

Interviewee: Willy Chirino, Lissette Alvarez

Interviewer: Manuel Gonzalez Pando

Date: August 1997

FIU Number: 534

WC= Willy Chirino

LA=Lissette Alvarez

MGP=Miguel Gonzalez Pando

LA: Y se vas hacer las preguntas otra vez? Porque eso es que te trae.

MGP: Tell us of Consolacion, your town.

WC: My hometown is great. [Laughing] I tell my children about the way I used to live when I was a child and they can't believe it. It is unreal to them. Because I come from a very small town in the western tip of Cuba, called Consolacion del Sur. Consolation of the South in Pines of the River Province. It is a town that in that time, was about four thousand, five thousand people. We lived a life which is totally different from the way we live now. My house, the door, the front of the house would open at seven in the morning. And we closed it around eleven. And in and out we had a caravan of all my father's friends, my mother's friends, my friends. Jose, the guy who used to bring the water to the filter in the kitchen. They used to come in and out without even knocking. It was the way we used to live. We didn't have a conscience of danger, except the normal thoughts of a kid fearing normal things. But not the dangers you live surrounded by in these times. So the normal things for me to do back then, swim in the river, or ride a horse. The things a guajiro used to do, a country boy like I used to be. And the way we used to have fun, was to go to "El parque" go to the park. Which every single town had in the middle of town by the church. And we would go around by the park, walking with my friends, maybe sit on one of the benches and talk. That was the big fun. Indeed, it was fun. It was a good time. And I remember my home town with a great deal of love and appreciation.

LA: Well being, [Laughter] in my case it was totally different. I lived in Havana. And being the daughter of two big celebrities, like my mother and father were like the Steve and Eydie of Cuba. [Laughter] They had their own tv show. They used to sing, or they still do sing. As a matter of fact, they have their own tv show and their radio show, which is wonderful. And they sang folkloric music from South America, Tangos and Peruvian Waltzes, and beautiful music. And I was surrounded by all that throughout my childhood. In Cuba I remember going to my grandmother's house and my house, because since they had to work a lot, sometimes my grandmother took care of me. And I loved to go there because I would be with my cousin, and my aunt who was a little older than me, but we would play together. At home I had my clan, all my friends, and we used to go bike riding; go to the park. And it was like a very innocent life at that time. [Laughter] Not much like now, the children learn too fast. And, I don't know, you don't know which is better. Because everything comes to you at once. Once I left Cuba in the middle of all that innocence, the age of innocence; how it hits you. So I remember my father telling me we were going to be sent to the United States. I was already aware of what was going on in Cuba. I was against the government very young because I used to be in a boarding school, a Catholic boarding school. And when the milicianas, the women militia would use to come and they took over the school, they use to have their underwear in the patio. It was a little bit like a rape of our environment, of our school. And the nuns were afraid. And they were thrown out of

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Cuba. Very soon, they were sent to Spain. And I was aware of what was going on. I didn't like it at all. Even though before my father was disenchanted with the revolution. In the beginning everyone thought it was a big thing and something positive. I was already hiding counter revolution papers that I would get in school; pamphlets and stuff. So, I remember one day that my parents were not home. And I was playing in the garden. And the maid came and said, "Lissette they are going to look around the house! These people from the government!" To do a search. And I came inside the house, and the lady was like white, she was so nervous, she was shaking. I remember my mother was buying a lot of things that were lacking at that time, like soap, and toothpaste, and cooking oil. So I started getting nervous knowing that my mother had bought that and we were not allowed to; that's ridiculous you know. So they started searching all the drawers and stuff. And I remembered the pamphlets I had in my room. I said, "Oh my god I'm going to get my parents in trouble." And I was praying to god that they wouldn't go in my room. And they didn't. So as the maliciana walks by my room, she says we don't have to search the kids' room. [Sigh of relief] I went "Thank god", they wouldn't have found it anyway, because I put in a place that was really weird, between two, it looked like a one piece shelf, but it was really two pieces, so I put it inside there. So they went to my parents' closets and they always locked it. So they wanted us to open it. I said no, I don't have a key. So they made a big deal, and went into my father's office, and starting looking in every book. It was so incredible to see these people go in your house, "Why? Why are they doing this?" So when my father arrived around seven, they had already left. He took me with him to the "comandancia" Where the malicianas were, and all the people from the neighborhood, [Spanish] Como se llama El Comites de Defensa? The Defense Committee of the Revolution. So my father was kind of angry. He says why are you going to my house and searching my house? You know, we are singers, and people love us. And we have nothing to hide. Why are you doing this? And I remember with big eyes, listening to everything, and when I arrived at the comandancia, they had like mountain of things they had taken away from everybody. Like toothpaste and soap, like everything, a mountain. And the guy tells me, "Look what we took away from the worms!" They used to call them the "gusanos" The people who were against the revolution, they would call them worms. And I was just, I just swallowed and said oh my goodness. And how terrible and frustrating. Even as a kid you would see this, and really hate it. So when the news came that we were leaving, there were so many mixed feelings. It was the excitement of course that we were going to the United States, but we didn't know in what conditions we were going to go to the United States. I remember the day we were leaving, my sister and I. My sister was very, very young. She was only five years old. And that day the flight was cancelled. So we had to come back from the airport. My parents didn't go to the airport, because it would have been very noticing, you know that we would be there with them. And they trying to make it hush hush like we weren't leaving. So we had to come back from the airport and leave the next day. But as we were leaving, we were hugging our parents again. I told my father as a child, and he said, "You'll be back very soon. Don't worry, in three or four months you'll be back again." And I told my father, "No dad, you better come soon because this won't end for a long time." I remember that. That is one of the things I remember most about leaving.

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How about when you got the news of leaving? 9:22 / 46:18

WC: It was the other way around, to me it was a matter of days. I left August 26th 1961. And I remember my cousin had a birthday party at the end of September. I remember saying, [Laughter] watch out I think I'll be back. It was like a short trip, maybe a couple weeks in Miami, the guy's going to be thrown out. But no such luck, anyway it was..

MGP: "Who knew you were leaving?"

WC: My father. You know I never, it was like the day before or so. I never knew the days ahead that my father didn't want me to talk to anybody about it. So we didn't even go to Havana. The night before I slept in Consolacion, my home town, my own house. So we drove early in the morning to Havana, right to the airport. And that was it.

MGP: Do you remember the airport, when you said good-bye?

WC: Oh sure, I might die at 150 years old, and I will remember exactly what happened that day, and how it was that I left. It was my first time on an airplane, never before of course, and I was 14 years old. I came with a friend of the family. By luck, or coincidence we took the same flight so I wasn't alone on the flight. Right here you have two different Pedro Pan experiences. One is not so bad, and that one, that is the bad one. So, I was very lucky because I came to Miami and I slept one day and they put me on the floor, because there were too many kids and not enough space. And the following day they took me to San Ra[inaudible], where father Walsh, back then, not Monsignor yet, used to live. We were about, 86, 87 kids, and we were the privileged ones. We were the ones that lived right in the city. They used to take us to Sears to buy new clothes every month. They used to give us two dollars to spend every Friday night. Two dollars back then was a lot of money.

LA: [Laughter] You're lucky!

WC: They used to take us every morning to La Salle High school. It was great. It was very good. As a matter of fact, of course, I used to miss my parents, my family. But, it was kind of nice. My exile didn't start until they came. But now, her story is quite different and quite hard.

LA: The many hours of therapy it caused me! [Laughter] Imagine, you come from the home of two celebrities living comfortably in Cuba, and all of a sudden you find yourself in Kendall, in this refugee camp. Where you brought your little bag, where you were allowed to bring 66lbs or 33lbs of things, I don't remember if it was 66lbs or 33lbs of things. And it was thrown in a mountain of other bags from kids. Two kids in a little bunk bed, in the same bunk bed, two at the top, and two at the bottom. And three weeks later, we were sent, we were fearing all the time. They would take us on field trips. We were fearing of seeing our names on a little black board where the next day we were supposed to leave somewhere, somewhere in the United States. So finally it was the day we saw our names, my sister and I, and two other pairs of sisters. One was Raquel Mendieta and Ana Mendieta. And Gisela and Alina, another pair of sisters.

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MGP: [Speaking Spanish] Perdon, cuando hablas de Ana Mendieta explica un pocqitico, porque, Ana voy hacer parte, [English] I'm going to touch up on her. So if you knew her, extend yourself a little bit about the artist, and her tragic death.

LA: Actually when I saw my name, on the feared blackboard, it was my sister Algita and I, Gisela and Alina, the other two sisters, and then Raquel and Ana Mendieta. Ana Mendieta later became a well-known artist, who was killed in a tragic incident in New York. So how our lives got together, to go to this very small town in Iowa called Dubuque. We couldn't even find it on the map. [Laughter] Then we went to this town in Iowa, and then from there they took us in a small plane to Dubuque. And then the nuns were there to pick us up. And they took us to St. Mary's home, which was an orphan home. And we were there, and our English was not very good. Because, even though I went to an American school in Cuba, it was not the same thing when you start having to speak a language fluently, than just going to class. And speaking for a while in the classroom with the teacher. So we arrived at Dubuque, Iowa. It was very cold. The snow would get 20 to 30 degrees below zero. Mountains of snow for a tropical being like me! [Laughter]

I remember that it was very sad because they separated us. The three bigger sisters were separated from the little sisters. Just imagine, that was your only family.

[Pause. Phone Ringing. Interview pauses for two minutes.] I think we better wait until all the phones stop ringing because this is incredible. We better disconnect the phones. [Laughter]

WC: De Franco go upstairs and disconnect your mother's phone please. Unhook your mother's phone. Take it off your mother's...

LA: So St. Mary's Home, so that was the first very traumatic incident. Like where is my sister going? She was taken to another hall. I mean it was right across the hall. And we couldn't see each other.

WC: Very cruel.

LA: Very cruel. The nun who took care of us was a Chinese man. And me not speaking very good English, imagine having to hear someone who spoke English with a Chinese accent. And would tell us, "You will never see your parents again, because the same thing happened in China. You won't receive letters from your parents again, because the same thing happened in China" So we were like living in this confusion. And we got sick. When we arrived we got Scarlet fever. Everybody, it was like a break out of Scarlet fever. I remember having this terrible, horrible sore throat and fever. And I would be even delirious. And the Chinese nun would come and say "Mya mia never see higha fever" It was terrible! It was so terrible, that face. And she was very bitter, of course.

WC: She was not mother Theresa, let's put it that way. [Laughter]

LA: No, no mother Theresa. [Laughter] And then again, not being able to see my sister, my sister she wouldn't allow her to speak Spanish. She didn't speak anything else, so she wouldn't speak

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at all. She would be allowed to take a shower or bathe once a week. She would get hit. Then in our dorm, Raquel Mendieta was my roommate. And we received our first letter from our parents. She received hers the same day I received mine. [Audio cuts off at 18:45 mark. Returns at 18:54]

Kind of hard on me sometimes, and at that moment I started crying and crying. And I couldn't stop crying. It was one of those fits; crying episodes. And then Raquel, Ana's sister also started crying. And then the nuns, instead of consoling us, because she was so frustrated too you know. They were going to lock us up in a closet. Because we were disturbing everybody else. So, I remember the closet didn't have a knob on the inside. So I was little bit claustrophobic, so I pushed the door, and I ran out. So they locked us up in the kitchen. So it was a long time for me, it was a long time. A year for a kid was a long time.

MGP: You were there for a year?

LA: Yeah, we were there for a year.

MGP: It was actually a very traumatic experience.

LA: Very traumatic experience. And then after, it was worse after that. Because actually my mother and father spoke to some people that they knew here in Miami, for us to come here to Miami. While they tried to get out. But after the first year, when they were going to get out, they were stopped at the airport by an accusation of one of their fellow singers. That used to live in our neighborhood, and used to be a close friend, well not very close, but very well-known singer. They had this accusation that my father had a clandestine radio station in the house. And that wasn't true. My father had a short wave radio that he used to listen to Fidel, when he was in the Sierra Maestra, in the mountains, when Batista was there. So it was the same radio he used to use to listen, he had another little radio where he could hear the police cars, so he would know when a bomb exploded, because he would hear the police cars telling each other. That's all, my father didn't transmit or anything. That was ridiculous. But that cost him another year of staying, and trying to prove that they were innocent. It was very, very traumatic. It's a long story, but if you want me to keep on going.

MGP: They told me that your story was you know, really bad.

LA: Well I had it rough in the sense that being in the orphan home, being separated from my little sister. Then we came to Miami. We started living in this house. And I was almost raped by these people where I was living. My sister was smaller than me, so she didn't experience the same situation. But me starting to be like an adolescent. I thought at first it was the guy from the house. And then finally, I realized I was really innocent you see? It was the age of innocence. In Cuba we lived a totally different life. So I thought it was the guy. And I realized it was the lady too, because I would cry for help, and she wouldn't come. And that was the first incident. And it was very long. And the incidents were spaced out. But, I wouldn't write to my parents about it, because they were going to die if they hear. Actually nothing really happened. A lot of things happened that may have been worse than just maybe happening.

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WC: But, what ever happened to you back then, would happen to a fifteen, fourteen year old kid now they would go to jail immediately. They both were in combination to abuse, sexually abuse you.

LA: They were trying to, well it's a long story, to tell it's very traumatic. I had enough therapy already and I can talk about it. [Comforting Laughter]

Interviewer: And you were aware of what was going on?

LA: Yes, I was aware. Because of the whole situation and the guy was trying to seduce me. And they would put situations where like, let's go to a drive in. And then she would get sleepy, and get to the other side of the car. She would be in the middle, and he would come and put his arm around me. At the beginning, as a child, you say he would do it out of a fatherly love. And then you knew, it was not such a fatherly love. It was very gradual. And then I wrote to a friend of mine in Cuba, my best friend from childhood, and told her about it. Then her to go see my mother and tell her about it. So finally my mother got me out of the house, and sent me to another house. Then finally, I ended up in another refugee camp at Florida City. We lived about, eighteen girls in one apartment that had two bedrooms. But it was of all this time, it was at least fun. We were with people with the same problems. We shared the same circumstances, so it was more of a reality to everyone there.

MGP: How long did it?

LA: It was almost three years. But three years to a child is a long time. So, we got reunited with our parents here in Miami. Because my parents had to leave through Mexico. They had to invent this story, that they had a contract in Central America to sing. So they would give them permission to take their guitar and some clothes. It was ridiculous, this is what happened. They thought that the government didn't know we were out of Cuba already. So they had this interview, and at the end of the interview, they were given permission to sing in Honduras; a country in Central America. As they were walking out the door, and they were very nervous, the guy who was interviewing them told my mother, "Are the girls going with you?" And then my mother said, "No, no, the girls are not going." Then they talked for a little while longer, and then they were finally leaving, and they said "Be sure to bring the girls from Miami when you come back." And my mother and father were petrified, because they knew; of course, they knew it. So finally they came to Miami, my mother came in first. My father had to stay longer in Mexico, because men were investigated longer when you were allowed to come into the United States. So my mother was the first one to come. And it was like, it was even a clash when you see your parents for the first time, after three years. Even there was a generation gap even bigger because I spoke English then, I had American friends, my mother would resent I spoke English on the phone. I was "Que Pasa USA" [Laughter] "Why are you speaking in English? You don't want me to hear what you are talking about?" I was an adolescent trying to go to parties, and my mother wanted to be the chaperon. [Laughter] "Mom you know, you don't take chaperons to parties here you know." "What do you mean?! What are you doing there that I can't see?!" That type of thing, so my experience was I could tell you so many incidents, but it would take forever.

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MGP: First of all how did you manage to become one of, they used to call them, Father Walsh's children?

LA: He was a privileged. [Laughter]

WC: I have my context, let me tell you how. My sister, my older sister, she married Tony Carrion who is the son of Angel Carrion, who used to be one of the house parents at San Waiferson. As a matter of fact, they called him La Casa Carrion. So they knew me of course, so immediately after I got in, they sent for me.

LA: I realized that when I was in Florida City there was a Carrion family. It was the same family?

WC: No the la Casa Carrion was the Casa Carrion. It was one of the matecamba de cumbe of St. Rainferson. Which is la Casa Carrion and Florida City. And back then, there was Kendall too, which was where you were.

LA: No, I was in Kendall. Then, when I went through the whole thing, and the two years went by. And then I was sent to Florida City, where they had a lot of apartments where a family, a couple took care of sixteen kids, fourteen kids in each apartment.

WC: The house parenting, over there we had about five different sets of house parents. And each one took care of about ten or eleven boys. So that's out of the way.

MGP: How long were you in Father Walsh's house?

WC: Close to a year.

Interviewer: And your parents came then?

WC: Yeah.

MGP: How was it reuniting with your parents?

WC: It was well, I imagine it was very emotional. But the thing is up to then I had it ok. Then, that's when my exile life and the hard times started because at that time it was, well my father, my mother, my aunt who always lived with us, who is my madrina too, how do you call madrina in English?

LA: Godmother.

WC: Godmother. My two younger sisters and myself. And the government used to give us \$100 dollars a month, plus all the canned refugio meat, and peanut butter and cheese you could eat, and powdered milk.

LA: Spam. [Laughter]

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WC: Spam. So there wasn't much we could do with a hundred dollars. Back then Miami wasn't a bilingual city. You know you had to speak some English or go to the Tomatera and pick up tomatoes. And that's what my father used to do. When he arrived he was a tomato picker. Then he worked at a place in Hialeah, that it was a fiber glass factory. He used to come in every evening with full of these little crystals inside the skin, it was so painful. It was amazing. You know, we had very rough times. But let me tell you something Miguel, every day of my life I thank God that he took that decision back then, to bring us over here. It doesn't matter what we went through. To stay over there, and have gone through what my friends, who have stayed in Cuba went through, there is no comparison, totally, so.

MGP: Now you have children. Have you told them about this experience? Have you told your daughter that you were actually sexually molested?

LA: We have, yes, I have told them. I thought the question you were going to make was if I would have done the same thing? [Laughter]

MGP: No, that's the last question I always ask.

LA: Yes, I haven't told my son. He's too young. And I will tell him of course. I think it's a thing all the kids should know, so they can protect themselves. Because now you look at it in a different way, how I would have reacted at that time. But, when you are a child, you depend totally on that family that is taking care of you. It's so frustrating, you don't know what to do.

WC: Where do you go for help, when the people who are taking care of you, are doing this to you?

LA: At the beginning, I thought this was supposed to be. That this was a part of growing up. It was very confusing. You know, mostly when you are a kid, you are nine or ten years old and you ask your mother where do babies come from and your mother says, "Have to pray to God for them to come?" And I say what if I pray to God? No, because you have to be married. And you already know, but you're testing your mother. And she gets very nervous. At that time I remember my aunt, my aunt Celeste. That's how my mother was raised, her sister Celeste. She got married and two weeks later her husband brought her back to my grandmother's. He said, "She's still a virgin." She didn't know what sex was, so he couldn't touch her for two weeks. Finally they started dating, and finally she came back pregnant one day. [Laughter]

WC: You know back then, let me tell you something, I have a story. This is unbelievable, because in the country it was even worse. This is a true story. I tell my kids and they don't believe it. Once my mother was, how do you say, punished, for a month without leaving the house because she had the nerve of saying hello to my father, while they were friends in the street, and he wasn't wearing a tie.

LA: Could you imagine?

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WC: This was a true story! He had to, in order to talk to her, or speak to her, he had to be wearing a tie! It was a symbol of some kind of respect to the family to be able to talk to her. Is that unbelievable or what? Nowadays you should see the kids that come visit my kids. [Laughter]

LA: We've come a long way baby! [Laughter]

WC: So, you know, it's amazing.

MGP: And getting back to the question that you anticipated, have you two talked about it? Would you have the courage?

LA: Let me tell you he had a different experience than I had, ok. Besides, how could I tell? I mean, my parents could leave three years later. Three years wouldn't have made such a big difference. You know, I would have stayed with my kids, but what if? What if I would have to stay there? Or, it's a very difficult thing to say. There's a lot of mixed feelings. Yes, you have to be brave, and just send them. But... how? What is going to await them? I don't know.

MGP: Did you ever feel the anger against your parents, for sending you alone?

LA: No. I started feeling more when I started having my children. You become, you understand more. There was periods in my life. Oh yes, I went from anger to understanding, to anger again. Like I told you, a lot of therapy. [Laughter] And confronting all these feelings. It was hard to talk about it. The more you talk about it, the more you release all this energy, all this contained emotion.

WC: Let me tell you, their decision was based on something else. Back then the thought folded, the idea, the conscience they had was, if the kids would stay there, there was a danger they would be indoctrinated. Brainwashed theory, you know. They were all scared to death about that. They were losing their children to the system. That actually the children would turn against them because the government would feed them information, and brainwash them. That they would be able to get the children to do this. So, they were scared to death of this. So that was principally, why they took this decision. And on top of that, remember that everybody thought this would finish real quick. So if I had the information my father had back then, all those fears, and the belief it would be a short period, I probably would have done the same thing. Now if I knew what really happened, I would of never in my life get away from my kids.

LA: Yes. Definitely. I agree with that. I agree with that. It's just, you have to be there. I don't know it's like an animal instinct. But, they need you, they need you more than having a what? A good nice room to sleep in. Or going to a nice school. They need you, it's your family. That's more important than anything. [Spanish] Contigo pan y cebolla, como dicen. [Laughter]

WC: The kids need the parents for sure. And I as a parent am one of those, we are as a matter of fact, like to be hanging around our kids all the time. So the thought of being separated from them is scary to me.

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MGP: Is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you feel would be relevant to this project?

WC: I don't know. Well, what I always like to talk about when I talk about my experience of Pedro Pan is, to enhance the man, Monsignor Walsh. To me he was, and he still is, and always will be my hero. People don't know that Monsignor Walsh was a wealthy individual. He comes from a very wealthy family, from island. [audio cuts off 37:39 mark. Audio resumes 37:47 mark] raised 14,000 young Cuban children. And I think he did a hell of a job.

MGP: Do you have any anecdote, you know a personal anecdote related to Monsignor Walsh and you ?

WC: Sure! As a matter of fact, he used to be quite a sweet individual. He used to take us in his private sail boat and his Mercedes and all that. But he used to be a disciplinarian too. I mean if you ever failed a course, there was a thing called "La paleta." And we all used to be very scared of "los paletasos" of Monsignor Walsh. Anybody who lived in that building, that motel, on twenty first street and Biscayne Blvd. would tell you, if something went wrong, and you had to get a "paletaso" he meant business. It was a very painful experience.

LA: They would have accused him of child abuse now. [Laughter]

WC: No..no.no.

LA: No, they would. [Laughter]

WC: No, no way. You know why? Because, the way he did it, you knew that you deserved it.

LA: Yeah, I know, but I'm telling you..[Laughter]

WC: The kid knows when he or she deserves punishment. And when you do apply punishment to them, and they deserve it, they don't even remember it later on in life. It's amazing, I have always disciplined all my kids. If you asked my older girls, if I have ever touched them, then they would say "No, he never did." And sometimes, I used to spank them. Because that's the way I think a child should be.

LA: We were brought up like that, that's why.

WC: And they do respond to spanking. I don't mean hit them on the face, or doing some kind of damage, but spanking. And that's what Monsignor Walsh did. Was heavy right on the butt, pow! With a paletta, painful. But, it was; he used to do it as a ritual, as a joke. "Ha ha you know it's your turn now, come here!" [Laughter]

LA: I remember in Spain they also used to hit in the hand with a ruler, kids. It was a little barbaric my darling. [Laughter]

WC: So, all I have, all I remember from the man is his beauty as an individual. And what he did for us, I have always, for example when they gave me the star in Calle 8, I dedicated it to him.

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And I have always said that whenever we go back to Cuba I am going to build a park in the middle of Havana somewhere, where people could go to know, to learn, to study the man himself and what he did for us.

Interviewer: You both work at this, there is a Willie Chirino foundation, which is committed to children. Do you think that perhaps all of that experience, would you talk about that?

LA: Actually the foundation started for Willy to start helping Cuban artists, and then it developed into this to help the kids. It's not only for the kids, but to help Cuban families. It's more focused on the kids.

WC: But I believe that our experiences in the Pedro Pan saga had a lot to do with everything we do in life. And that has to be a very important part of it. Our work in the foundation is something we do with heart. And that is because we have gotten so much, from so many. We feel the necessity of giving back. I think it's a natural, something that you do very natural when you get so much from somebody, that you tend to pay back, to give back. We have been so fortunate to get so much from out of life, and so many people who have given us a lot, a lifetime, and we have to give back.

LA: There is also the two aspects of the needs that these children have. The physical need, what they need of food and shelter, and the emotional need, which is what I felt. So it's like the two sides you know. When I deal with the children I always talk aloud to them, how they feel, how they interact with their families. How these emotions, these needs for love that they have, you know. I think in the future, people who have kids, they should go through an examination. They should go through school for having kids, it's very important. The scars that you carry through life, because of things sometimes you don't know. You don't know how to act. And some people even think they are doing things for the good of their kids, and maybe it's not the best thing to do.

MGP: Let me ask you about Ana Mendieta, did you see her later in life?

LA: No, no. Ana... as a matter of fact, it's funny, Raquel, my roommate Raquel, I wrote her an email, she wrote me an email last night. We didn't see each other for a long time. We spoke on the phone because somebody came to me, to ask me about Ana. They were doing a documentary on Ana. So, I spoke to Raquel on the phone, and she used to live in New York. And then one day, I was at a Yoga center that I go to, and there was a guy saying he was moving in from New York and he was the husband of Raquel Mendieta. "Is she Cuban?" "Oh yes, sure." "Do you know if she was in an orphan home?" "Oh yeah! That's her! I was her roommate." So we got reunited, and we see each other very often. She's going to Istanbul to present her sister's art.

WC: They have the same guru now. [Laughter]

LA: Gurumai [Laughter]

MGP: Muchas gracias a los dos. [Spanish]

Interviewee: Willy Chirino, Lissette Alvarez

Interviewer: Manuel Gonzalez Pando

Date: August 1997

FIU Number: 534

LA: You know the whole story about Ana? You know what happened? The version of her sister. It's very interesting. Are you going to interview her? You should interview Raquel.

MGP: If you want to give me, anything you know about Ana, it would give it more variety.

LA: Ana was a beautiful girl, beautiful girl. She was a year younger than me. Even though they took her to the little girls, she was very frustrated over there, because she wanted to be with us. And she was a very happy girl, very strong character. She would be very vivacious and inventing games all the time, like she was later on with her art. The story that Raquel tells is really very spooky. Let Raquel tell you. But they believe that definitely she got killed. She got pushed out the window by her husband.

WC: The guy got away with it supposedly.

LA: He got away with it because there were so many things that could prove she was pushed out of the window. First of all, she was terrified of heights. The window was high, so nobody could just fall out the window. He had marks on his body. There were marks on the window. There were so many things. But since there were no witnesses, and she drank, and whatever. Those are the things you can't believe, but they happen.

WC: Pero no se puede, ya hablamos no?

MGP: Ya.

WC: No se puede, el dijo que se comitio suicide.

MGP: Ok, let me get the phone off the hook. [Ends.] 46:18

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Ximena Valdivia, 2020