

Interviewee: Elisa Chovel
Interviewer: Miguel Gonzalez-Pando
Date: March 1997
FIU Number: 521

EC=Elisa Chovel

MGP= Miguel Gonzalez-Pando

[Scene 1, start at 1:44]

EC= Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children we were tossed across the sea and we tried to create roots anywhere we were landed. When we first bought this home for you children, a friend gave me this bromeliad, which had a lot of meaning to me and I never realized that it was going to multiply as it has. It's like the children of Pedro Pan, we landed in a foreign coast country and we created our roots by having our families and lives here.

[Scene 1, take 2 start at 3:00]

EC= Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the sea and we tried to grow our roots wherever we landed. When we first bought our home, a dear friend gave me an air plant, which was very meaningful to me because of the "semejanza" to the Pedro Pan. I did not realize that it was going to multiply that little plant it was going to multiply as it has. It's just like the story of the children of Pedro Pan that we tried to grow our roots by multiplying, having our careers in our host country.

[Scene 1, take 3 start at 3:59]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the ocean and we tried to grow roots wherever we landed. When I first bought our home, a dear friend gave me a bromeliad, which was very meaningful to me because of the similarity in being tossed; and I did not know that it was going to multiply as it has. Just like the children of Pedro Pan that they created their roots by having their families and establishing their careers in the host country where we landed.

[4:44, break in recording]

[Scene 1, Take 4, start at 5:09]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it is to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the ocean and we tried to grow roots wherever we landed.

[Scene 1, Take 5, start at 5:24]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the sea and we tried to create roots everywhere that we landed. When we first bought this home, a dear friend gave me a bromeliad, which was very meaningful to me and I did not know at the time that it was going to multiply as it has. The same thing happened with each child of Pedro Pan, we created our roots by establishing our families and careers in our host country.

Interviewee: Elisa Chovel
Interviewer: Miguel Gonzalez-Pando
Date: March 1997
FIU Number: 521

[6:06, Telephone rings. Comments in Spanish]

[Scene 1, Take 6, start at 6:11]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the sea and we tried to create roots wherever we landed. When we first bought our home, a dear friend gave me a bromeliad as a gift, which was very meaningful to me and I did not know that it would multiply as it has. From one little one we now have the tree full. That is exactly what the Pedro Pans did. Wherever we landed we multiplied, we had our families and established our careers. We took roots in our host country.

[Scene 1, Take 7, start at 7:15]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the sea and we landed. When we first bought this home, a dear friend gave me an air plant bromeliad, which was very meaningful to me. I did not realized that from one that little plant we were going to have a tree full of them. And that is exactly what happened to the Pedro Pans. Everywhere we landed we multiplied by having our families and creating our careers.

[Scene 1, Take 8, start at 8:10]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed

[Scene 1, Take 9, start at 8:28]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the sea and we tried to create our roots wherever we landed. When we first bought our home in Coral Gables, a friend gave me one air plant, one bromeliad, which now covers the entire tree. This is the similarity with Pedro Pans that whatever we landed we created our roots by having families and careers.

[Scene 1, Take 10, start at 9:30]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the sea and we tried to have our roots whenever and wherever we landed. When we first bought our home in Coral Gables, a dear friend gave me one bromeliad, which multiplied and now it covers our tree.

[Scene 1, take 11, start at 10:04]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the sea and we tried to create our roots wherever we landed. When we first bought our home in Coral Gables for you children, a friend gave me a bromeliad, which was very meaningful to me and I did not realized at that time that from one little plant our tree was going to be covered. And that is what happened with the children of

Interviewee: Elisa Chovel
Interviewer: Miguel Gonzalez-Pando
Date: March 1997
FIU Number: 521

Pedro Pan. We created our roots, we multiplied and we established our careers in our host country.

[Scene 1, Take 12, start at 10:49]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the sea and we tried to create our roots wherever we landed. When we first bought our home in Coral Gables, a friend gave me a bromeliad,

[Scene 1, Take 13, start at 11:20]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the sea and we tried to create our roots wherever we landed.

[Scene 1, Take 14, start at 11:28]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the sea and we tried to create our roots wherever we landed. When we first bought our home in Coral Gables for you children to grow in, a friend gave me a bromeliad air plant. I did not know that from one single plant it would multiply to cover our tree. That's exactly what happened with Pedro Pans, we were tossed and wherever we landed we had our families, we multiplied and we had our careers and that was our way of finding our roots.

[Scene 1, Take 15, start at 12:25]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the sea and we tried to create our roots wherever we landed.

[Scene 1, Take 16, start at 12:40]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the sea

[Scene 1, Take 17, start at 13:10]

EC = Bromeliads, which are air plants, remind me of what it was to be a Pedro Pan. As children, we were tossed across the sea and we tried to create our roots wherever we landed. When we first bought our home in Coral Gables, a dear friend gave me one single bromeliad plant and I did not know at the time that it would multiply to cover practically our tree. That's exactly what the Pedro Pan children did, they landed, they multiplied, they found their careers and that's how they found their roots.

[13:50-14:19, Discussion of scene 2]

[Scene 2, Take 1, start at 14:20]

Interviewee: Elisa Chovel
Interviewer: Miguel Gonzalez-Pando
Date: March 1997
FIU Number: 521

EC = The biggest tragedy of the Cuban exile experience has been the destruction and the breaking out of the family unit. Some of the Pedro Pan children, after forty years, have never been able to see their parents again. I love having a family.

[14:44-14:48 discussion]

[Scene 2, Take 2, start at 15:00]

EC = The biggest tragedy of the Cuban exile experience has been –without a doubt- the breaking out of the family unit. After forty years of exile, some of the Pedro Pan children have never been able to see their parents again. I am one of the lucky and blest ones, I now have all my family together... and, I love having my family.

[Scene 2, Take 3, start at 15:44]

EC = The biggest tragedy of the Cuban exile experience –without a doubt- has been the breaking out of the family unit. After almost forty years of exile, some of the Pedro Pan children have never been able to see their parents again. I am one of the lucky ones that has being blest, and I now have my family together... and, I love having my family together again.

[Scene 2, Take 4, start at 16:31]

EC = The biggest tragedy of the Cuban exile experience –without a doubt- has been the breaking out of the family. After forty years, some of the Pedro Pan children still have not been able to see their parents again and will never see them again. I have been one of the lucky ones and blest, because I have all of you, I have my family together again... and, I love having my family.

[Scene 2, Take 5, start at 17:16]

EC = The biggest tragedy of the Cuban exile -without a doubt

[Scene 2, Take 6, start at 17:29]

EC = The biggest tragedy of the Cuban exile experience –without a doubt- has been the breaking out of the family. After forty years, some of the Pedro Pan children have never and will never see their parents again, I am one of the lucky ones, I am blest. I have all of you together, I have my family... and I love having my family

[Scene 2, Take 7, start at 18:12]

EC = The biggest tragedy of the Cuban exile experience –without a doubt- has been the breaking out of the family unit. After forty years of exile, some of the Pedro Pans will never and have never seen their parents again. I am one of the lucky ones, I have been blest. I have all of you my children and my parents together... and I love having my family.

Interviewee: Elisa Chovel
Interviewer: Miguel Gonzalez-Pando
Date: March 1997
FIU Number: 521

[Scene 2, Take 8, start at 19:00]

EC = The biggest tragedy of the Cuban exile experience –without a doubt- has been the breaking up of the family unit. After forty years of exile, some of the Pedro Pan children have never and will never see their parents again. I am one of the lucky ones, I am blest. I have all of my children and my parents... and I love having my family

[Break to discuss interview setting and process, 19:32-20:00]

[Scene 3, take 1, start at 20:00]

MGP= If we can go back five, ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty years, thirty some years back in time, I want you to remember the little girl, you home, your parents... with all of that to go through your mind at this point in Cuba, and remember the first time someone would say to you something about you coming to the United States. Who told you that? Where were you? OK?

EC= La primera vez...

MGP = No in English

EC = That's right.

[Scene 3, take 1, start at 21:06]

MGP= The first time you heard about it

EC = The first time that I heard that the Cuban youth were being sent to the United States for safety reasons, it was from someone in my own family. My cousin Magaly Mendez who was student at the American Dominican School in Cuba was sent to Washington, DC. The reason why she was sent, it was because my cousin Rudy had been picked up by the Cuban military police. He was seventeen years old and he had distributed some propaganda, anti-Castro propaganda. He gave it to one of his friends from the Marists school in Cuba and because of that reason he was sentenced to seven years in Isle of Pines, where he was very ill-treated and abused. There was just not questioned that we were truly in danger, because he did not committed a crime, je just simply had a pamphlet that was condemning what was happening in Cuba. So, just because he had a difference opinion, it is not that he bombed or he killed anyone or threaten anyone. He was expressing his views. Solely because of that reason, he was sentenced. For a seventeen-year-old person, to be removed from his family and society and put in these incredible conditions, he never really recovered.

Never really recovered.

[Break to fix setting, 23:08-23:32]

Interviewee: Elisa Chovel
Interviewer: Miguel Gonzalez-Pando
Date: March 1997
FIU Number: 521

MGP = Talk to me when you just heard from the first person. Who told you, where were you, that you will be coming, you will be leaving Cuba, you will be sent to the United States alone? Or with your sister?

EC= I think that it was such a massive reaction of fear of the parents that, at one point, I knew that it was going to happen and it was nothing I could do to stop it. I was scared to death to leave my home, because the Cuban family was very old fashion. My family and all of the Cuban families, they cut the umbilical cord when the child is ninety years old, maybe. You know. So, for me to realize that from that type of home environment I was going to be sent to a new world, a different country, was a little bit frightening; and also because I was going to have my sister with me as my responsibility.

MGP = Do you remember the actual moment that your parents told you that you would be sent with your sister to the United States?

EC= I remember that my sister and I had not gone to school for over one entire year because the schools had been confiscated. The private schools had been confiscated, religious or not, they were confiscated. The only thing I was doing is I was studying piano and music. My piano teacher, who was from Spain, told my mother "Elisita is old enough to go to the countryside to alphabetize," and my mother had a sheer panic attack. My mother was born in the Canary Islands in Spain, and she knew what had happened there. So she was terrified and the very next thing I heard is a conversation between my aunt, who was the mother of my cousin who was already in Washington, DC, and her son was in jail, saying to my mother "you have to take Elly and Mary del Carmen away." Because they are going to put her in the countryside to alphabetize. That will be as weird as to saying that you will be to send your child to Mars. Because a Cuban parent will not ever think of having their daughters away from the family unit. You have to protect them until they were married. The boys may have had maybe more freedom, but the girls absolutely not. I knew at that time that there was just absolutely no choice. My parents were not going to allow this teacher to give my name so that I could go out and alphabetize in the countryside because it was rumored that things happen to girls when they were there in the country. That apart from the fact that some brilliant students were being sent to communist countries to study in scholarships. So there was always a danger, because I was also a very good student. There was really no options, because everybody was doing it. It was a massive panic attack that all of the parents had. Some of it was really well founded, because in my family unit, my own cousin had been sent to jail and we were not going to school. Obviously, the school was confiscated, because we were only supposed to learn the Marxist doctrine, or whatever it is that they wanted us to learn, with no options.

MGP = You are giving me a lot of historical background, but I want the reaction of the little girl when she was told; who told you? Your mother, your father? Where were you? Don't dwell on the political and historical process, but your own experience, personal

Interviewee: Elisa Chovel
Interviewer: Miguel Gonzalez-Pando
Date: March 1997
FIU Number: 521

experience. Who told you, finally one day someone must have told you “we are going to send you to the United States;” remember that?

EC = I remember that incident, because my mother had just returned from paying a visit to my cousin in Isle of Pines, Rudy. She was totally heart broken. She had to go on a boat for I do not know how many hours without drinking anything and she was just bringing him food. I remember the conversation when she returned. My mother and my aunt saying, you have to send the girls to safety, because something is going to happen. Elly is very rebellious, or I was very opinionated, I was very concerned and I was outspoken. They were afraid that something was going to happen to me too. My cousin was already in Washington, DC, at a school there and I know that was the moment that my mother decided that she had no recourse, but to send me. I overheard the conversation and I understood, I understood it was my time to go.

MGP = How did you feel?

EC = I felt very sad. I was extremely disappointed at everything that had happened. We had been had one more time. I think that there were a lot of hopes that the country was really going to be democratic and we were sold on the river. Also, I think that there was always the hope of all the parents and all of the children that this was a temporary situation and I know that I was told by my parents that I will be back in no time at all. That we will be back in a few months. It was going to be like maybe going to a summer camp. We left in June and we were so sure that the Americans, our big brothers -the Americans- would not let this happen that I left with the hope and the knowledge in my heart that it was only a short while. I would have never abandoned my country otherwise. I would not.

MGP = Do you remember –and again, do not give me the big picture- I want the personal, because as we weave ten, twenty individual stories the big picture will take shape. You are not speaking on behalf of Operation Pedro Pan, I just want your story. Remember packing, getting ready, going driving to the airport? Take picture of that, how did you feel?

EC = Surprisingly the mail arrived and my uncle who was in Miami had had mailed to my parents the visa waivers that he had gotten at the Catholic Welfare Bureau. So the mail arrives and my mother says Elly we know have the visas, so we started the process of selecting our favorite three dresses, which of course we could not bring, because they would have not been suitable. We only could bring three sets of clothing and that’s it. So, how do you part from everything that you loved and your books, and your dolls and your mementos. Three, only three, sets of underwear, three shoes, three dresses, that was all we could bring. It was an amazing fit that a child at that time would just pick three things of what they like and that was we brought.

I was most sad about leaving my piano, I wonder if I ever would have a piano again or how long would it be before I can come back and play it. That was a day of a shocking nature, because there had been talked and there were so many other people who had gone

Interviewee: Elisa Chovel
Interviewer: Miguel Gonzalez-Pando
Date: March 1997
FIU Number: 521

before, so many kids, but once that visa waiver arrived, I knew it was a point of no returned. That's it, now we go.

It was a happy and sad day. I was happy to be out of danger and maybe see my cousin. I did not know I was not going to see her again for many years. They never sent us to where she was. It was sad, because I knew that it was impending, that departing was impending. It was going to happen. It was not in the future, it was going to be now.

MGP = Your father, did he talk to you about, did he tell you what to expect; why? And I am telling you your father because he is the one who I am going to interview. I would like be able to talk back and forth

EC = My father was very quiet about the all thing. I think he was trying to conceal his feelings, because he was a macho-man Cuban man and he could not show how sad he was going to be that we were not going to be there. At the same time, he did not want me to be in danger, or my younger sister to be in danger, so he also had no choice.

MGP = Did he ever talk to you about it to you or your sister, what was going to happen?

EC = They both, my mother and my father, just told us that it was a temporary separation, that we would be coming back very soon, shortly, in weeks or months. Because the situation in Cuba was going to change. Fidel Castro was not going to be there and it would not happened, because after all we lived only 90 miles away from the United States. Therefore, there would never be a communist regime in Cuba, so this was only temporary, like everything in Cuba it changes. It was going to happen and it was better that we were not be there to suffer any of the consequences of what was impending.

MGP = Do you remember the day you left?

EC = Yes, I remember the day I left.

MGP = Tell me, take me through that day.

EC = Well

MGP = You know as detailed as you can. You know that last day in Cuba.

EC = The last day in Cuba... I and my sister got up very early, our bags were packed since the night before, since it was so small. I remember sewing a little ring into the hem of one of my dresses, because I wanted to keep it. I had had it since I was eleven years old. It was a tiny little ring, but it meant a lot to me. The first sad thing that happened is that my father would not come with us to the airport, he was so broken up, that he could not hold himself to accompany us to the airport. So my mother took us with the chauffer to Rancho Boyeros. When we got near to the airport, my mother had the driver stopped and she said I had this red umbrella and I am not going to go to the airport with you, but when you are in the plane look out for the red umbrella, because that is my way of saying good

Interviewee: Elisa Chovel
Interviewer: Miguel Gonzalez-Pando
Date: March 1997
FIU Number: 521

bye to you girls. So, first my father left/said good bye to us at home, then my mother without telling me first says good bye to us on the road on the way to the airport. She also told me, now you have to be your sister's mother, because she is the younger one and she won't have me. You now have to take care of your sister. I went into the airport with my sister trying to not cry. I did, I did not cry. It was a protective sense that I had that I had to hold myself upright, so my sister would not suffer and the militiamen would not know how really heartless and scare I was. We were there for hours, they did take our bags away, luckily they did not see my little ring. I remember going into the airplane and finally feeling safer, because we had finally gotten into the plane. Then decided which side of the plane we were going to sit in. The steward decided to sit us on the left side. The plane takes off and we were looking out the window desperately for this red umbrella. My mother was on the wrong side of the road, so I never saw her. My mother – clearly- the first time we spoke and the first letter, her question was “Are you alright?, did you see my umbrella?.” Miguel it was the first time I lied to my mother, I said yes, I saw the umbrella. It was a series of white lies, I would never tell my mother exactly how we felt or what was happening with us, so that she would not suffer.

MGP = The plane takes off, what were your feelings at that moment?

Now you are telling me your story, before you were advocating for Operation Pedro Pan

EC = Once the plane was airborne, I realized that I was on my own, and not only was I on my own, but I had my little sister –who was twelve- who was looking up to me to be her everything. I had to become stronger, totally stronger. At the same time I took over the role of the mother, the protector, the know-it-all, and the not showing her how frighten I was. My sister said, “who is going to be waiting for us there, is that George really going to be there,” and I said “of course, George is going to be there.” George was the code word that we would say at the airport. Someone was supposed to come from Catholic Charities and ask “are you waiting for George?” and we would say yes, we are waiting for George; and that meant that we wanted to go to the camps. Little that I know that George was a real person that was the actual name of George Guarch, who came to pick us up.

MGP = Who would pick you up?

EC = George Guarch. He was an employee, a Cuban employee of Catholic Welfare.

MGP = Take me through the steps, the plane land. The next couple of hours, what happened?

EC = When we arrived, I was sort of like a dream state. Expecting to see who was the person who was going to pick us up. I remember an American man looking to us and he saw that I was in need. He said, do you need anything? And I said, yes I need a dime to call my aunt. That was the first time in my life that I beg for something. He gave me a dime and with that dime I went to a public telephone and I called my aunt. The mother of my cousin Rudy, who was in Isle of Pines. She was in Miami and I was calling her to let her know that we had arrived to the airport. To me that was so kind, I think always someone

Interviewee: Elisa Chovel
Interviewer: Miguel Gonzalez-Pando
Date: March 1997
FIU Number: 521

come along when you are in need. This man out of the clear blue-sky came and asked me if there is something I need and I said, yes I need a dime. That was a fit that I finally could make the phone call. They took us into the immigration part of the airport where an employee of Catholic Welfare Bureau asked “Are you waiting for George? Are you coming to the camps?” and I said Oh, Aleluya, Aleluya... here is the magic code word. They took us with another six or seven children that were in the plane with us into this little bus. They started stopping at different camps where the children were drop off. It was pretty scary because it was already dark. We drove to Kendall, then we drove to Matecumbe. Matecumbe was so dark and it was so full of trees. I was scare to death, my sister and I were holding hands. Luckily only the boys got off there. The last stop was Florida City and that was where my sister and I disembarked.

MGP = Who greeted you there? Your first meal? Keep taking me there through everything that happened.

EC = You know that actually a lot of little details I have blanks for most of my life. I remember little things like answering questions for a social worker who was there. I do not even remember her face. All the data, where were you born, what is your name, what school did you go to?, did you have chicken pox?, all of the things. Then answering for my sister, because my sister was very shy. So I would take the part of my sister-daughter now didn't have the chicken-pox. They took us - after all of this interrogatory- they took us to our foster parents' home. It was a family, the husband and the wife, he was a doctor dentist from Cuba. De Velasco, they were a lovely couple. They had a tiny little apartment in Florida City, where I think we were eighteen to twenty young girls and it was the first time I slept away from home into a little room that was stacked with bonked beds. They were so tight and together that we would had to, the first ones had to go in and the second and the third like we were little sardines. I did not sleep next to my sister, she was like two beds removed from me and that was quite an experience because I slept with my sister in my room in Cuba and then now I was sharing a room with eighteen people. The whole room was filled in with beds. One of the girls that was in the top bunk unbeknown to anyone had [47:33-47:42] What do they call that disease que se ponen a temblar... epilepsia. A few days after I had arrived, the girl that slept on the top bunk, had seizure because she was epileptic. I do not know where, I had the sense I saw it on a movie or heard about it, the first thing is they bite their tongue, so I got myself on top in the bunked bed and I open her mouth and I stuck the pillow. Because I was so afraid that she was going to hurt herself.

MGP = Go back to that first night, the very first night. They turn off the light, what went through your head?

EC = I do not think that anything went through my head when the lights were turned off, but what I felt was like a pound of bricks was on my chest. It was such a desolate feeling, knowing that my parents were not there, that I was not at home, that my little sister was looking up for me and that I could not tell her how I felt. It was like having a vice (49:02)

Interviewee: Elisa Chovel
Interviewer: Miguel Gonzalez-Pando
Date: March 1997
FIU Number: 521

put on top of my chest. I prayed, I prayed and I knew everything was going to be all right, but that feeling of that heavy weight on my chest at night I would never forget.

MGP = So you were actually not in the camps, you were in this...

EC = Florida City was a camp, we were not in tents. They were apartments that were vacant and Monsignor Walsh worked out a deal with the Italian owner. They put a fence around, they built a cafeteria and then instead of renting it they had Cuban house parents living there with all the Cuban unaccompanied children.

MGP = During the day you all eating in the cafeteria

EC= Yes, it was like being in an institution, like in a school. We had classes in the morning, we had English, and math and painting. Then we had our meals, not in the home, but everybody walked in single file, like little Indians to the cafeteria. There I had my cornflakes, the American washed our coffee. I did not know how we were going to survive that... that was a shocker. The big treat of the day is when they gave us a bag of Fritos. Once a week they had talent shows, where the children sang or recited. It was like a summer camp.

[Break to fix setting in Spanish, 50:44 – 50:47)

MGP = Did you make many friends, you remember any? Have you kept any of them, kept in touch with any of the girls who went there?

EC = My sister and I bonded with two sisters that were from Matanzas, Marta y Raquel de la Portilla. We were very fond of each other, it sort of like people pair off with people that were of the same feelings and had similarities. They were two sisters and we were two sisters, and we were actually about the same age practically. When we left, Marta and Raquel were absolutely devastated, because we had bonded already again, I mean you bond that's what humans do. You lose what you have and you bond with someone else that you can have ties to. We would watch out for them and they would watch out for us. It was a lovely relationship. At the beginning when we went to the foster home, I think we may have written once or twice and after that, you know life just sped up. It was many years later –actually through Monsignor Walsh- that I found Marta again.

MGP = how long were you at Florida City?

EC= In Florida City we were for three and a half months. We arrived on June the second and we left at the end of August or beginning of September to a foster home in Buffalo, New York. That again, when the social worker called us into the office to tell... she told me, she did not tell my sister that they had found a foster home in Buffalo, New York. Buffalo, New York, to me sounded, not that it was up north, I thought it was out west. I had visions of having all these herds of buffalo running around as we were landing. We were on the milk run, which was a plane that stopped in absolutely every town in the east coast. It took us like twelve hours to get to Buffalo, New York. I remember to look out

Interviewee: Elisa Chovel
Interviewer: Miguel Gonzalez-Pando
Date: March 1997
FIU Number: 521

the window knowing, for sure, that the buffalos were going to be running... of course, there weren't any.

MGP = ... You left Cuba, saying good-bye to your parents. Three and a half months later, you leave Florida City saying good-bye to your friends, again going to some place you did not know. Can you compare those exact constantly saying good bye?

EC = The leaving Florida City, after we had become accustom to our house parents and bonded with some of the other girls was again another parting and another fear. Exciting because we were going finally to a foster home and we were be going to an American school, but very frightening. That, of course, my sister never knew, that I felt frightened. I knew that we were going to be okay, but it was frightening because it is not knowing what's there. It's not knowing who's going to be there. In the plane, I was studying my English lessons, American. I needed to know my English by the time I landed in Buffalo, New York. Little did I know that, of course Ms. Murphy who was a social worker, greeted us at the airport and she only spoke English. She told us that the lady who was going to be our foster mother was an English teacher at one of the schools, but she was born in Costa Rica, so she spoke Spanish. She was a widow. To my amazement and delight, our housemother spoke Spanish, our first housemother.

MGP = Do you remember meeting Monsignor Walsh?

EC = I did not meet Msgr. Walsh, I saw him at a distance when he came to visit Florida City. His name stayed in the back of my mind through all of those years. I always felt I was one of the children of Father Walsh. I did not meet Father Walsh until thirty years had come by. I think life threw us together. This was someone I had to meet at one time in my life to finalize the cycle, but I was already an adult, I was already established.

MGP = Let's get back to Buffalo with your foster parents. How long were you there? How did they treat you? How did they treat your sister?... before we get into that, after you left Cuba, when was the first time you spoke with your parents?

EC = I don't remember... I do not remember that

MGP = You do not remember what, because todo lo que yo digo, nada de lo que digo sale

EC = No, pero es que yo no me acuerdo. Tu sabes lo que es... I know that we talked, I know we had a letter, but I do not remember... I must have been in Florida City. The only thing I remember is my mother asking me whether I saw her umbrella, her red umbrella... and I saying yes mommy I saw your red umbrella. How was everything? We are fine, we are fine... Do you like the food? Yes, we love the food, especially the coffee

[Break, mixed conversation about the recording in Spanish, 57:10-57:45]

MGP = How was that experience in Buffalo? How long were you there?

EC = I was in Buffalo for three and a half years, two foster homes and then Rosary Hill College. The first year I lived with the foster mother who was from Costa Rica. It was

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Date: March 1997
FIU Number: 521

good for us to have someone that spoke Spanish to help us, but I had a very serious illness while I was there, because in the camps there had been chicken pox and the measles (measles is that how you pronounce it?). I had the measles and I did not know it and because I did not want to be a burden to my foster mother, I did not tell her that I was feeling sick. I went days to school while I had very high temperature. Luckily, –thank goodness- her daughter was a nurse. She was studying to be a nurse and she was coming to spend the weekend. She walked into my room and she said, Elly you don't feel well, do you?, I said no. She took my temperature. I not only did I have the measles, but I had pneumonia. She called the doctor, they came in. I was nearly at the point of death. It was because I did not want to be a burden, so I kept it to myself. They had to call an ambulance and take me in the ambulance. I remember this foster mother screaming at the top of her lungs... que problema! que problema! Se muere la niña... “This girl is dying, what a problem.” My sister crying. This crew taking me for my one and only ambulance ride through the streets of Buffalo. I said, now I have abandoned my sister, I am dying an my poor sister is going to be left there in the foster home. I get to the hospital. No hospital wanted to have me, because I was contagious. They finally found a hospital that would accept me. Ms. Murphy was crying her heart out. She was such a sweet, sweet social worker and I said Ms. Murphy, I am dying, please don't bury me in the snow. I want to be buried in my land. The social worker crying, crying and she said, who told you you are going to die? You are not going to die. Yes, I said, my foster mother said that I was dying, I know I am dying. Here I am in an American hospital, having heard that I am going to die and therefore I had abandoned my sister. I let my mother down and my father down. They are taking my clothes off, they are putting tubes everywhere and I was just hopeless. I mean I was just so, didn't know enough English to defend myself or find out what was going on, but I made it. I made it and I survive in bananas, because every time I became the pet of the hospital. All the doctors and the nurses adored me. I was the coast celeb. Here this little girls who is from Cuba, a refugee who has pneumonia and who has the measles. Every time I came... what would you like to eat? And I said bananas. It is a miracle that I did not become a monkey. That's all I ate when I was in the hospital, bananas and bananas and bananas. They were so sweet in that hospital. I think I was there probably a week until I was all right to come home but again I guess we learned to survive.

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Ximena Valdivia, July 01, 2020