

EI-1012

ARTEMIO HECHEVERRIA HERNANDEZ

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH D

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ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: PAT HILLIARD

CUBA,

AGE 22

LEVINE: Today is July 30th, 1998, and I am here in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio with Artemio Hecheverria Hernandez.

HERNANDEZ: (Unintelligible).

LEVINE: Mr. Hernandez has a most interesting story to tell because, uh, starting in 1935, he stowed away on the SS Barcelona.

HERNANDEZ: '35 or '6.

LEVINE: Yeah, 1935. And he continued stowing away...

HERNANDEZ: Different ships

LEVINE: ...on different ships, about 14 times, between 1935 and 1940. Uh, he was 22 years old when he came to the United States the first time.

HERNANDEZ: No, (unintelligible), but then in between that, they in 1936, 1936, they put me, our community, too, was so bad, they put me and Elizar and me in Elmira reformatory. Elmira reformatory send me back here, they sent me back to Cuba. And that's the last time, 1937.

LEVINE: Was the last time?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: That they sent you back?

HERNANDEZ: I mean, I mean, I come out, they put me in a reformatory here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah. And they took, they, they sent me to Elmira reformatory, and then they bring me here, keep me locked here for, for about a month, sent me to Cuban.

LEVINE: Oh, oh.

HERNANDEZ: You understand?

LEVINE: Yes.

HERNANDEZ: I was poor and wasn't supposed to come back here but every place I keep coming.

LEVINE: OK, well, well, let me just say that this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and Mr. Hernandez is 84 at the time of this interview, 84 years old...

HERNANDEZ: Yes.

LEVINE: ...at this time. OK, um, would you say again, please, Mr. Hernandez, for the tape, your birth date and where you were born?

HERNANDEZ: I born in Santiago, Cuba on October 20, 1913.

LEVINE: OK, October 20th, and, um, did you live in Santiago right up until you were 22 years old, when you first started stowing away?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, no, I moved to Havana.

LEVINE: You moved to Havana.

HERNANDEZ: Havana, yeah.

LEVINE: And, and is it in Havana that you grew up?

HERNANDEZ: Most, up to 22 years, between Havana and New York, yeah.

LEVINE: So, um, do you remember your childhood very much? Do you remember growing up in Cuba, before you came here?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: When you were, when you were a little boy?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you were growing up, do you remember that?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: Sure.

LEVINE: OK, well, what do you remember most about growing up in Cuba?

HERNANDEZ: Well, uh, I remembered I was, uh, hanging around in Santiago de Cuba with the United States Navy, in Guantanamo Bay, the Navy and, and, in Santiago, I with the Merchant Marine, so I was on my journey to come to the United States.

LEVINE: I see, because they were stationed there...

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: and you, you, you were aware of them.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah. Guantanamo Bay, that's a Navy base.

LEVINE: Right. Right.

HERNANDEZ: Still there, though.

LEVINE: Right. What was your mother's name?

HERNANDEZ: Eh?

LEVINE: Your mother's name?

HERNANDEZ: Juana.

LEVINE: Juana?

HERNANDEZ: Juana Hernandez.

LEVINE: Uh, what was her, do you remember her maiden name before she married your father?

HERNANDEZ: Juana, Juana, Juana, Juana, Juana Hernandez and then after married my father become Hecheverria. That's the way they do spell it.

LEVINE: Oh, OK, OK, so she was Hernandez.

HERNANDEZ: After that she become Juana Hecheverria Hernandez. For before she married my father, she was Juana Hernandez.

LEVINE: I see.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: OK. And your, uh, father, his first name?

HERNANDEZ: Jose.

LEVINE: Jose.

HERNANDEZ: Jose Hecheverria.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And, uh, did you have sisters and brothers in Cuba?

HERNANDEZ: They all died now. Let me see. I had, I had fourteen brothers, brothers and sisters. Uh, ten girls, ten, ten girls and four boys, yeah, fourteen altogether.

LEVINE: Where did you fall in line? Were you, were you near the oldest, or were you near the youngest?

HERNANDEZ: No, I'm in the middle, no.

LEVINE: In the middle?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, I'm in the middle, in between, let me see, I got another sister behind me, she, she was, uh, she was 20. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh huh. Uh-huh. And did you go to school in Cuba?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, I did. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh huh, uh huh.

HERNANDEZ: But, uh, the other way, uh, I was a trouble kid, you know.

LEVINE? You were a trouble kid?

HERNANDEZ: But I was, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: See I heard, uh, I helped, I helped, they helped me a lot while I was on a ship here, I used to do, you know, the merchant ship. I was a merchant marine for almost 14 years here on the United States ships.

LEVINE: That was after 1940?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. OK, um, when you think back to your early days in Cuba, what are your fondest memories? What are the things that you remember most about growing up there?

HERNANDEZ: In Cuba?

LEVINE: Um.

HERNANDEZ: Well, uh, I would hang around the waterfront all the time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: You understand?

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Come up with the ship, helping the cook on the merchant ship, washing dishes, so I figure as soon as I become a cook and come to the United States. So most of the guys used to, oh, they used to “Come on, come on, come on” where you stowaway. They was helping me to come here.

LEVINE: I see.

HERNANDEZ: You understand?

LEVINE: I see.

HERNANDEZ: And I used to go on the ship, peeling potatoes. And, you know, see the ship left when those (unintelligible) never come out. So this guy told me, some of the deck people, people in the steward department, told me “Why don’t you come someday?” So he was helping me stowaway on the ship.

LEVINE: Were you the only person stowing away?

HERNANDEZ: No, we used to go miles, sometimes four and four together in the hold. We used to getting about a couple piece of bread and water. We would be in the hold.

LEVINE: Wow.

HERNANDEZ: Now, they used to catch sometime, they catching me asleep, you know. Of course, we were hungry below. There were four (unintelligible) running together. The war was over. They, the, the, the Second, the Mate, the Chief Mate came up on the, on the, on the hatch, looking for, you know, to see if the cargo was right. So they find that we were four fine. So, most, most of the time we come out three or four together.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: And would somebody who was working on the ship come...

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, help, yeah.

LEVINE: and give you food and...?

HERNANDEZ: No, no, no, no, no.

LEVINE: No?

HERNANDEZ: They just help me to come up here, told me what to hide in.

LEVINE: Where to hide.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...but they didn't help you with food or anything?

HERNANDEZ: No, no, no, no, no no.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: We used to wait at nighttime to blow by, sneaking out, go to the mess hall and get some bread, whatever we could get.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, and water, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: Then we go back to the hold in the daytime. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Would you, could you remember, what, what was your dream? What, what...?

HERNANDEZ: To come to the United States.

LEVINE: Why did you want to come? What did you think was here?

HERNANDEZ: Because I see after I get here, I see that life was better here than, than, you know, I see the Merchant Marines that was making money, and Havana was very bad (?) those days. It was very, very, it was during the Depression, too, yeah, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: So I figure, you know, I, I travel, I like travel to come up here. I figured because I want to become a Merchant Marine, so my dream come true. Finally did. Oh, I, I, I, I get my paper here. See the Coast Guard over there?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Think I'm a regular.

LEVINE: Oh.

HERNANDEZ: Right there where you come up in the park here.

LEVINE: Yes, yes, I know.

HERNANDEZ: Think I'm a regular(?) Washington, or so I travel or so my dream was to come to the United States. So when I used to come over here, the social service used to help me before I go over to Cuba, give me some clothes, or give me a couple dollar, so I used to shine a shoe here, you know, because I only got passengers, too, you know. You know, people come out to wait for, for immigration quota to go up.

LEVINE: Right.

HERNANDEZ: So I used to travel all over the place, shine the shoe to the security here, or oh...

LEVINE: Oh, while you were here?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, let's talk first about that first time when you stowed away. Do you remember when you, when you...

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, the first time.

LEVINE: went onto the Barcelona?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, the first time when I come over here, I was saying I was Puerto Rican, so they don't send me to Cuban.

LEVINE: Oh.

HERNANDEZ: Because some Puerto Rican told me "Say you're Puerto Rican, you're born in Puerto Rico." So, since Puerto Rico was of the United States, so I said that, but then they found out that I was don't, they send me back.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: You know what I mean?

LEVINE: Well...

HERNANDEZ: They keep me here about four, four months, (unintelligible) there was a family, you know, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, tell me what happened. You, you got on the ship in Cuba and the ship came to New York. Then where did you go when the ship first arrived? How did you...you came out, you lifted up the hatch, you went ashore?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, well, no, no.

LEVINE: What happened?

HERNANDEZ: No. At the last time I come up, they come out and they open the hatch to take the cargo or roll the rug up the pier, that was the pier, let me see, let me see, on Pier 24. I get up, I run away, you know. The security guard (unintelligible) because they already caught me at sea, so they locked me up before getting in port.

LEVINE: Oh.

HERNANDEZ: Until they were getting ready for passengers.

LEVINE: Right.

HERNANDEZ: So when they get security to come here, I run away in the pier, yeah.

LEVINE: And did they catch you?

HERNANDEZ: They didn't catch me that time.

LEVINE: So how long did you stay, uh, free in New York City?

HERNANDEZ: That was the last time. They, they, they, they...I stayed here until I went to reformatory school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: I was, uh, I was living up there on 116th Street and 11th Avenue, where they had the Cuban Club. In those days, those people want to make, uh, they were members of the International Lincoln Brigade that was going to go to Spain. I was going to go to Spain to fight in Spain for the, you know, in the Viverde (?). See that's what they, the club, they called it Julio Antonio Mella, that was a communist club, communist party, whoever in communist party.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: So they was going, they send us, they send people to fight against Franco in Spain, so I tried to get in that, but I never make it.

LEVINE: Well, uh, did many people go from that social club?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. There were 14,563. Oh, yeah, yeah. That was organized, they organized the Lincoln Brigade.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: They did.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: That was, most, most, most of the people were members of the Communist Party. .

LEVINE: I see.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, did you have communist sympathies at that time?

HERNANDEZ: Those days I did.

LEVINE: You did?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Well, you see, in those days I used to come up to Union Square, where the communist party used to make (unintelligible) treasury loans because I was a crazy kid, you know.

LEVINE: Well, what was it about communism that, that...

HERNANDEZ: In those days, well...

LEVINE: that you liked?

HERNANDEZ: That to me, in those days, was that they helping me and they were looking better for the working people. You understand?

LEVINE: Yes.

HERNANDEZ: I used to come up on 14th Street, and stay because that was the headquarters of the Communist Party and took the, the Daily Worker newspaper, to take a motel and sell for (unintelligible) for Lincoln, you know, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: And they helping me a lot, eating or place to stay, oh yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: So you found a, a home in a way...

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, there, yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: ...with that group?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: They helping me, I used to go to the picket line, help in the picket line, see, you know, that was my life.

LEVINE: Huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah. It was that and getting to show up on, on Water Street. That's what the unemployment, you know. I used to be a dishwasher in a ritzy (?) restaurant, all that. Then I would live on 25 Summer Street. There was Merchant Marine school right here in South Ferry.

LEVINE: Oh.

HERNANDEZ: The old Merchant Marine, there's no more building now. Because in those days, I sleep, too, in, in Battery Park, where they got the big building that you take the ferry to Governor's Island.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. You mean Staten Island.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, no, to Governor's Island.

LEVINE: Oh, Governor's Island.

HERNANDEZ: That, that, that's it. See, the Staten Island, the red building, there used to be a soup kitchen in those days.

LEVINE: Really?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, soup kitchen.

LEVINE: Huh.

HERNANDEZ: You know, the building that you take, that you just take the, the ferry to Ellis Island, I mean to Governor's Island.

LEVINE: Governor's Island, right.

HERNANDEZ: So I used to sleep there and eat there.

LEVINE: Oh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, in those days, you know, you got to make a big line over there to eat, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: I was there, know?

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: There was a lot of soup kitchens around the South Ferry, but that, that was the best one.

LEVINE: It was the best one?

HERNANDEZ: That, that was the bigger one, yeah.

LEVINE: The bigger one?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh huh. And what was it like? What, what was it like when you went into a soup kitchen?

HERNANDEZ: Well, I mean, you have to line up, you know. They give you something to eat and, uh, you go up there, just like a shelter now. Like a shelter.

LEVINE: Shelter. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: And then used to come back 9:00, before 9:00, you got to stay there; otherwise, you don't, you don't got no place to stay.

LEVINE: Oh, you have to be there before 9.

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Like a curfew or something?

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah, in those days, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Then from there, they, there were so many people, they send me to Chinatown, Bowery Street, The Bowery. They used to have a place for, for, like a shelter, too, yeah. I, I (unintelligible) I went through a lot of things, you see.

LEVINE: Yes, you did.

HERNANDEZ: Got no family and no things, know?

LEVINE: None, none of your brothers or sisters came to this country?

HERNANDEZ: No, no, I'm only one.

LEVINE: Only one.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now what was it like in the Bowery in the, in the Depression? Do, what, could you talk about the Bowery a little bit?

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: What, what it was like?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah. See, in those days, the Second and Fourth Avenue elevators used to come up all the way here to South Ferry, right to where you take the ferry.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: to Staten Island. So I used to sleep in it, too, hang around, you know. See, the, the, the Fourth Avenue and Second Avenue subway, come up the elevator all the way up, all the way up to right there, where you take the boat to, to Staten Island.

LEVINE: Right.

HERNANDEZ: That's it, right there, they turn around and go back.

LEVINE: Oh.

HERNANDEZ: That was my hangout. That's, every day I come out to South Ferry because it remind me of my younger days around here. Every day, the first thing, you see me here - Battery Park, the Seaport. Because I used to go to the (unintelligible) market seaport, too. Help the guy with the fish there, (unintelligible) unload the cargo, you know, yeah. I, I love this section because it reminds me of when I was very young, you know?

LEVINE: Yes.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: Every day I come out with number one subway, see me in Battery Park, take the ferry, go back. 'Course before you pay a nickel down, then I, I would pay, uh, 25 cents all over, now you don't pay no. So that's how come I make a couple, three, just get away from the city, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: I love the water.

LEVINE: You love the water. You always loved the water.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, oh, every day you see me around here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Just getting try to stay away from my neighborhood. I don't, I don't hang around my neighborhood.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: Nah.

LEVINE: Well, what is it about the water that, that, that you like so much?

HERNANDEZ: You see, why, you see, I, my dream coming true this way because I, I travel, I, I, I've been, in 40, in 40, I mean 28 countries all over the world. I've been in all Europe, like, like I've been in Germany, been in Francia many times, Francia, been in Spain, been in England, then I've been in Copenhagen, Denmark. I've been in Belgium, Antwerp, that's a seaport, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: And, uh, I like travel. Then this way to Central America, I've been in Argentina, Brazil, um, uh, Panama Canal, up this way. Been in Jamaica and Costa Rica, Honduras, you know, been all over those places.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: And I worked on the Canal, too, Panama Canal.

LEVINE: Oh, wow.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, Balboa, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, tell me how it was that you were taken to Ellis Island that first time. What happened?

HERNANDEZ: Well, they keep me here for.(unintelligible).

LEVINE: No, but I mean, how did, how, did somebody approach you on the street?
Is that how?

HERNANDEZ: No, no, no, no, on board the ship. On the ship.

LEVINE: You were still on the Barcelona?

HERNANDEZ: No.

LEVINE: No.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, that, that, that's where they catch me on board the ship,
yeah.

LEVINE: And...

HERNANDEZ: Fourth time.

LEVINE: And, and, and then they just put...

HERNANDEZ: They bring me here.

LEVINE: Did they, did they handcuff you? Did they...

HERNANDEZ: No, in those days, no, no, they don't handcuff you, no.

LEVINE: No, they just said "Come with me." And...

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, I told them I was through security (unintelligible) because,
you see, when you was stowaway in those days, they keep you here, the company
had to pay for every day that you're here to the government. And they wouldn't
bother send you, then so you had to say you was a passenger.

LEVINE: Oh.

HERNANDEZ: You know what I mean? Oh, you know, you know, you're a
stowaway coming in, but on the way back you got a ticket like you was a, like you
was one of the passengers.

LEVINE: Right. So they would charge the Barcelona...

HERNANDEZ: The company (unintelligible).

LEVINE: Shipping line?

HERNANDEZ: Because I come up on different companies, too, you know. (names of shipping lines unintelligible). It was the (unintelligible) person that they catches' company. Any stowaway come up, with any matter, no matter where you come from, they charge to the company.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: So they charged the company and you...

HERNANDEZ: The government charged, too, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. So what, what was it like? How were you treated here at Ellis Island?

HERNANDEZ: Oh, very good. I was trying to stay here, every time I no have to go back out. Those days was very good –good food, we had good treated, got a good hospital. Hospital is good because if you are sick, they take you to hospital for a small little bit in there. That was merchant marine hospital, too, at the same time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: You know?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: And, uh, they give you clothes before you go back, the social worker, you know, usually give you some clothes, you know. So, you know, so now by me said to, to the other stowaways, they all want to come back. And when they see me go back to Cuba with different clothes on, they all want to come back. They'll follow me. We used to (unintelligible), just we used to get on a ship before, like about, just about two hours before the ship left, they close out the (unintelligible), you know.

LEVINE: So, do you..

HERNANDEZ: Some of the longshoremen help, too, to come on the ship, in Cuba, yeah.

LEVINE: So, in other words, just because you came back, you had new clothes and everything, other people stowed away...

HERNANDEZ: With me, yes.

LEVINE: ...with you the next time.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah, very good, they used to be, they used to follow me to come here.

LEVINE: Right.

HERNANDEZ: Oh, I was three or four together. So what I do, since I know this for myself, when, when, when I come up on the ship again, I know they going to get everybody, so what I do, I know how to get up on the dock. So they, they busy, they can't get me, so I runned, I run myself. They keep, they keep all the other people in. I run two times. Oh, yeah, I was running.

LEVINE: Well, let me ask you this, when you got to Ellis Island, where did you sleep?

HERNANDEZ: Oh, we slept on a bunk. Two, two level bunk, one on top of the other...

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: ...up on the second floor. They got second floor and third floor. Now, but not if you was a bad boy here and fight, they got a lock, they lock you up like a jail.

LEVINE: In a cell?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, right down, down on the first floor, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: And everybody come up from jail that was bad, they lock them over here, too. They had it, they got it set like a jail here, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. Were you ever in, locked up?

HERNANDEZ: Huh?

LEVINE: Were you ever locked up here?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah. Yeah, cause I fought, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, because you fought. But you wanted to come here, right?

HERNANDEZ: Huh?

LEVINE: You wanted to be here.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, but you see what happened. We, we had a, we had a, we used to play cards – poker, I mean 21, like that, so we used to fight for that, you know, so the police caught us, they don't want you play, so they locked me out. I was a bad kid. I was a gambler.

LEVINE: Would you gamble when you were playing cards?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. We used gamble 21, you know, yeah, Blackjack, that's how I loved playing Blackjack.

LEVINE: Yeah. What else did you do for, for entertainment while you were here?

HERNANDEZ: Well, they used to, social work, they used to play ball right in the front where you caught the ferry, the old ferry.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Used to play baseball there for (unintelligible) try some fresh air, no, yeah. And then sometimes we used to go to the movie and to the church.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember any movies that you saw here?

HERNANDEZ: Ah, lot of movies, was they, uh, like, uh, picture like...see, they go, they, they used to bring the new movie, the, the, the new movie they make it, before the previews, they showed the movies.

LEVINE: Oh, they showed them here, previews of what was going to go into the theaters?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: We saw all the movies here.

LEVINE: Wow.

HERNANDEZ: And I meet a lot of people from all over the world here, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: Especially, especially lot of Italians was here in those days, and, uh, mostly Italian, from Europe, and a lot of people Norway.

LEVINE: Really?

HERNANDEZ: Norway.

LEVINE: Were these seamen or these were stowaways or they were passengers? Who were they?

HERNANDEZ: No, lot of those guys was jumping ship, yeah.

LEVINE: Jump ship.

HERNANDEZ: A lot of those guys stowed away, too.

LEVINE: The Norwegians and the Italians?

HERNANDEZ: Norwegians, Italians, oh there was a lot of Italians here. Specially a lot of Italians come out of the jail, they put them here to send them back.

LEVINE: Oh, to be deported, they had...

HERNANDEZ: To be deported, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Deportation, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Even me, right now I'm not a citizen.

LEVINE: No? Hm.

HERNANDEZ: But I'm allowed to be in the country because there are no relations to Cuba, you understand? Yeah. The last time I come up here, uh, now, since I come out as a stowaway, I come out as a merchant marine on a ship to Houston, or to Galveston, Texas, on a, a Norwegian ship.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: I come out as a cook there. Then I pay off there and come out to New York, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: This time I remember me a lot, a lot, a lot. For me it was just like, uh, nothing those days. They was treating you so good, so nice here. And I meet so many people from all over the world, that, you know, they was going back and they used to, where you slept, you change your, your linen every day. And you had to take a shower every day. You maybe took a shower every day, you took a bath, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah, just roughly, do you have any idea how many people were here who had jumped ship?

HERNANDEZ: Oh, there was a lot of stowaways from all over the world. Oh, there was a lot, a lot of people stowaway. They even China here, but not too many China. But they have like a, like a, they got, they got a lot of seamen and they jumped ship, too. (Unintelligible).

LEVINE: Right.

HERNANDEZ: They had to send them back.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: And they keep them over here until the ship come back and put them back on the same or another ship. That's how I meet other people here from all over, especially Norwegian, people Denmark, and people from Italia, a lot, and from Espana, especially lot of people of Spain.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, plenty. Because see, here at South Ferry, there used to be a lot of restaurant of people from Spain. They was helping me, too, you know. You know, helping washing dishes, all that. But I was, those days when I was stowaway, I don't care. When I come over here, just like to me was, uh, Paradise.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Cause we have everything here - clean, good food those days, they...I make a little money, I shine the shoes. So it was very good for me those days, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Also, if you're sick and you'll get...

LEVINE: Medical care.

HERNANDEZ: Oh, very good, oh yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: The other way, in those days, I had a little decision from Cuba coming over here. I had gonorrhea and they cured me here, too.

LEVINE: I'm sorry, say that again. I didn't catch ...

HERNANDEZ: I had like V, VD...

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: ...and they cured me here.

LEVINE: Oh, they cured you here?

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah, they got good hospital here, very nice hospital. That was, that was the ferry (?) hospital. The doctor that was here worked for the Navy.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Navy doctor, yeah. And, uh, they kept (?) it good, clean, beautiful, yeah. I had, I had, to me, just like, uh, I love the place. I love this place.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Oh, that's nice. Would you say there were like 100 or 200, how many, how many other people were either jumped ship or stowed away...

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...when you were here?

HERNANDEZ: Oh, oh, well because see, most of the people on the side I was, they was a stowaway or jumped ship, on my side.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. On your side.

HERNANDEZ: Because they got a side for the passengers.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: People who come out here to work for the quarter or quarter to (unintelligible).

LEVINE: Right.

HERNANDEZ: But now my, this side used to be the fourth floor and this side of the building was nothing but jumped ship and stowaway and people come up from jail.

LEVINE: Yeah. How many of those people, just a rough idea?

HERNANDEZ: Oh, about, we had about 2-300 people.

LEVINE: Oh, really? And how about the passengers? Did you have any contact with the passengers?

HERNANDEZ: No, we see the passengers that (unintelligible) for the passengers. Like the big auditorium that you see.

LEVINE: The great hall there.

HERNANDEZ: They come out. Passengers used to come out and then we come out, after they come out for the church.

LEVINE: Ah.

HERNANDEZ: But we see the passengers through the, the gate outside. Yeah, we see them.

LEVINE: I see.

HERNANDEZ: We had a different dormitory, different, different place to stay and then, yeah, but you can always see the passengers. We don't mingle with them. They don't let you, but you can see like in the church, they want who want to go to church on Sunday. The passenger go first in one place and then we go to the back, and the security was watching us so we don't mess with passengers, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well...

HERNANDEZ: Very nice over here. They don't have no gun, no, no stakeout, no...

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: There was, there was (unintelligible).

LEVINE: What can you remember about the church services that you attended?

HERNANDEZ: They had a church catholico. They got three churches. They had two Catholic churches here at this thing. Two got the same as. They got Catholico

church, they got the other, Christian or something. They got two different churches here in those days.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: I used to go to the Catholic Church because I'm a Catholic, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, in those days, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. And did they have...?

HERNANDEZ: And the Father used to come out with you, see if he could help you up, and what could I do, get in touch with your family and all? Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Help you fill out the appeal just to see. When you were here you used to get like, uh, appeal. They, uh, they give it here to see if you want to get appeal, so they won't send you back. So I used to get, make all the time...

LEVINE: Appeals?

HERNANDEZ: ...so I could stay here more longer.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: They send up to Washington, D.C.

LEVINE: Right.

HERNANDEZ: That way they'll keep you, when the appeal come out and deny you, then they send you back.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: I used to stay here two, three months.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. And, and when you went outside, did you go outside, um, under supervision or could you just walk...?

HERNANDEZ: No, no.

LEVINE: outside whenever you want?

HERNANDEZ: No, no, we go, we go with supervision, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: When we go outside to play baseball twice a week for couple hours, well, well, you know, we were supervised. But you see like, uh, in those days, like, uh, you know, we was surrounded by water and the only way you can get the ferry is right over there, you know. 'Cause it used to be like a small little ferry, like uh, like the one you got there to Staten Island.

LEVINE: The Circle Line?

HERNANDEZ: No, no, no, no, no.

LEVINE: Oh, the staff boat, the staff boat. A little...

HERNANDEZ: That was a special boat.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Ellis Island boat, they used to call it.

LEVINE: Yes.

HERNANDEZ: That was different than now. No, it was a little come up here. Small, little ferry the same size you see over there where they go.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: I know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: It was a small little ferry back and forth, the same, the same way that, that they got, you see the one that Ellis Island, I mean go to Staten Island, but it was, was a small ferry. It would dock here and dock over there where they got the Coast Guard on South Street and (unintelligible) and South Ferry, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: That was, uh, next to the Staten Island Ferry. You dock there, yeah.

LEVINE: Right.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, those were good days, good days.

LEVINE: So you remember that period of your life with good feeling?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I told you social services and, uh, we'd play baseball over there, you know, in the summertime. In the wintertime, you know you got inside and take you to (unintelligible), you know, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, very good.

LEVINE: Yeah. OK, we're going to pause here while Ryan flips the tape and we'll continue in a minute.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, OK.

Pause to flip tape.

LEVINE: You mentioned earlier, Mr. Hernandez, about the social workers here at Ellis Island. What can you, what do you remember, do you remember what organizations they came from?

HERNANDEZ: Well, the church was over here, too, with you.

LEVINE: The church.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: But a social worker was more, more familiar with the people.

LEVINE: Yeah, well, how did a social worker help you in particular?

HERNANDEZ: Well, like, you know, like if you already probably you need to get in contact with your family, if you have family here or where you reach your family. You know, you talk to her and you, you, you go for interview when they call you up.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: And they help you how could you get your paper and all that, you know, they try to, try to if they can help you with your papers and they explain to you how you can, when you go back to your country, how you can do your papers, how to use your passport to come to over here. They will get, they will explain to you about the law that how you can come up legal to the country.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: And they, they was always told, you know, giving you advice, you know, how's your family, if you got any family like here, or how they get in touch over there, you know, all that. Yeah, they were giving, very good social workers, very good.

LEVINE: Did, did a social worker ever help you...

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: ...in particular?

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah, they did.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: They did until like one time I want to make an appeal because they denied it here, so that I want to make an appeal to Washington, D.C. because they hold me more longer, I stay here more longer.

LEVINE: This was a pill, did you say?

HERNANDEZ: Appeal, appeal to, to, so I could stay here more longer, you know. So I could stay in the United States.

LEVINE: Oh, an appeal, uh-huh, uh-huh. Appeal, uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: So what they did, helping me to make an application, send it to Washington. That way I could stay here more time because I want to be here.

LEVINE: And they helped you do that?

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah, oh yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: They used to, they used to help the people fill out the papers to come back and, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: How would you do, yeah.

LEVINE: And the social workers, the social workers themselves, were, were they, um, were they immigrants? Did you, did they come from other countries, or what...

HERNANDEZ: No, they was..

LEVINE: were they?

HERNANDEZ: They was Americans.

LEVINE: They were Americans.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah,

LEVINE: And they ...

HERNANDEZ: and they was, they was working here.

LEVINE: And they came out every day by boat?

HERNANDEZ: No, they have to, yeah, they come over there, they got the office here. Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Were there other offices here that you, that you, um, went to?

HERNANDEZ: How they would look at... yeah, they did after, let me see, yeah, they have, uh, one around '39, about was '40, that help you with the people come up, that would come from Spain, deported, you know, because when the Franco and the Revolution of Spain. So they come over here and they help you how to fix your papers to stay in the country. 'Cause you see, in those days, those people who left the United States, that was illegal, they went to Spain to fight against Franco, and then they come by here (unintelligible) for Spain, they come back and they put them over here. They help you about to, to get out, you know that, yeah.

LEVINE: And did you know many of those people?

HERNANDEZ: From Spain? Yeah, because those are the people that I told you before...

LEVINE: From the...

HERNANDEZ: They left from the Cuban Club Mella, 163 and, um, Fifth Avenue, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: From the Lincoln Brigade, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. So did they come back with stories that, that they told you?

HERNANDEZ: Eh?

LEVINE: Did they come back with stories from Spain...

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: ...that they would tell you about?

HERNANDEZ: They tell you how they did in Spain, how they fight, how they put, how Franco, when Franco took over, you know. Because in those days, it was the, uh, Alcala Somora (doublecheck spelling) was the person who took over Spain, then Franco took over him, you know. And that's when they, all the people, have to leave.

LEVINE: Hm.

HERNANDEZ: They told me about Spain, the fight, the Lincoln Brigade, you know, yeah. Most of the people who went to the Lincoln Brigade was a member of the Communist Party.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Majority.

LEVINE: Now did you stay associated with that club?

HERNANDEZ: Eh?

LEVINE: Did you stay associated, did you...

HERNANDEZ: with that club?

LEVINE: ...keep going to the club?

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah, I used to sleep there, too, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: I used to sleep in the back of this, of this. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: And they, see in that place they used to have a restaurant, too.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: So I help, you know, you eat there, you sleep there, too, yeah, oh yeah. They had two clubs, the one from Spain and the one from Cuba. The one from Spain they called Social Espanola, and the other one they called the Cuba, the Cuban Club. That one was same, it was same building. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah. They help me a lot, you know, over there. In those days, that was, uh, that's when the home relief was established, so what we did, they took the people who paid no rent, they took them over the forest or to the stream and they would, would bring them out to Marshall's Grove and we took, we bring them back. We help to bring them back and forth. Then they had to wait another thirty days before they could do that.

LEVINE: Oh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, the barber up there in Harlem, in Harlem. (unintelligible).

LEVINE: Well, in Harlem?

HERNANDEZ: They, they, like a lot of people got bedridden, they out two or three months, or they send the (unintelligible)? Members will think they are people who can still walk, so after the (unintelligible) left, we put them back.

LEVINE: Ah, and then they have to wait thirty days?

HERNANDEZ: Thirty days before they can go back.

LEVINE: And do it again?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And this was during the Depression?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, that's right. I help a lot. I help a lot.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: I used to come out with demonstrations to fight against, you know, the, the Depression. We used to come out to Union Square always. Most of the Sundays and Saturdays there would be a big meeting. The Union Square used to be like, uh, the place to protest or complain about anything against the government.

LEVINE: Right.

HERNANDEZ: Right up at Union Square, yeah.

LEVINE: And would, would people, would people stand up on boxes and give talks, or how, did people speak...

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: ...at Union Square?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. There was a, there was a guy used to be General Secretary of the Communist Party Holme, used to speak over there. And, uh, right across the street, that's where they make The Daily Worker, the paper, newspaper. Used to call The Daily Worker, used to come up and take them all uptown. Yeah. Yeah. And, uh, what the hell the others guy's name? Browley, Browley used to be a candidate of the Communist Party to be a President, you know, you know. (Unintelligible) among those people.

LEVINE: Yeah, does this club still exist?

HERNANDEZ: No, no, it's been gone.

LEVINE: Gone. When did it, when did it close down?

HERNANDEZ: Closed, it closed, oh, after, after Franco, they closed the place.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: When Franco took over, they closed the place. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, now, did the Cuban people that you knew from that club, did they stay together in some...

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: social way?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah. They, uh, then they change, they come out to 14th Street between 8th and 7th Avenue. They're over there. They still got a club over there.

LEVINE: They still do?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, makes no, you know, no one saying I did, but they got a club over there. That's at 14th Street between 8th and 7th Avenue.

LEVINE: Ah.

HERNANDEZ: They got food over there you buy cheap, you know. I go there because, see they got people for the Revolution from Spain, those days, they are still over there, in my (unintelligible).

LEVINE: Ah.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: But, but the club is different now.

HERNANDEZ: Oh, definitely, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. No more Communist ideas, no, no, no, no.

LEVINE: It's a social situation.

HERNANDEZ: Social, sure, sure, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. But you still go there, you...

HERNANDEZ: I go there sometimes, ...

LEVINE: ...still have people who are friends?

HERNANDEZ: drop by, talk about...

LEVINE: That's wonderful.

HERNANDEZ: ...those days, you know. I meet a lot of people you see, like, uh, I don't see many people my age.

LEVINE: Right.

HERNANDEZ: Mean (unintelligible) I only got about two, three people. I got some guy from Greek who was merchant marine in my days. I meet him at the South Ferry every day, you know, sometimes we talk about... He sure got a memory, and look, look like a bull (?).

LEVINE: Huh.

HERNANDEZ: He's younger.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: He knows Friday he might, that's it. He don't care, but he's very (unintelligible).

LEVINE: He doesn't care about it.

HERNANDEZ: No, no, no.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, what keeps you going? What keeps you going about your life?

HERNANDEZ: What keeps me going? Well, uh, I was, uh, I like all the time, you know, to try to keep me moving, or to take a shower, I do my own cooking, see, in my building that's for senior citizens, they got dining room over there, too.

LEVINE: Oh.

HERNANDEZ: But I don't go, I do my own cooking, you know. I don't have to go to the street if I don't want to, I come up from my apartment, living on the 4th Floor, down to the basement to eat, it's 35 cents breakfast, 75 cents for dinner, but I don't, you know. I'm tired to do lines, sit down, among too many people, want to be, you

know. So I got my apartment nice and, uh, I do my own cooking. I got a (unintelligible), some girl come up to my apartment four days, I mean three days, four hours, you know, clean my whole place, wash clothes, over there, you know. It's a nice building, too.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: More for senior citizens, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Your building is for senior citizens?

HERNANDEZ: Eh?

LEVINE: Your building is strictly for senior citizens?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, and some, uh, and some handymen, you know, people can work over there. But the majority, 90 percent of the home is for senior citizens, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: That's, uh, 595 Columbus, well, you know, between (unintelligible) 1 Central Park.

LEVINE: Ah.

HERNANDEZ: And they, uh, they take people once a week or twice a week to Atlantic City, you know. They charge you \$13, over there they give you ten, you know, take... They take you to different parts of the state, you know. They keep you busy.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: They got social club, too, over there. You can, you know, like if you don't want to be in your apartment, you can sit, play dominoes or card (unintelligible) over there, and then they got, uh, at nighttime in the lobby, they got a TV, you can stay all night long, you don't have to, you know, very.... They got security, anybody goes to your apartment, got to call you, very...take good care.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: They got social worker there, too.

LEVINE: So you're satisfied with your living arrangements?

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What are the, what, did you ever have any heroes in your life?

HERNANDEZ: Any what?

LEVINE: Heroes? Anybody you looked up to that you, that you, um, either knew...? A hero? A hero? Somebody that you wanted to be like? Somebody you knew that you respected that made a difference to you? Was there anybody ever that you looked up to that way?

HERNANDEZ: Well, (unintelligible).

LEVINE: Yeah, that you, that you admired, that you wanted to be like, that you knew or heard about or ...??

HERNANDEZ: Well, I meet a lot of people I like to, you know, to talk to and be with them. See a lot, I'm a friendly way. See the other way I meet so many people all over the world, since I was kid, because I used to hang around with tourists in Cuba, too.

LEVINE: You hung around with...?

HERNANDEZ: With, uh, with American tourists, you know, (unintelligible). Havana was very famous for American tourists, you know, and for tours from all over the world. So after I become merchant marine, I used to go to Tampa for me to (unintelligible), buy me a car, said to him, take it with a ferry to Havana, make money in Havana with American tourists - summertime. In the wintertime, I come back here and ship out. Yeah, I like, like to, I like to be friendly with people. I born that way.

LEVINE: So, when you, when you were, um, associating with the tourists, the American tourists, were you taking them as a guide? Did you take them around the city?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Take them around.

LEVINE: Is that what you did?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah, take them around to different places they want to go, to Rumba (unintelligible) Factory, to see the country, to see the city, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, that's what I was doing then, yeah.

LEVINE: And where were you when you joined the merchant marines?

HERNANDEZ: When I joined merchant marines? I, I come up here as a, uh, on a ship, Norwegian ship.

LEVINE: The what ship?

HERNANDEZ: Norwegian ship.

LEVINE: Norwegian ship. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Si. I come over here to New Orleans and then back and forth, from Havana, New Orleans, to Havana, then I took my paper, my seaman paper then.

LEVINE: In Havana?

HERNANDEZ: No, no, Havana, no, yeah.

LEVINE: In, in, in, uh...?

HERNANDEZ: In the United States, because you can't ship out if you don't got the American papers on an American ship. So I shipped out, did my seaman paper, that's how I become a merchant marine. I thought I'd just watch on this, you know, just took the apartment. Then you come out, learn about being cooking or second bak...I mean, second cook and, second cook and baking. I make how to bake bread, pie, uh, make pie donuts, donuts, hard cake donuts, so I become, you know, I become a Second Cook and then I become a Cook and Baker.

LEVINE: Hm.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, now, were you a merchant marine during World War II?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you see any kind of, uh, of, um, action? Did you see any war...?

HERNANDEZ: No, no, because we was most, mostly near the coast.
(Unintelligible)

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: I never, I never been, no, outside the...

LEVINE: No? OK.

HERNANDEZ: No, no. After that I did. After World War Second, I went to, like in 1945, when they attacked Pearl Harbor, I went, then, then I went, I went to, from here, no, from San Francisco to Honolulu for the (unintelligible) and then come back after Pearl Harbor. Sure, I do a lot of traveling.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

HERNANDEZ: Then I went to Argentina after the (unintelligible). The big ship, the big German ship, they took them up in Argentina because Argentina those days have more German, lot of influence of German, lot of German over there, so I meet a lot of German people in Argentina. Oh, I probably meet a lot of people, yeah.

LEVINE: What would you say was the high point of your life?

HERNANDEZ: My what?

LEVINE: What time in your life was your best? What do you consider the best time of your life?

HERNANDEZ: When I would travel.

LEVINE: When you what?

HERNANDEZ: Travel on the ship.

LEVINE: Travel on the ship.

HERNANDEZ: Meet different people here, there, you know, travel.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Uh, like a Europe person, I like a more Europe.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Like, uh, we going to France, and to the island, Dublin, that's the island. I used to go there. I like, I like Spain, but I like, uh, Europe a little more –

uh, France, France, Spain, Italy, and, uh, Copenhagen, Denmark, (unintelligible), too. Used to go to Stockholm.

LEVINE: What about, um, what was, was there a time in your life that you consider, um, the worst time in your life? Was there a bad time ever?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. In the ship, the ship, I had a rough time, too.

LEVINE: How do you mean?

HERNANDEZ: See, I had bad weather at, at sea. Coming down in Atlantic, north, in the North Sea, (unintelligible) ship might go (unintelligible), yeah. I had a bad time going to, to New York, to going to, to England on the English Channel. That's the North Sea, very rough water. And coming out one time in, in a ship M.S. Spokane, coming from New Orleans, you have to come to Cape Cross, (unintelligible) Cape, before you come here. Rough water.

LEVINE: Hm.

HERNANDEZ: Almost we sunk, oh, yeah, oh, yeah, oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Were you afraid?

HERNANDEZ: And I don't know how to swim.

LEVINE: Ah. So you were afraid for your life?

HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah, oh yeah, yeah, oh yeah. And I don't know how to swim.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Wow.

HERNANDEZ: (Unintelligible)

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: But I know one thing. I know that life, you know, life preserver, I know if you ever get in the water, I know how to happen, but I don't know, I've never been in the water.

LEVINE: Yeah, well, that's good.

HERNANDEZ: I know I got, I got the (unintelligible) in case I get something, I don't know what it, keep myself alive, you know?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: That I know.

LEVINE: Yeah, good. Um, let's see. Well, uh, when you look back on this now, when you look back on the fact that you stowed away and, and was here at Ellis Island...

HERNANDEZ: Well...

LEVINE: ...how do you think about it?

HERNANDEZ: I think about that I'm very successful, see.

LEVINE: I'm sorry, say...?

HERNANDEZ: I'm successful, very successful.

LEVINE: Successful.

HERNANDEZ: I'm successful. I (unintelligible) for my life. The other one, my dream coming true, coming what I wanted. Now, I would say, that because I've been in too many trouble, too much trouble, I would figure, I said a lot of times, I'd be lucky, if I get to 50 years. Thank God, look, I've lived over that now.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: I keep living (unintelligible).

LEVINE: Huh.

HERNANDEZ: (Unintelligible)

LEVINE: And how do you feel about being Cuban and being living in America for such a long time?

HERNANDEZ: Well, let me talk about it now. You talk about things that I ...I would now, I would like to go back to Cuba.

LEVINE: You would? Why is that?

HERNANDEZ: Eh?

LEVINE: Why would you like to go back now?

HERNANDEZ: Why? See, I'm getting old. I haven't seen Cuba now for the last forty years now, since Castro, you know. A lot of people in America went to Korea, Pusan, Korea on a ship, see. In 1952, then I went to Cuba and then come back in 1954. I haven't been back to Cuba. Now I would like to go back to Cuba. I still got two sons – I got one girl and one boy in Cuba

LEVINE: Oh.

HERNANDEZ: I haven't seen for a long time. You understand? I got a lot of cousins or relatives over there in Santiago, Cuba. And, uh, I got nobody, no family here.

LEVINE: Ah, so you'd like to go back for your family?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, the reason I don't, I don't, the only thing I'm afraid is because they don't send my check there because there's no relationship between United States and Cuba, you understand?

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

HERNANDEZ: Now if you go anywhere in the world, they send my Social Security check, but not to Cuba. That's why I'm so proud to maybe they fix it up this thing, you know. I think that this goes, this going to be, they're working to do that now.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: So I'll probably be relationship (unintelligible).

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: That's my, that's my dream, to go back. Believe me, I swear to God.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how do you feel about this country?

HERNANDEZ: I guess, uh, you gave me life. You gave me what I was looking for, I got it. How do I feel about this country? I love, I love this country. Got to love it! Listen, you see, in this country, I've been through a lot of things, but even told one thing about. Even in the South, in those days, you know it was bad for black people, black skin. I was getting along pretty good, too. I've been in Savannah, Georgia.

I've been in New Orleans. I've been in Mississippi. I've been in (unintelligible) Mobile, Alabama, and those, (unintelligible), I get by.

LEVINE: Why do you think you got along as well as you did?

HERNANDEZ: I? Where, where?

LEVINE: Why do you think you got along in the south, as a black man, as well as you did?

HERNANDEZ: Well, uh, in those days I hear about so much about, you know, and, uh, I, this is, this is what helping me in the south, I tell you what. You know what helping me in the south? That, uh, besides that I have black skin, I was speaking Spanish. In those days, they were, they were different if you speak, if you wasn't American-born. You understand what I mean?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Now, in our paper, when you take the seaman paper here, they don't put, those days they don't put like a white or if Spanish, you are Spanish, it doesn't matter what color you are. They don't put black or pure Spanish (unintelligible).

LEVINE: Oh.

HERNANDEZ: Now in the South, I've been in a lot of places, like Norfolk, Virginia, (unintelligible) very dark-skinned. Norfolk, Virginia, uh, South Carolina, you know, Jackson. And, uh, I've been in them. You had to walk by, you know, I'd be, like I'd be coming from the ship with two different people of different colors, white, all that, so they let me go with them, they, they let me go those days, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Now it's different.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: I get by. Even sometime, I, I, I get a ship from New York, a ship out of New York City. I go to different country. The ship don't come back here, it come back to other seaport. We get paid over there. We have to come back by train, cause this is my main port, you know, here in New York, my home port.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: So I go up on the train, like in those days, used to come up the black one train, the others a certain time. I come up on the train with the, mixed in the crew, they never bothered me, no.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you experience any prejudice for being black?

HERNANDEZ: No, I, uh, you see, I always, I, look, I'm a human being, I just said I never (unintelligible) prejudice, but I figured that's something where you can get along with people. By the way, you see, that I got more white people friends of mine than my own people.

LEVINE: Huh.

HERNANDEZ: (Unintelligible).

LEVINE: Huh.

HERNANDEZ: Right here.

LEVINE: Good. Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: I got plenty (unintelligible) lot of family from friends of my wife, but I got better friends right now, though, than that, a lot of black and lot of Spanish right now...

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: ...in New York City.

LEVINE: Well, when in your life did you get married?

HERNANDEZ: Eh?

LEVINE: Did you, did you get married somewhere along the line?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, in Cuba and then I get married here, too.

LEVINE: When was the first time?

HERNANDEZ: Well, in Cuba, it was in 1941.

LEVINE: So, you, after you came back from Ellis Island?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah. I got married in Cuba. I got married, and there, there, there was, there were bases, there were American, American bases, Army bases in Cuba in Havana. And I got there, I just come up from Panama, like I told you. I left on December 7, 1941, when they attack Pearl Harbor. So I get in Cuba and they said we'll make an Army base in Havana, so I got a job there, and they give me because I speak little English, know, they give me as a foreman, labor foreman, so I working over there, yeah.

LEVINE: Is that where you met your wife?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, in San Antonio, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was she working also at the same...?

HERNANDEZ: Eh?

LEVINE: Was she working where you were? How did you meet her?

HERNANDEZ: No, I met her (unintelligible) in that little town.

LEVINE: Ah.

HERNANDEZ: She belonged to a small little town in Havana, they called San Antonio.

LEVINE: I see.

HERNANDEZ: That was where the Americans made the Army bases.

LEVINE: Right.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah,(unintelligible) yeah, Army bases. And that's how I meet him, yeah. She died now.

LEVINE: What was her name?

HERNANDEZ: Hilda, Hilda Quantana Echeverria.

LEVINE: How, could you...?

HERNANDEZ: Hilda, Hilda.

LEVINE: Hilda. And her last name?

HERNANDEZ: Well..

LEVINE: What it was?

HERNANDEZ: Quantana, Quantana.

LEVINE: Quintana?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: With a k?

HERNANDEZ: With a Q, Q-U-A-N-T, Quantana. But I married here, too.

LEVINE: You married another person? Here?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah. I married a girl here, let me see, probably now twelve years. We don't live together. She was my good friend, we married. I figure this way, if anything happens to me here, she can get my check, you know, over here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: My union check over here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: We get along pretty nice, you know, yeah. She's a Puerto Rican, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: And I figure, too, because I was going to begin to fill my paper out that she's American citizen and help me, too, you know. There's a lot to think of.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: So that's the way it is.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: That's what I been thinking, well, you know.

LEVINE: Right.

HERNANDEZ: Now we get along, she lives on one side, me on the other side. She call me, I go to her house, she come to my apartment. We got no relation, but she's like corporal friend.

LEVINE: Right.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, you know, very good, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, when I went to the hospital, she, oh, she was helping take care, you know.

LEVINE: Very nice, uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: So we go.

LEVINE: Is there anything else you can think of about Ellis Island that we may not have talked about?

HERNANDEZ: (Unintelligible) Yeah. Every day I sit at the park and watch and see here every day. Got me remembering.

LEVINE: Yeah, well...

HERNANDEZ: Every time I pass by here and then I go to Staten Island. I pass here, I got my binoculars, you know, to look at my house. I tell other people this is, a lot of people I say "Oh, that's Ellis Island, that used to be my house." I tell other people that this used to be my house, which it used to be my house in those days.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, I'll always...

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: remember, this place remember me a lot of things – good, good things.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Only bad thing, well I know I have to go someday and be back, I (unintelligible) have to go back and fight again. Havana was bad in those days, too, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Very bad situation, very bad.

LEVINE: Yeah. But you feel as though it would be okay now for you to be back there?

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, uh, yeah, well, uh, that's what I, I would like to, to see that they, you know, make a relationship with Cuba. Yeah, I'm going.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, I go.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: You see, like it's good to see, like uh, Santiessa(?) now. When I see the island, it reminds me of my good old days, when I was younger then. So now I want to see my country without war, without racists, who's left over, you know, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: How many I'm go? Maybe I got 30 years more, maybe I got nothing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: You understand what I mean? So I would like to go see without war, without racists, who's left over of my friends, you know, I see, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HERNANDEZ: That's my dream.

LEVINE: Well...

HERNANDEZ: I hope my dream come out true like this happening.

LEVINE: Well, you, your first dream came out, so maybe this dream will come out, too.

HERNANDEZ: Yeah, now I, I'm prepared, too. I hope everything be alright, yep.

LEVINE: Well, that's wonderful. Well, I wish you get your dream and I want to thank you so much for a beautiful interview.

HERNANDEZ: Thank you for coming over here, see you here, too.

LEVINE: And we're going to give you a tape of the interview and then I'll show you where this tape will go in the museum.

HERNANEZ: Alright. Esta bien.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERNANDEZ: I will drop here sometime, too, and look around.

LEVINE: Yes, you should certainly come back and visit. Absolutely. OK. I have been talking with Artemio Hecheverria Hernandez, who came from Cuba, started stowing away in 1935 and continued for about 14 times until 1940. And, uh, today is July 30, 1998. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

END OF TRANSCRIPT