garcia, Corral Wodiska—

YG: *Perfecto— [END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A] [START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]*

(Conversation begun before tape turned on)

YG: *Wait, okay...*

AO: And he said they would throw him into these wagons, drawn by horses and just throw the bodies in there. Take them to the outskirts of the city, pile them up and throw like kerosene around them and just, he said, "I saw this," and then, y'know, throw a match in there and you would hear these bodies groaning. They were still not dead, yet.

YG: *Burned alive?*

AO: Burned alive. In India.

YG: *Why would they be burned?*

AO: Because, to prevent disease from spreading.

YG: *Oh, just because they had to?*

AO: Just because they died and they didn't know...I mean, people there, like I tell you, thirty-some years old and died and they didn't know what they died from. So what they did was pick them up and rather than bury them, they would take them and burn them. In fact, I think Vivian has some pictures, because he took pictures of, y'know, the piles of, yeah. And um, he said, like, one Thanksgiving, he said they were leaving 'cause they used to leave from there to go bomb the Japanese. And uh, he said, they started, start out it was about

four in the morning and he said they were all lined up to take off. And evidently, he says there was like a mountain right at the end of the runway and he said the first one, y'know how they shoot them off, they signal them out, and he said the first one that was supposed to go out, he evidently froze, y'know, when he started out. And he didn't take the plane up fast enough. He hit the mountain and about, I think he said, ten other planes, "boom, boom, boom" [with slapping fists], he said and they had to go out there and pick up what was left of the bodies. They all crashed. Yeah.

YG: *And your husband saw all of this.*

AO: And he saw all of this. He went through that. He was there, like I say, for three years and six months. I never saw him all that time. See, the girls, I didn't have any of the girls until after he came back. When he came back, he was already sick. I mean, he had this terrible rheumatoid arthritis, what they'd call it. And he flew back from India to Miami, and they stopped in, going over, they stopped in Iceland, no Greenland, and he said it was beautiful there, but they were told, see, they got off and marched, You know, I guess to spread their legs [laugh] and he said they were told, don't even

look to the side, don't take anything they offer you because catch spies all over. And they were afraid, y'know, if they said these people, y'know, so generous trying to give them stuff and they couldn't take anything. And see, he went around the world, 'cause he left through the Pacific and came back through the Atlantic.

So he lost one day of his life, y'know, when you go around the world. And um, I remember when we were, after the girls were grown and we were gonna go to San Francisco. The girls wanted to go, cause Beverly was already married, that's my youngest one and he said, "No, I never want to go there cause the last thing I saw when I left this country was the Golden Bridge," he said, "and I don't want to see it again." So I said to him, "Remember one thing, when you left, you went under the bridge. We're gonna go over it and you can stand there and piss on it!" [laugh]

Well, he decided and we went and we had a wonderful time. We drove, oh, all over, we went to Las Vegas, drove everywhere into Nevada and we went to Sausalito and well, all over those places. Had a wonderful time. When he came from the service, his brother, I kept working with his brother the whole, during the war, and when he came back, his brother

said, well, he wanted to take us into the business, because my husband had told me, "Wherever I am, you're gonna come and stay with me, 'cause you can work at any of the px's or anything." So then, my brother—

YG: ()

AO: Now my brother, no, it was, he, I mean, we had had so little time to, y'know, together, and he said, "No," he says, "We've sacrificed enough." So then his brother, 'cause see at that time it was very hard to find help. See, I was offered a job with the shipyard in the offices there, making much more than I was making with him and when I wrote my husband and told him, he says, "No. Now he needs you. You stay there till I come back," which is what we did. So when he came back he says, "Now, wherever I'm sent," cause he came back as a sick, y'know, he was sick. So he was taken to Hot Springs, Arkansas. Hot Springs, because they have those baths there where they, y'know, treat them.

YG: *Oh, okay.*

AO: Yeah, yeah. There was a hospital there, air force hospital, recoup. So um, then my brother-in-law said, "No, I remember when he landed, he landed in Miami and he called

me at the office," 'cause I tried to find out what was wrong with him. I knew he was sick but I couldn't get any satisfaction. So I went to the Red Cross, I went to everybody, I went to my church, the Catholic Church, the people there, nothing. Then my brother, my brother-in-law had a friend, his name was Reverend Walter Pasiglia and he said, "Give me the information on your husband. I'm gonna see what I can do." So the next thing I knew, my husband said that this general went to his bedside and said, y'know, asked him how he was doing and all like this. And uh, then I found out that Claude Pepper, who was the Senator here for many years, for the state of Florida, had been the one that intervened and got this guy to go see him and that was the first I knew, more or less, what was wrong with him. So when he came back, and well, I wrote him a letter and I, of course, Reverend Pasiglia, he used to help a lot of people here. He had a little church in Ybor City, the Presbyterian Church there on, what is it, 8th? Yeah, I think it's 8th, oh, 11th. 11th. I don't know if it's still there. Um, so when he came back and my brother-in-law said, "Look," he says, "what I want to do is, I want to bring you all into the business." My husband said, "Well, that's different."

YG: *The tobacco business?*

AO: Tobacco business. Like we were working there with him all the time but he was, his partners, died in 19-- , one died in 1939 and he decides—

YG: *The owner's partners?*

AO: Yeah, there were three, like I told you. José and Emilio and he was, the other one, three.

YG: *Your brother-in-law's the only one that stayed alive.*

AO: My brother-in-law, right. The others...so, no, one of them, um, José died and that's when he decides to pull out. He pulls out and tells brother, the other brother, "Look, I want the business. I want it, y'know, all." So naturally, he was the sole owner then, when he offered us to go in. So we each, I had saved, during my husband's, while my husband was away, I used to get \$50 a month, y'know, which is what they sent the wives and I saved it and I used to keep books for the little cigar factories. We had five hundred small cigar factories, what we called buckeyes. Buck, b-u-c—

YG: *Five hundred?*

AO: Yes, buckeyes.

YG: *Cigar factories.*

AO: Yes. No, little cigar factories.

YG: *Buckeyes.*

AO: Buckeyes. B-u-c-k-e-y-e-s [pause]. And uh, I used to keep books for several of them. I also had a brother-in-law who used to make bunching machines, the machines where they make the bunches to make the cigars, okay? And he would, I said, "No, sell them to me and I'll sell them." I used to sell them and make ten dollars off of each one.

YG: *Each cigar?*

AO: No, each machine.

YG: *Oh, machine.*

AO: The little machine. A bunching machine, which it was a little machine that had a little canvas like this. They would put the material, this tobacco material, in there. They would do this and it would roll it and make what they called the "bunch," "e bonche".

YG: *Oh, bonche.*

AO: Bonche. And then that was rolled with the wrapper and made into cigars.

YG: *Hmm...um, how long were you in this business? How long were you doing this?*

AO: I was working from 1938 through, well, '97. Well, my husband died in '97 and I was

out of there in '98. So you gotta figure from '38 to '98.

YG: *Whoa...*

[pause]

AO: Sixty years. There was a time, when my mother passed away and my dad came to live



with us but still, I was home, but I still did, and the

girls were little but I still did, y'know, work for my brother-in-law. Then they had, you know, someone there, but, I mean, basically, the whole time. I grew old there.

YG: *You know something else that's, I think this is, how was, like, the Latino struggle, like, like, people when they're coming here, like, how was, was it hard for them, like, coping in with everyone, from the blacks and whites and the--?*

AO: Well, there was the Latinos were not as prejudiced as Anglos, with the Blacks. They, of course, the Blacks...when I was growing up, I remember the Blacks didn't even look at you. The Blacks from here. They

didn't look at you because if you...I remember as a little girl, I went with my brother, we used to go to the grocery store, was A&P, and there was another one, named Piggly-Wiggly and they had specials, weekends. We had these little pull, which we used to get with Octagon coupons, little buggies, like, y'know these little red buggies with, everybody had, all the little kids had one—

YG: *Yeah, yeah.*

AO: And my brother, I would sit in it and he would go across what was Fortune Street Bridge, still there, and I remember going across that bridge when it was wooden. My feet, my little feet, I was afraid it would go through, y'know the planks weren't very close. I used to go for a walk with my dad every night and when I got there, he would laugh because I would be, you know, very cautious. I was afraid I was gonna go through there. [laugh] Well, if you, as a child, I got side-tracked, I got sidetracked, he would take me to go to Piggly-Wiggly because you got five pounds of sugar for five cents, okay.

YG: *Five pounds of sugar?*

AO: Five pounds of sugar for five cents, okay? Ten pounds of potatoes. It was nothing, hardly, and all these specials.

We would go and he would put them in this buggy and bring it home, these specials. Of course, you had, every neighborhood, you had a grocery store in the neighborhood. We had the couple, about three grocery stores and we had the butcher and we had the fish market, the Madecinis were right near, where I, they used to have these schooners come in, 'cause they would bring in fish, they would go deep sea fishing and come in. But what I started to tell you was, one day, excuse me, I was waiting for my brother outside the store. This black man comes by and he looks at me and for some reason I became very scared and there was a policeman standing, in those days, you went up to policeman. You felt safe. Today you don't know [laugh]. But I went and I said, "Sir," and he says, "What's wrong?" I said, "I'm afraid. That man was looking at me," and he went up to him and I'll never forget he says, he took out his stick and he says, "Get out of here!" Y'know, just very. They were very um, now it's the other extreme, but at that time, if they suspected anything or a black did anything, they would hang him.

YG: *Hang him?*

AO: The people. Like, here in West Tampa, they would hang him off of these big trees out

here, especially weekends. They would hang him.

YG: *This is happening throughout the 1920s, 1930s?*

AO: Oh yeah. 1920s, 1930's, oh yes, oh yes.

YG: *Oh my goodness.*

AO: Oh yes. They were really discriminated against.

YG: *The Latinos weren't that discriminated against.*

AO: No, that's why I'm telling you, it was the Anglos. I remember when, another thing I remember when I was growing up, I saw, you see it in the movies now and you say, "No, that couldn't be." There was a family, the Vilasco family um, who, Vluid Vilasco, he was a very good bas-er, football player for Hillsborough High. There were three, four brothers and they used to live next door. Their father used to bootleg, make liquor at home, at home, okay? And um, they, I guess that the um. We used to call it, we used to call it the federale [laugh]. They used to always have these little black carts, y'know, and wear hats. Now, when, and there used to be a lot of bolita, people that sold bolita, in those days in the neighborhood.

YG: *What's that?*

AO: Bolita is like the lotto. It was against the law then. Today. They used to sell numbers. You see, they used to sell numbers. Bolita, b-o-l-i-t-a. They used to sell numbers, for ten cents if you won you got eight dollars. And uh, they had a system since these federale, you used to have to come across Fortune Street Bridge. Now, they had one guy, it was a kid. At the end of Fortune Street Bridge, there was a fruit stand there and he would be standing around there. When he saw the federale, he would whistle and about a block away they had someone else that whistled to the other one on the next to the next block. By the time the, it was like the police got there to the town, to Roberts City [slap] everybody, the people that sold bolita, they were sitting down, playing dominoes and y'know, they always got away. But this time they, these, federal, came and I remember I was playing hop-scotch right in the sidewalk. They came to the house next door. It was a two-story house. Downstairs there was like a warehouse and upstairs this family lived and I'm telling you, Valascos. And they knocked on the door. The lady, her name was Loretto, and they said, "Open up in the name of the law." Well, her house was upstairs like that and my mother's kitchen was, y'know, next door but, y'know, you could hear and she said

"Catalina! Catalina!" and they took out an ax and knocked down that door and went inside...

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B] [Story was not completed)

[START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A]

AO: So I, now that you mentioned, you know, that the way that they were treated and all like this. My father came from Spain to Cuba, 'cause that was the jumping point. Then, there they processed their entry into this country. You had to have someone here who would claim you, y'know, and fill out like we did for my husband.

YG: *Yeah.*

AO: So you would come in legally, see. And it was very hard because the Spaniards had what they called a quota. And they couldn't come in except so many a year and, of course, my dad was fourteen, fourteen? Yes, when he left Spain and went to work for a, um, this company that sold tobacco to the United States. And he used to, like I said, they stayed right there in the warehouse where the tobacco was kept so they wouldn't have to pay rent until—

YG: *They were allowed to live?*

AO: Lived there.

YG: *In the tobacco, but not all the employees.*

AO: No, no, well, the young ones that came and, ah, were paid very little in Cuba, so they would, y'know, until they were claimed by the person here.

YG: *What was youngest you could be, working in a cigar factory?*

AO: Twelve years old. They used to—

YG: *Really?*



AO: Yes. Oh yes. They used to, as soon as they were able to, they would work in the cigar factories. Yes. And uh, that was one thing that, uh, that my mother was also brought from Spain and she came as a babe-in-arms, to the United States. Uh, she was fourteen when my father, my father was thirteen years older than my mother, thirteen. An' um, it was in Port Tampa, when he noticed her, 'cause my grandfather used to have a bowling alley and they used to go bowling. And he used

to see my mother hop-scotching, he says, not hop-scotching, rope—

YG: Jumping rope...

AO: Yeah, jumping rope and, y'know, well, she wasn't sixteen when they were married. So, at that time, by that time, they were starting to develop the cigar factories in Tampa so he, um, had this house built. In those days, the man would, the groom would usually build a house and when she left her parents and got married, she came already to live in her home, y'know. It wasn't like, you know, later, y'know, you rented or whatever, no.

YG: He already prepared the house.

AO: Right, and that house was where we were all born. It was torn down when they started the development out there and they did all the, y'know, and now it's all those black apartments, out there and it's all changed out there, between North Boulevard east, y'know, all of that in there, which is playgrounds and tennis courts and what not, for Tampa youth, see.

YG: Oh.

AO: Yeah, it's all in there.

YG: All connected.

AO: All connected. So we used to live, it was near the river and my brothers, of course, used to like to go and go, take off their clothes and go skinny—[laugh]

YG: Skinny dipping.

AO: Skinny dipping, and my father, my mother used to worry so much, they used to jump off the bridge into the river. And my mother, oh, she suffered with that and one day, my mother said, "The boys are out there and I can't leave", 'cause I was a baby, I mean, young and so my daddy says, "I'll fix it. Went out there and took all of their clothes, brought their clothes home. Them, the three boys, there were three boys, I mean, that used, and some of the neighbors, and took all the neighbors, everybody's clothes, brought 'em home. "They'll come, and that is when we'll get 'em." So they had to wait until sundown and chop leaves off these palmettos, y'know, to cover up to be able to come home. [laughter] They were little, thirteen, fourteen years old, y'know. [laughter] An' my mother was the one that, in those days, they would've all gone to jail, because the way parents, I mean, they really gave it to you, okay? The paddles and the belts and all like that, I mean, you know.

YG: Usually the whipping.

AO: Oh, the whipping was very bad, but um, they all grew up to be, like I look back and all the younger, the boys in the neighborhood, they all grew up and none of them really, you know, bad or you never heard of any of these shootings. Nothing like that went on.

YG: *Didn't have much violence?*

AO: No, no, no, not at all. Not like that.

YG: *I recently visited Cuba and uh, like, the streets, we are allowed to roam two, three o'clock in the morning. Everybody would tell me, "Oh, don't worry. Because, you know, it's safe." Y'know, is it more like that? Y'know, is it more like that how it was here before?*

AO: Oh yeah, you could go out any time of the night.

YG: *No worry at all that they bother—*

AO: I never worried. I, now, I used to remember, heck, even when my children were small. Um, we used to go to the park here and we would walk to the park and walk to my friend's and all over and I didn't feel, y'know, you have to be looking around, no! None of that. None of that. It's very scary. It's, and, you never locked your front door. At that time you didn't

have air condition. We didn't have, well, no, there's wasn't none. We'd leave the door open, 'cause you had the screen door and you had the other door, so all you did, you know, was open that door and let the screen, y'know, the air, and open up all your windows. Nobody came in.

Respect. There was a lot of respect. If a neighbor would tell my mother, "I saw Alice doing something," anything...I used to love to skate. And uh, there was a neighbor who didn't want us to skate on his sidewalk, so when we got to his area, we'd jump on the street and miss his sidewalk and then get on the other sidewalk. Well, [laugh] I said to myself one day, "You know what? His kids," Manuel, I remember. He was my age. "He skates on my sidewalk. Why can't I skate on his?" Well, we were all skating, so when we got to this man, Manuel Lorez was his name. Got to his sidewalk, everybody jumped off and I stayed on, so when I went past him he was sitting on the front porch. He just looked at me and said, "Wait till I tell your mother." [laugh] Boy, I knew, but I said, "No, that's not fair." [laugh] So, I get home and my mother says, "Didn't Mr. Lorez tell you not to skate on his?" I said, "Yes! But Manuel skates on my sidewalk!" "That doesn't make any difference. He doesn't want you to skate on his!" An', I mean, I got it.

You have to respect the elders and when anybody, an older person came into the room, you stood up. You never stayed sitting. And if, like, my mother's friends would come, all she'd do is look at me. I knew I had to get lost. Go on the porch, the front porch. I never listened in on conversations and, y'know, my parents watched a lot of was...at that time, when I was growing up, there were, there was a magazine named True Confessions. I'll never forget [laugh] and it had all the, like the Enquirer, stuff like that, I would say, more or less. An', um, dear me, my mother would see one of those magazines around. Mmmm, we had problems. None of that went on, no, no, no, no. An' you know, I think back and you say, without having all of this formal education they have today, and um, uh, it was instilled into us, that respect. An' I remember my mother saying to me, because I was young, had temptations just like they have 'em now. But you just didn't, I mean [noise], y'know, let yourself go. She used to tell me, "I trust you and I know you would never do anything to bring shame on your family."

To me, that was, y'know, I never...whenever, like I say, I had temptation, I mean, I think of Momma, "No, no!" Even a kiss, y'know, I knew that...and, y'know, and when my husband

started, 'cause, of course, in those days they would come and ask for your hand in marriage and I'll never forget when my husband came with his father, who had come from Cuba, to ask for my hand. An' uh, that day, when he took my, he told me, says, "We're going tonight, y'know, my dad and I are going to ask for your hand." So, I didn't want to be there, y'know. An' it was my sister's birthday and she was gonna, my other sister was gonna to take us out to eat. So I said, "Good, that way I won't be here." An' I'll never forget, when I got home, they were still there. I went around the side of the house and they were sitting in the dining room and I got up, I got a box, I got up to look through the window and my husband would go into the kitchen. My mother was in the kitchen and my father was in the dining room with my father-in-law. An' uh, he'd go and he'd come back and they'd start talking. He couldn't make it. He'd go back and my mother would, "Go ahead! Finish! He has to go to bed. He works tomorrow!" [laugh] Yeah, they used to, yeah. The next day after, I'll never forget, my daddy said to me, "Well, you know Martín came to ask for your hand in marriage and you know what that means. A big responsibility when women get married." He says, "An' I wanna to tell you one thing: Martín is

like a diamond that has not been polished and it will polish according to the way you treat him. Be very careful, you don't wanna break the stone." I'll never forget that." He says, "Go very softly, when you try to get the polish off, to get to your stone."

YG: Yeah.



AO: Yeah, and it was true because my husband had a very quick, he didn't, he was very quick temp..., his bark was louder than his bite. An' he was very, but, you had to know, all you had to do was look at him and he'd just, pussycat, y'know? An' that was one thing I learned from my father and I never forgot. He used to tell me, "You have a precious stone. Be careful how you polish it." Yeah? I want to show you the picture, the wedding picture, so you can see what we looked like.

[END OF INTERVIEW]