

Lily Almandares & Julia Rodriguez

Hillsborough Remembers

Lily Almandares and Julia Rodriguez are old friends. They visit each other and chat about things that friends chat about. Both grew to adulthood in Tampa and shared stories about the Great Depression and about World War II. As they share their memories of Tampa, they give us a glimpse of what this city was like more than fifty years ago..

WWII
At Home & Abroad

This is an interview with Lily Almendares (**LA**) retired of Tampa, Fl. Mrs. Almendares was in Tampa during World War II and the Great Depression. This interview is being conducted on November 19th, 1999, at CTA River Gardens Apartments. The interviewer is Taurean Wong (**TW**). I'm representing H.B. Plant High School. And Julia Rodriguez (**JR**) is also attending this interviewing session.

TW: Okay, I'd like to ask both of you, like, how old were you at the time? During World War II?

LA: I was born in '24, 1924, the war started in '42. So how do I figure out how old I was at the time I can't remember.

JR: Well, subtract huh ---

LA: 1924 from '42.

TW: Oh, okay.

LA: Yeah, yeah, 1924 from 19 -1920...

TW: Your were born in '24.

LA: Yeah I'm sorry '22, '22.

TW: And the war was at '42.

LA: That's right, 1942.

TW: 19, I think... around nineteen at the time. What was I going to say....How was, how was the propaganda like, almost like the advertising of World War II or how ---

LA: Well yeah, they had big, big pictures of Uncle Sam "We need you!" You remember that, Vicki, "We need you!" with a big finger pointing so that we could get people to come you know, to join the army. So then a.... I happen to have a poem, a poem at

home I should have brought, but I wrote it during the war, when the men went to war, when we went to do the war efforts. You know build ships, ---

TW: So, the woman basically took over most of the men's jobs?

LA: Took over the jobs that the men were doing because they had to go away to war. That was for the war effort.

TW: I guess, okay, ...What were, I guess, like the major parts of Tampa, like around then? Let's say, like I'm not sure what, was Temple Terrace Like was that around? Or was it basically like Port Tampa?

LA: Port Tampa was around but I don't remember Temple Terrace.

JR: All these new sections weren't around then.

LA: No, No like you said Port Tampa was. But that's old, old.

TW: How about Ybor City?

LA: Oh Ybor City was around then.

JR: Oh Ybor City has always been.

LA: Yeah 'cause my family settled here.

JR: Carrollwood and all these other sections, they weren't around during the war.

TW: Was there, this goes a little bit off but, was there any kind of entertainment industry, were there, like, any movies starting to be put out, like about maybe the war or anything?

LA: Well there was Paramount News. They had Paramount News, a lot of news about the war.

JR: Yeah in the news was about all we saw, in the news and the movies.

LA: Yeah the Millennium News and the newspapers, you know.

JR: But as far as movies I don't think that right then, they didn't make movies.

LA: No, not about the war.

JR: After, they did.

TW: Okay, how was, how was it in the cities I guess, I'm not sure how exactly the news got down that there was war, but when everybody found out it was, there was a World War II was it, like, was everybody, I guess, like shocked about it or.... **LA:** Yes. I was, my family was, and I'm sure that ---

JR: Yeah we were all, but in those days they didn't have demonstrations and all like today.

LA: No, they didn't have anything like that, but we were very afraid, scared.

JR: Yeah 'cause everybody was, that we knew, you know, people that had sons and all that would be going. But like I say, in those days there weren't demonstrations or nobody to tell us when to move. We just followed them just like that.

LA: Roosevelt needed help and we were there to help him.

TW: For say...did you have, was there any siblings that any of you had, that left, had to go to the war?

LA: No, my cousins did. I had cousins that went.

JR: But my husband was in the Merchant Marines. He went in the Merchant Marines.

LA: And my husband was in the war, too.

TW: Your husband.

LA: Yeah.

TW: Okay, kind of switching it here over towards, were both of you around during the Great Depression?

LA: Yes.

TW: The Great Depression.

LA: You too, right?

JR: I'm older than you are.

TW: Was that like, was that like tragic when everybody found out about it? Or was there a lot of people that lost jobs?

JR: How would you like to live on, on, well it's true that groceries and all were cheaper, but my, when I got married my husband was making \$12.50 a week. And we thought, you know, we figured out before we got married, that was a lot of money. After a while we worked in a cigar factory, we worked 4 days a week, we were making \$7.50 a week.

LA: That's right \$7.50 a week. That's \$14, no wait that's \$15 every 2 weeks. So it's \$7.50 a week, \$15 every 2 weeks, so that made it what---

JR: \$14 to \$15.

LA: Can you imagine that?

JR: But at that time, everything was cheap.

LA: This was the depression.

TW: Yeah.

LA: Not the war yet.

TW: No.

LA: Things were tough!

JR: Then after, then that's when after Roosevelt made the WPA—

LA: Mmm hmm....

JR: Then they go dig ditches and go do things like that...

TW: The WPA?

LA: The WPA is Workman what?

JR: Huh, Huh.

LA: Public something.

JR: Workman something comp---

LA: I can't remember, it was WPA. That's all I can remember. And we had the NYA, National Youth Association, and I worked for the NYA. I was cleaning the boards in the school and sweeping the classrooms after school and that brought, uh, \$5 a month. With that I bought my shoes and stuff that I needed. You know I bought my own stuff because my parents couldn't afford it.

JR: My husband worked in the WPA diggin' ditches.

LA: My husband, my father too worked in the WPA.

TW: Now, being related, to The Great Depression and World War II, how was, being you were 19, I guess you were kind of young teenage age, how

was it? Was it, while these things were going on was it more like friend bonding or family bonding?

LA: and **JR:** Oh yeah, family and friends!

LA: They helped each other.

JR: I think everybody was closer those days.

LA: Yeah, we needed each other. But not only for eating, but for support! To give us courage to go on. It was bad! I'm glad you didn't have to do that!

JR: Well, well, in a way thank god o' mighty! If it wasn't that my mother used to help us. My mother used to always give me you know, some groceries and stuff cause, if not, we would have done without.

LA: Roosevelt put us on our feet when the war started.

TW: Looking back on to more the Depression side or maybe even World War II side, was there any, like, any, like, angry feelings towards the government, like, when these things were happening? Was anybody like---

LA: Not that I know of. No.

JR: I don't think so—

LA: Um The banks all went, you know, the banks all went bankrupt.

JR: Well that was before, the bankruptcy, that was before that war though.

LA: I know, but we're talking about the Depression right?

TW: Yes.

JR: Oh, the Depression. I thought he said, if during the war if anybody was mad at the government.

LA: Oh no. No. We weren't mad at the government. It wasn't the government's fault the war started.

TW: Now switching to the Great Depression though.

LA: Yeah. The banks closed. Everybody that had money in the bank lost their money. There were rich men working that never been, men that were rich, had been rich, they lost their money in the Great Depression. Working side by side with my father that was a poor person with my father. He didn't have a lot of money.

JR: A lot of people, a lot of them committed suicide.

LA: Right, they jumped out the windows cause they couldn't, couldn't live without the money they'd lost. Because you see, cause it was not federal... the FDIC that they have now.

JR: Yeah, they weren't insured.

LA: They were not insured for that. There was no such mention of that at that time. Now it can't happen. Because they have the FDIC, which is federal, that protects the people with money in the bank.

TW: I'm not sure if, maybe well learned this in our history books but, during the time of World War II or I guess a little after or a little before, were you all aware of the Holocaust? Or that it was happening?

LA: No we were not. We heard about it later.

TW: Later. Oh, so you all really weren't informed about anything.

LA: No we didn't find out 'til later. Yeah, cause Hitler, that is Germany. Yeah we were fighting Germany and who else. It was Japan, Germany, and who else. Italy! Germany, Japan, Italy! And who else---

-----Lily & Julia speaking Spanish for a while-----

LA: Hirohito, Mussolini, Germany, yeah. Hitler (), Mussolini and, whatever his name was, the Japanese guy.

TW: Okay...for World War II, like, you were saying, so basically women took over the mens jobs like ship building.

LA: Yes, that's where I worked in shipbuilding.

TW: And I guess like factories.

LA: Factories, wherever, like sometimes, the bakery too, bakeries, bakers, the bakers had to go. So people took over the, you know, women, took over like, Wholesome Bread. Remember Wholesome Bread?

JR: Yeah.

LA: A lot of women went in to work at Wholesome Bread.

JR: And there was no shipyards 'til the war.

LA: That's when it started.

JR: That's when the shipyard's started. They started building ships---

LA: 'Cause we were not prepared for war. We were not prepared! We were not expecting war. It took us by surprise completely. They had a McCloskey Shipyard, and then they had another shipyard. I worked at McClosky, and the Tampa Ship Co, but

I don't remember the others, the names of the others. There was several shipyards here at the time in Tampa.

TW: Which would you say, I guess, had the I guess, greater affect on this area? The Great Depression or World War II?

LA: I think the Great Depression.

TW: The Great Depression.

LA: It was very hard to live through that, and then war, too, on the account of the boys that were leaving, you had families, you know, young men that were leaving, but the Great Depression was very tough—

JR: Though the war in a way brought money because when the shipyards started, the boys could go work there made money, because they paid good money for that time.

LA: Exactly, some of them were, what would you call them, deferred deports. They were doing something for the war effort here. You know what I'm saying, instead of taking them to war, they kept them here. They deferred them. They let them stay here, some of these men. So they could work for the war efforts, the war efforts. Like my boss. My boss was a man, a young man. I'll never forget him, Robert Ely. And then his boss was there. We had some men, I don't want to say they took all the men, but a lot of the men were taken. So we worked with these men that taught us what to do. When we went to go in the shipyards, because I didn't know what to do.

JR: Well, I guess you know the Depression, we didn't know any better. We were used, you know nobody had money. Where it isn't like today, today millionaires are a dime a dozen, but in

those days if you had \$1,000, you were a millionaire.

LA: Yeah.

TW: Like along with I guess the women, did any children have to come and work? Or--

LA: No children, um hum.

JR: Que?

LA: The children go to work.

JR: No, no. No. The only thing is, like say my husband, they were eight and his daddy was dead. So they had to go milk cows and everything before they went to school, just to get milk. And a lot of the kids did that, you know, cause they were all needed the money and needed, but there were a lot of kids, and they had to work, you know before going to school and everything.

LA: You know I never realized, now that he's talking about it, I realized how close the Depression to the war. I never even thought about that! That's amazing! I never—because we lived through it, you know, and we just put it out of our minds I guess. You know things are so different today. I am so glad!

TW: A lot better now than-?-

LA: Yes, oh yes.

JR: Kids have it good today.

LA: Oh, gosh, yeah.

TW: My mom says that.

LA: Yeah, your mom says that? How old is your mom?

TW: My mom is forty...like... 45, 46. But, I don't think my mom would know

too much about this, my mom came from Jamaica.

LA: She's too young to know about the war. Guam was in the war. Guam was.

TW: Guam?

LA: Guam.

TW: Islands?

LA: Yeah, Guam Islands.

TW: For our side? Or?

LA: Our side, sure.

TW: How was...what was I going to ask?

LA: It's hard to interview somebody, isn't it?

TW: (laughs) Yeah, a little, but it gets better!

LA: You're doing great though I tell you!

TW: Oh, thank you! How was, was there... I'm not sure how to bring this up I guess I don't want to say like really a racial issue but more or less immigration.

LA: Immigration was long before that.

TW: Long before then?

LA: Yeah, immigration was phased from like Cubans and the Puerto Ricans and stuff like that. You know what I'm saying. But not the blacks. The blacks were not involved in that at that time.

TW: Okay.

JR: But back then, the blacks were discriminated...

LA: Discriminated against, that was not the issue, I mean, they had their own sections where they lived, the blacks. In Tampa, in Ybor City. They lived past 22nd St., from 22nd beyond. From 22nd this way, they were not allowed to live at that time. Because there was a racial issue at the time. It still is somewhat now, today, but not like it was then. And you know what? This lady, she was black, and she two children, and we used to play with them! And they lived across the street from us. Isn't that amazing! I don't know how she got away with it, but she let her children come over she did. We used to play with her children.

JR: Yeah, well...

LA: I never forget...

JR: And I always remember my mother used to say, "It hurts them just like it hurts you." So my mother was, never taught us—

LA: That's right, that's right. We never had, see, my parents either, they never had anything against the black people. Because see, my mother came from Spain, but my father came from Cuba. He was French and Cuban, but he came from Cuba and they mixed over there. In Cuba, they mixed. You know, so he didn't know that when he came here that he wasn't supposed to do this.

JR: Well really, I would say the Latin people weren't the ones who, you know what's considered a cracker, what we always call a cracker, well, like, the American people...

LA: Rednecks, like rednecks...

JR: The rednecks, they were always the ones, the Ku Klux Klan, and

they're the ones that were all. And now what do you see, all the cracker girls, with the black boys, but they were always the ones that...

LA: Which is fine if that's what they wanted, you know, cause they used discriminate like she's trying to say. They used to discriminate against us and they're the ones mixing them more. You know what I'm saying.

JR: Because even with the Latin people. The crackers used to always say that we're all Cuban niggers.

LA: Uh Huh, they used to call us Cuban niggers, because of color.

JR: Like, when my husband was young, he used to go to Sulfur Springs. At that time they had dances there, and all these cracker girls used to like the Lat—to dance with the Latin boys. And there, they'd start a fight already because the cracker boys would be upset.

LA: Oh yeah, all the time.

JR: I t was terrible, but—

LA: My mother raised me, my mother raised me, my cousin and I both. And my cousin used to say that the Latin teens and they used to go to Sulfur Springs and get into fights. And they but, "Don't go there anymore they don't want you there," he'd say, "I don't care, the girls will bring me back."

JR: The, the, when we were young, the discrimination was terrible as far as the water fountain past white and color. And a lot of them weren't allowed to even go, if you were walking down the sidewalk they would just have to...go on the street. It was, it was bad, but that's why we always say I can see why they are like they

are because of the way they were treated.

LA: Have you heard about the sit-down? I don't know if you heard it or not. The sit-down they had at downtown? I think it was...where?

JR: In Woolworth's.

LA: Woolworth's that's right, near Woolworth's, they sat down, the blacks, sat down because they were protesting at one of these places because they wanted to eat just like everybody else. Have you heard about that?

TW: Mmm mm [no]

LA: That was really something. You know that I was there, at Woolworth's. I was eating. And these blacks sat down, you know to eat, they wanted to eat...And they wouldn't serve 'em. They said, "You can buy it and go eat over there. " Just like that. And I said, "Why? If you sell them the lunch then they should be able to eat it here because the money they make is just as good as any body else." So they could buy it, give them the money for the food because they had to stand in the front for (), right? But not there, oh. I never forget that.

JR: It was terrible.

LA: Yeah, very bad.

TW: Now, like, earlier you were talking about going to, like, Sulphur Springs. How was transportation then? Was there, like, basically a lot of public transportation?

LA: How were we...?

JR: somebody, like one of the boys had a car

LA: Yeah, but because I really don't remember. See, I remember, but I was just a young teenager, you know. At that time, I didn't, I never went to (). It was mostly the girls from, the girls from Sulphur Springs used to dance with the Latin boys, you know, but we didn't go. Just the boys....

JR: It was more like what they used to call in those days a juke joint

LA: Uh huh, like a juke joint.

JR: Ever heard of a juke joint?

TW: Uh huh. I've heard of a juke joint.

JR: Oh lord.

TW: Um, okay, dating back (), dating back, um, towards World War II, did you get more information from, um, I guess around the city or community or more from your relatives or your parents, or whoever you were staying with at the time?

JR: Probably from newspapers or the radio--

LA: That's what I think.

JR: --cause we had radios ...

LA: and the radios and telev.....

JR: -- and the radio...

LA: and the newspapers...

JR: no tv of course....

LA: radio and newspapers, that 's where we got the information. We never had the straight information, just what they wanted us to know.

JR: Yeah.

LA: Like, if they killed a hundred boys they didn't care. They'd take like twenty of them out.

JR: ()

LA: They didn't tell us the truth () I mean

JR: No

LA: ().

JR: And they didn't let the boys either, that were over there, they didn't let them write. You know, they sent them their letters.

LA: Yeah, they sent them and ()

JR: They couldn't send information of where they were or what they were doing or what was going on.

LA: (). () didn't care what was going on. They sure did, censor.

TW: All the things that were coming from overseas?

LA: and JR: Yes

LA: Yeah, whenever they wrote the letters home? They had to go to the different person that read it and then they'd stamp it with a big stamp. If there was something, information about the war or what they were doing or whatever, they, they wouldn't let 'em, go. They, they...

JR: They'd black it out.

LA: They'd black it out.

TW: Okay.

LA: That's interesting, isn't it?

JR: Yeah, yeah I never knew anything like that.

LA: Yeah. I hope you never have to go through it.

TW: Hmm??

LA: I hope you never have to go through it. [laugh]

TW: () read a book, last year and this year. I even went to, uh, I went to the Holocaust Museum. We, and actually, out of the group of kids, like, seven or eight kids, that's doing this with my school. I'm not sure about the other schools, but with my school, are the same kids that went on the fieldtrip to the Holocaust Museum in St. Pete.

LA: mmm hmm.

TW: Where we went and, like, there were a couple of survivors, and Jewish survivors and things from there and, like, we talked to them and they were telling about the concentration camps and stuff.

LA: Oh.

TW: and showed pictures and everything so, like, ()

JR: That is terrible. That is terrible.

LA: See, now they want to say that like it didn't really happen.

JR: Oh yeah, sure it did.

LA: Sure it happened.

JR: It had to be so, especially their kids, you know, anything like that with your kids and all.

LA: Mmmm. We didn't have to go through that.

JR: No ()

LA: But those poor Jewish people.

JR: We had it good.

TW: Well, compared to that, the things that you went through wasn't good.

JR: We went through but we can't say we had any suffering like that.

LA: Oh no.

TW: Okay, then, I think that just about wraps it up.

JR: Oh, well that's good.

LA: I hope you've had some information.

TW: Oh, yes. Yes, I really did.

JR: We had, I was trying to find, cause I was telling her that I had, my mother had her, we used to have a ration, we had this little book that had little, all little coupons in it and we could just use so many. Cause you can't find, couldn't get sugar, you couldn't get ()

LA: All different kinds. You couldn't get meat. You couldn't get gasoline.

JR: All kinds of (). Yeah, yeah.

LA: See, with the little () I had, () little stamps (). Red one was for the meat. I don't remember the others.

JR: The blue.

LA: If you run out of those little stickers you could not buy meat. See, they each have a, every month they'd issue....

JR: Everything was rationed.

LA: If you used it up, the meat, before the end of the month and you would not get any more meat until, unless you knew somebody who could sell it to you on the black market. The black market. You ever heard of the black market?

TW: Mmm.

LA: Yeah. ()

JR: And the sugar was what...()

LA: Oh yes. You know, one time my cousins, the oil was rationed, remember? So, one time he bought blue oil, my cousin, his wife, my cousin says, "I'm not cookin' with that, the eggs turn blue.." [laugh] Poor thing, he couldn't get any other. "That's all they sold me, the blue..." I don't know, I don't know what the blue meant. I don't know about. We didn't eat the blue, 'cause it was blue like your shirt.

JR: Un uh [no]

LA: () cigarette. I didn't smoke but I knew people who smoked. They bought 'em on the black market.

JR: ...black market. Well, people who smoke used to go and buy two cigarettes. Well, one cigarette and nobody had money --

LA: yeah...

JR: -- to buy a whole pack.

LA: And you know what? Whenever somebody found that, because my husband used to smoke, Chesterfields. You remember Chesterfields? He smoked the Chesterfields. So, whenever somebody got a box of Chesterfields, where they got 'em, I don't know, but they can, he'd sell 'em like that. They'd say, "I got

Chesterfields. You wanna buy 'em?" And you'd see a group of men there trying to buy it.

JR: Yeah, my husband smoked Chesterfields..

LA: Chesterfields, they were very popular. Especially when my husband was here.

JR: Well, in those days they had no filters.. were just regular, and we were all just about that big. Yeah.

LA: That's interesting about that rations, food rations?

JR: Yeah. I had had, my mother had, uh, my father's her, so everybody had one. And, I think I gave it to my daughter and I forgot because I wanted to get them to show them to you.

LA: Yeah. She had mentioned it. Told her to bring it. What's your name, I can't remember

TW: Uh, Taurean.

LA: Yeah, Taurean. And I said, "Bring them so he can see them." That would've been nice, huh? To see them.

TW: Is that, do they just issue that to every family or just people that were working?

LA: No.

JR: Every person.

LA: That's the only way you could buy anything with those tickets. If you don't have those tickets, they wouldn't sell you... Gasoline, too, was rationed. Gasoline was rationed. Everything. Not the milk, but the cigarettes, oil, meat, what else?

JR: Oh, you didn't have, you needed a coupon even for canned goods.

LA: I don't remember that.

JR: Yeah.

LA: I don't remember that. I remember the meat and--

JR: Yeah

LA: All, gasoline.

JR: Yeah, everything was rationed.

LA: Well, I'll be darned. I don't remember that.

JR: I can remember so many times. You remember the city market that was in downtown?

LA: Yeah, I sure do.

JR: Cause my mother used to love coffee. She, she--

LA: Coffee, coffee got rationed too. Coffee.

JR: But, she used the sugar, too, she needed was, they had evaporated milk, not evaporated milk, condensed milk, which is sweet.

LA: Yeah.

JR: Oh, and she'd send us downtown to get her--

LA: I remember the city market.

JR: --the condensed milk.

LA: I remember the city market but I don't remember the cans being rationed out.

JR: Yes it was.

LA: ...because everything was going to the war effort so they, the, they did that so the soldiers could have more, you know.

TW: () you mentioned city market, where was that? Was that, like, downtown?

LA: That was downtown.

JR: Yeah, downtown down there. It was on Tampa Street.

LA: Tampa Street.

JR: That was, in those days we didn't have all these, these...

LA: Yeah, supermarkets.

JR: These supermarkets. That, that city market was, uh, it was the big thing.

LA: It was like a supermarket but just that one. They didn't have supermarkets everywhere. You know, they had little Spanish stores in Ybor City.

JR: Yeah.

LA: But like the quote "Supermarket," that's the only one. So everybody went to that: city market. That's what they used to call it.

JR: Yeah.

LA: City Market.

JR: I can always remember, my mother saw in the paper that they had a leg of lamb. Ahh...

LA: [laugh] Everybody wants a leg of lamb. That's interesting, isn't it? I laugh about it, but it was very sad.

JR: Yeah...but they were old days. I think people were closer...

LA: yeah...

JR: ...family was closer....

LA:they helped each other. Sometimes, my mother would have to borrow somebody's ration tickets and other people would have to borrow from her--

JR: Yeah

LA: --and then they pay each other back. They were so good. That's an experience in itself, isn't it?

JR: Well, when you just stop to think I'm living on four dollars a week, what the hell would you do now? [laugh] With that seven dollars a week? But you can go to the grocery store with three dollars and get a bag.

LA: This guy used to say, "I'm getting stronger today. I used to go to the store and buy three dollars worth of groceries and I couldn't carry it home and now I can carry it home."

JR: Five pound of potatoes was like a nickel or a dime and sugar, five pounds of sugar, was a nickel or a dime.

TW: Well, prices here have sure gone up because of inflation.

LA: Yeah, right. Okay.

TW: Alright, thanks. So are both of you going to be on the 30th at Blake?

LA: Mmm hmm

TW: Okay. Um,

LA: Will, will we see you there?

TW: Yeah, I'll be there. I think it's, is it three? I don't know. I have the paper at home.

LA: I don't know. What time is it, I forgot.

JR: I don't know. I wrote it down and I don't remember.

LA: At three o'clock, I think.

TW: Yeah, I do, it was three. I think it was three. I have the paper at home.

LA: Yeah, I have it too.

TW: Well, thanks a lot. I really appreciate it.

LA: Uh huh. Alright. We were glad to ...

JR: So then we'll see you over there.

TW: Yes, ma'am.

JR: So then, what do we do? Wait a minute, you got to sign this..

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[END OF INTERVIEW]