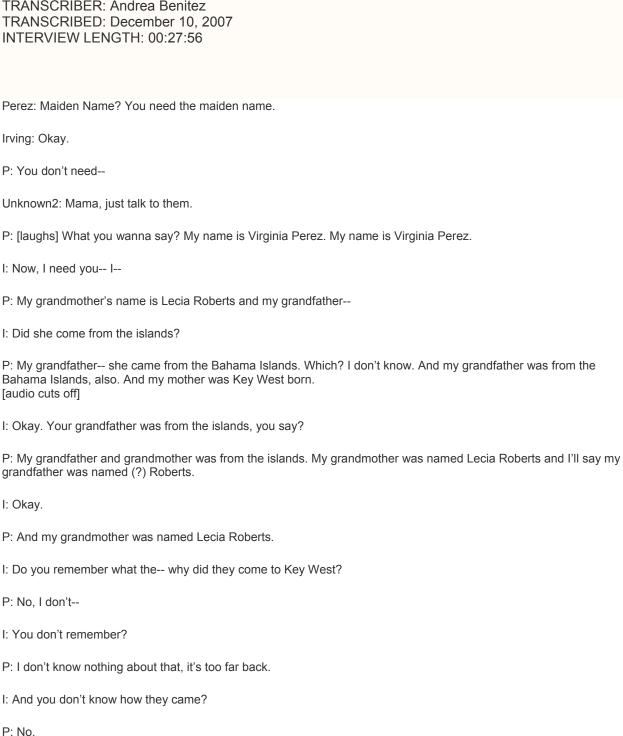
Title: Key West Oral History Interview with Virginia Perez

INTERVIEWEE: Virginia Perez INTERVIEWER: Virginia Irving TRANSCRIBER: Andrea Benitez

I: Do you know anything else about --?



- P: I know his-- the brother's name- he was also over here- (?) Roberts.

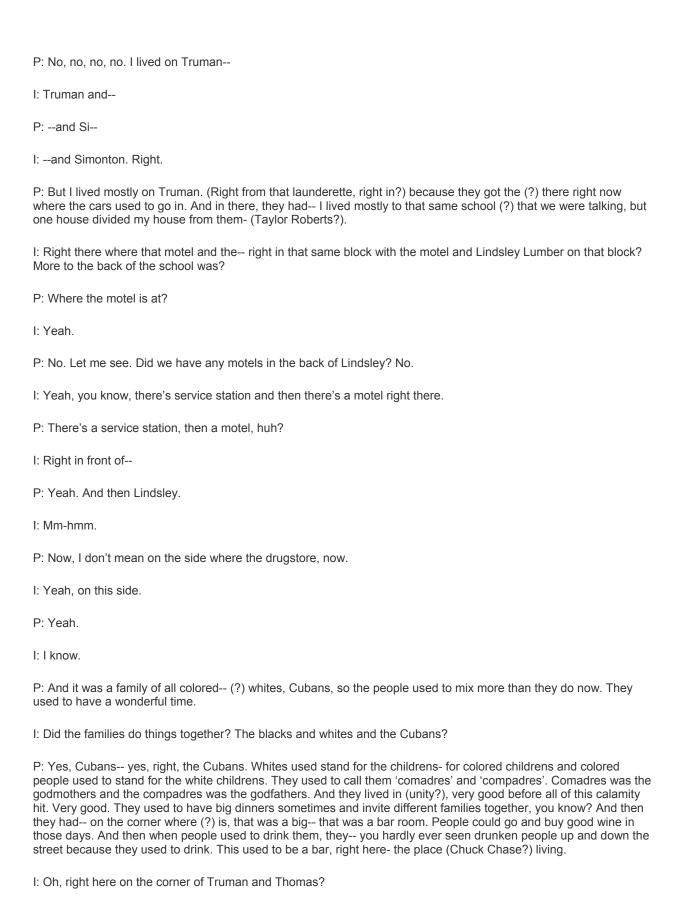
 I: Mm-hmm.

 P: And he had a sister, her name was Carolina (?). She was-- she died on Thomas Street. That's um-- (?) great-grandmother. But my father's from Spain. What else you wanna know?
- I: Well, I wanna know when your grandparents came to Key West, then, did they bring your moth-- was your mother born here or was she born over there?
- P: Can't tell you nothing about it. Maybe I could tell you more about it if I see Lecia. See, I could-- 'cause she-- see, she's the oldest child. She's eighty-nine.
- I: Well, maybe I could talk to her, too.
- P: Yeah. She eighty-nine and I don't remember.
- I: So how far back do you remember? When you were how old?
- P: How far back I remember and how old I was? I remember when I was six years old. I was (?) alley right here in back in the lighthouse.
- I: What's the name of the alley? Terry Lane?
- P: Terry Lane. And I remember that my sister- (?) Perez- she was the queen of Zion Church. No, she was the queen of the (next under the queen- third queen?). But then she beat the queen and then they didn't have no more queen for many a years.
- I: Well, why?
- P: Because she would out-dress the queen. (My aunt went to the limit?). She put the very best she wore. I'll never forget, I wore the dress out. (And if she wore?) the Chinese silk (?).
- I: Did she make it?
- P: She had it made. I think it was made by some white people. And after that, they didn't have no more and they used have-- they had a picnic right out there by the (?), that was a picnic ground out there.
- I: She picnicked on Flagler?
- P: Yes. You know where they had that bar across the street?
- I: Mm-hmm, the--
- P: Yeah, my mother was (living?) (?) then. She-- they prepared for picnic then two and three days cooking. Two and three days cooking and preparing meals, you know, and they had a wonderful good time.
- I: Well, what was the picnic for?
- P: Just picnics. They had (parties?) like people have picnics now-church picnic.
- I: Did you go to church regularly?
- P: Every Sunday.

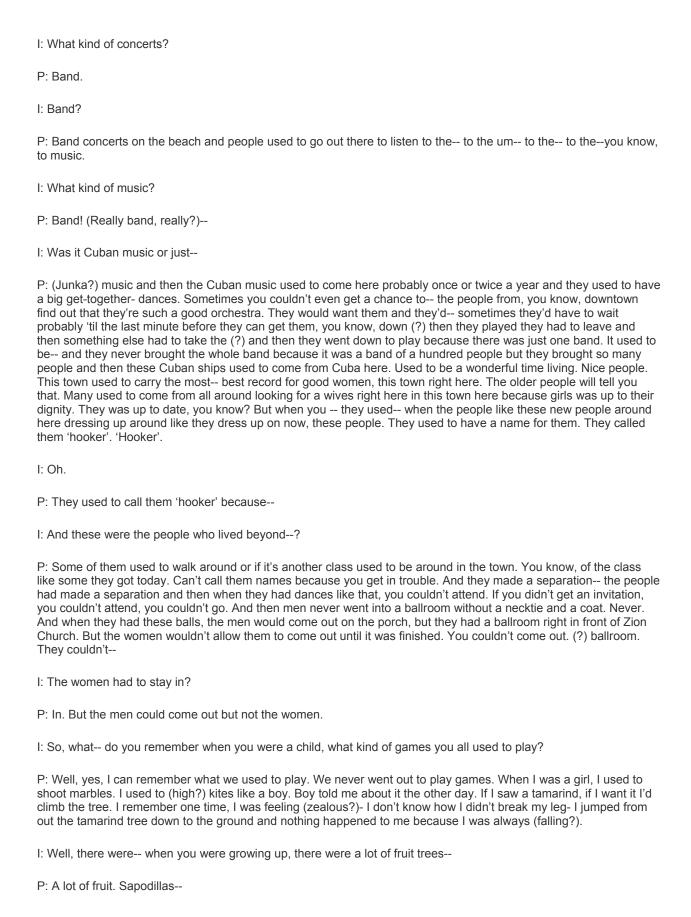
I: Okay.
P: Every Sunday. My mother sent us to church every Sunday. (I went attend?) to convent school. I went to convent school, me and my sister both. And I remember one time they had a terrible storm here and they put the school high up off the ground, see?
I: Where was the school?
P: Right where it is right now where they tore down. See the one they tore down? The old school, not the boy's school. One behind this place where they vote. You know where they vote on Duval Street?
I: Oh, yeah.
P: There was the school behind that. But it was high up off the ground.
I: Was that a big wooden building?
P: Yeah.
I: Yeah, I remember.
P: And big two-story building. You remember that?
I: Mm-hmm.
P: And then they had some kind of bad storm here and they had a storm here and we had cows they used to drive cows here every Tuesday, every Wednesday, and Thurs Friday. So
I: Drive cows with what? What do you mean?
P: They had a slaughterhouse on the beach.
I: Oh, okay.
P: They had a slaughterhouse.
I: What beach?
P: Monroe Beach.
I: Okay. I have to ask you these questions
P: Yeah, I mean, they had a slaughter uh, yeah, a slaughterhouse. Mr. (?) he used to be the man that killed the cows and we had a meat market there over this (town?). We ate fresh meat, we didn't eat no injected meat when I was a kid. We ate fresh meat. Fresh meat. And every four o'clock in the afternoon, that's when the meat came into the market and we had to go on you know, we used to go and get the
I: And buy it.
P: And buy it.
I: Buy what you want?
P: Buy what you want. Anything you want. They used to hang it up, hang it up in the market

I: Do you know where the market was? Do you remember? P: Yeah, right out here in front of the-- right here in front of-- his name was-- well, I don't remember his title. He was a Cuban man. My mother used to deal with him and he-- right here in front of the Van Dyke. I: Oh, on Whitehead Street. P: Whitehead Street. Then we had one right here on-- next-- by the Cuban Club. Then we had one downtown though-- but I think the Lumley Market, that came afterward- you know, after I was born. I remember that in childhood. Then we had one right there-- you know where the-- you know where they had the (restaurant?) on Truman Avenue? Truman Avenue? I: Yeah and Simonton? P: Right off from (?). I: Mm-hmm. P: Well, that was the meat market. Right there, that was the big meat market. I: Then everyday people would go--? P: Everyday get fresh meat. Everyday, fresh meat. I know when stew meat was fifteen cents a pound. I: Mm-hmm. P: Yes. That's true. Fresh meat killed from the market 'cause they used to bring the cows-- I don't know where they used to bring them from but they used to bring over here, you know? And they bring here into town and this man named (Sheeley?), he used to-- his daughter, she's about the only one living now. She's-- that's her daughter-- his daughter and he had a son (?), he was named after his daddy and he died and his daddy died. I: Do you know if they used to bring this cattle in by boat or by land or what? P: Yeah, by boat. I: By boat? P: Mm-hmm. They used to bring them in by boat- on a ferry. My mama-- I could always remember that I got the worst whipping once. (?) looking at them (first?) cattle. Got up early before anybody got up. (?)--I: Do you remember how old you were? P: Oh, I was about eleven, I guess, something like eleven years old. A child. I: Yeah. P: About eleven years old. I wanted to see (?). (?). I: Where did you live when you--? P: Right down (?).

I: You lived on Whitehead Street?







I: --the people that you go in their yards and get them?

P: Well, sometimes they give you permission to go in, sometimes they didn't. But (Mrs. Eden-- Mr. Eden?), he looked like Santa Claus. He was a white man with plenty of beard like these people used in the old days down here. Even Mr. Prichard that used to collect the rent- (ground rent?)- for the Prichard Square. He wore a beard, you know. And I used to be scared of him (?). And this was a wonderful town; a very clean, wonderful town to live in. And then there was another bar- (?)'s bar- right on Petronia Street. He used to bring his merchandise from the warehouse-- they used these great big strapping horses. They pulled these big wagons that he bring this--

I: What did he have on the wagon?

P: He'd bring his beers and stuff like that.

I: Oh. Liquor and stuff like that.

P: Yeah. And he would (?) and they--

I: He would bring it on a wagon?

P: Yeah, he bring it from-- he buy it on the wagon, see? He furnish his own transportation, this man here because my son-in-law used to work for him and he used to tend to his horses. And that's why my husband sent him back to Cuba because he used to take the horses out swimming, take them so far out because somebody told him one day that he better, you know, stop him because if he didn't he would drown them. And he sent him back to his country (for a month?). But this was a wonderful town, a clean town. You could have (?) and Duval Street, on holidays, it was a pleasure for people to go shopping. People-- when it's Christmas time, people used to be cooking for weeks.

I: What kind of things did they cook?

P: Oh, like they cook now and tasty-- not like they cook now because the people don't cook like then, they don't take no time. They cooked baked chickens and stuffing and baked turkey and the best of cakes. Some of everything, they just cooked. And everybody goes and they used to have here like they call masquerade. They would go around five or six wagons, you know, masquerades, dressed up like these people dressed up now but more specially better in all kinds of colors and these great big hats like the old country (?), you know, these old (tall things?). And they go from corner to corner. We wasn't allowed to go too far- couple of corners and then you had to go back home. And they go all around from house to house and house to house. They had Christmas--

I: But what would you do when you went from house to house?

P: Oh, the men, see, not children.

I: Oh, and what were they doing, though?

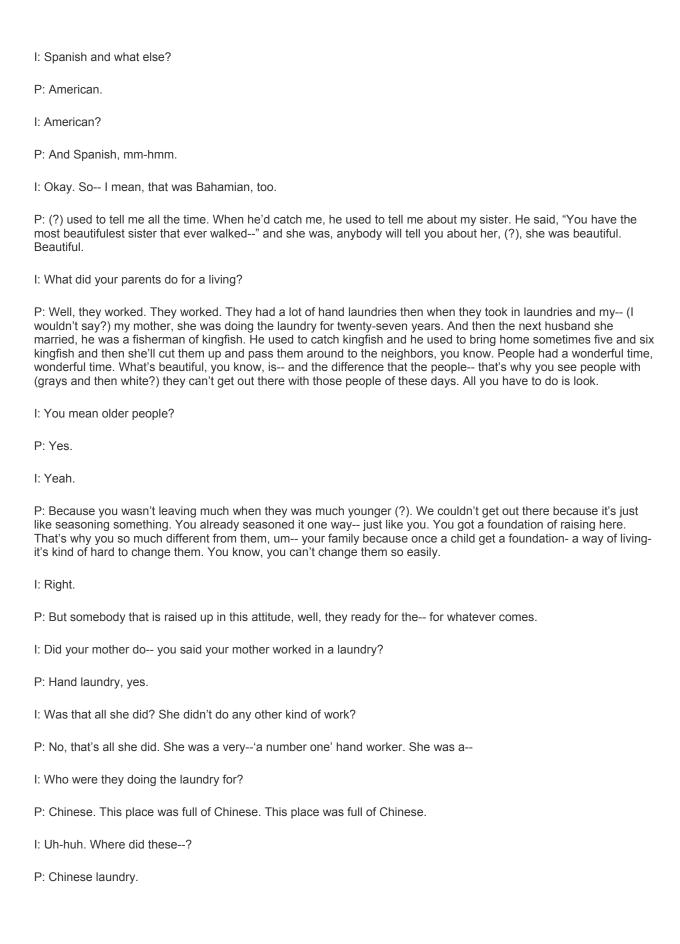
P: They go and drink and eat from house to house and have parties and dance and whatnot--

I: And the children would follow behind them?

P: Some of them was allowed to but some couldn't 'cause the parents wouldn't let them. And they would get on the corners and play the music and pick the guitars and play the music and when they get tired, they get up and they go again for many blocks and they kept that up. I'll say, Christmas wasn't one day. Sometimes, it'd go over a week. They were (keeping?) Christmas after Christmas, because the people really had a good time. (Really?) had a very good time. The people now, if they would take time to enjoy themselves like the people in the days back, it wouldn't be-the people wouldn't be so badly confused because they'll have something to occupy their mind. I could tell you that another kind of the people get-- you know, get-- you know, get-- I'll have to tell you that afterwards. They had parties everyday- another kind. They could have parties. They enjoyed themselves. They used to have parties for weeks. Among their friends (?). And I mean-- but they enjoyed themselves and, you know, there used to be couples that they enjoyed themselves. And the people used really have-- the people used to raise their own hogs here when I was a girl until the law came by and they stopped them. They raised their own hogs, they raised their own chickens and

then when this neighbor kill the hogs, they would give the next neighbor and then the other. One killed, they'll always share. That's the way how the people lived here; they used to share with one another. They wasn't, you know, selfish. They used to share with one another.

- I: How was it with raising children here a long time ago?
- P: Oh, the childrens had to listen. They got (something?) on they self if they didn't listen--
- I: They had to listen to who?
- P: To the parents. They wasn't allowed to go out of the yard. I only went out once a week when we bought our-- went to buy groceries or went to buy something on Duval Street (and after that?) was Christmas. Then they had the carnival come here. Some people-- I mean, you know, straight people, they were there everyday but certain families-- and this town was (honored?) for the beautiful of women and men that you could ever (clap?) your eye upon because they were mixed Spanish and Cuban.
- I: Why didn't the parents let the children go out? Why did--?
- P: Because they told us that they (protecting them?) from the dangers, from the danger of life. They tried to make them to be good men and women. You know, some of them was unruly but, you know, that's been happening since the beginning of the world but when childrens got unruly and girls got unruly, well, they had to classify that the girls that was in their (rank?). And if a girl was keeping company with her friends and if she happened to get married, well they'd speak with one another but they kept no more company. They had to divide them up. They didn't visit no more one another, they couldn't be together no more. That's the way it was in my time. They had to separate. A girl had to-
- I: Who had to separate?
- P: Why, their parents wouldn't allow them to keep company anymore with a married girl.
- I: Oh.
- P: They asked that once they got married, they had to look for the married company to be with; no more single girls, see? They had to get out of that life. You know, they didn't dislike them and they'd talk some and whatnot but they wouldn't have nothing to conversate about 'cause they felt like they didn't have nothing in common, they didn't have (?).
- I: You were saying that Key West had some of the-- you mean the colored people that were some of the beautiful--
- P: Yes, the most-- Key West had the most beautiful women that anybody want to (clap?) their eyes upon. You know, and I would include myself but you know how people is. [laughs] But I knew it was told-- it was told to me and my sister. And my sister--
- I: That you all were beautiful?
- P: My sister was the most beautifulest girl- anybody could tell you- that ever walked on the face of Key West.
- I: She was a mix of what?
- P: Same thing I am.
- I: What?
- P: Spanish.



- I: Oh, the Chinese people were here, so they-- what were they doing in Key West?
- P: They were doing laundry for the city. This place had factories- cigar-maker factories. The cigar-makers used to come from Cuba from Tampa or any place. When they had a strike in Cuba, they used to come here. When they had a strike here, they used to go to Tampa.
- I: Oh, okay, they went back and forth--?
- P: Yes, when they had a strike, see? And then after, the people that's smart enough to know how to make cigars with a machine, then that cut the hand-makers out. Your granddaddy was a first-class cigar-maker. He was a very good cigar-maker, first-class. He worked in the (?) out here where they have the (?)? That was a--
- I: On Simonton? Right there on Simonton?
- P: Yeah, about, not far. Then (?) halfway out on the highway, that was a factory. This restaurant they got for the children now for school, that's there they-- that's where they-- the cigar-makers used to eat breakfast there, those that didn't want to-- (?) canteen because they used to send canteens out there for the (?) to carry the canteen. The (?) every morning, seven days a week, and they used to pay them.
- I: You said there were Chinese workers here?
- P: Oh, yeah.
- I: What did they do?
- P: Right here in this house. The Chinese laundry.
- I: Oh, the Chinese came here to do the laundry.
- P: Yeah, they took in laundry to make money.
- I: And they would do the laundry for what people?
- P: People and hire colored help- ironers and colored washers.
- I: What would happen to these Chinese people?
- P: Well, after business wore out, they scattered like everything else. People follow the business, you know, and follow their living.
- I: Were they here like around maybe the time the when railroad was being built?
- P: Well, they were (slacking?) out.
- I: At that time?
- P: Yeah, they (slacking?) at that time, yes. That's how some million-- oh, I can't (think of it?) anymore.
- I: Are you tired? You want to stop?
- P: Well, I mean, I'll tell you after because you're taking a record-- you're recording. And all my--
- I: Any other kind-- any other different people? You named Chinese here in Key West?

P: Yeah, they used to have-- the Irishmen used to come here a lot. They used to come here-- for what reason? I don't know. But they used to come here. The Irishmen- they was very white in their face, looked like the blood was ready to come out. The blood was always to the surface of the skin. All nationalities from (?)-- the boats used to run from New York, from (?), Cuba, all over the world, the boats used to come in here. (?) port and this used to be a big Navy yard, you know? Big business there in the Navy yard, people from all over the world. A lot of Key West girls got married to a lot of servicemen and they, you know, took them to different parts of the world. And this used to be a wonderful place, this place. This place is nothing like it used to be. This used to be a good, God-blessing place here, this place.

I: Everybody you say got along?

P: They got along. Now, everybody gonna have ups and downs. They had quarrels and the bad class people, they had fights (?) good class ones, too, but I mean, you didn't see it everyday, you know, like they do now. People used to drink like they do now but seems like knew how to drink because they used to have it to their house everyday and when they have-- they used a lot of table wine.

I: Mm-hmm.

P: See? (?). Maybe somebody can give you a longer story than me-[audio cuts off]

END OF INTERVIEW