

EI-772

JORGE FERNANDEZ

BIRTHDATE: JANUARY 13, 1926

INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 24, 1996

RUNNING TIME: 27:00

INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: KEVIN DALEY

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO

ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: KIMBERLY MAIER

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

COUNTRY, YEAR: CHILE, 1929

AGE: 3, FOR ONE YEAR, RETURNED TO CHILE IN 1930

RESIDENCES:

- **VALPARAISO, CHILE**
- **THE US: TARRYTOWN, NY**

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul SIGRIST for the National Park Service. Today is Wednesday, July 24th, 1996. I'm at the Ellis Island recording studio with Jorge Fernandez. Mr. Fernandez was born in Chile. Came to the United States in 1929 when he was three years old, and the family stayed one year and returned to Chile in 1930. Present also is Alejandro Fernandez who is Mr. Fernandez's son, and who will function as interpreter for us during the interview. I should also say that Kevin Daley is running the recording equipment in the studio. Can we begin Mr. Fernandez, by you giving me your birth date please?

FERNANDEZ: January 13, 1926.

SIGRIST: And Alejandro, speak as full voiced as possible so it will record all of us. Mr. Fernandez, where in Chile were you born?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) In Valparaiso, Chile.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me where in the country that's located?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) In the central part of Chile.

SIGRIST: Tell me what your family was doing there to make a living?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) My mother was a housewife. My father worked in construction, and my older brother, seven years older. My other brother is five years older and my aunt was three years older.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the house that you lived in, in Chile, if anything?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) I remember. It's a big house with a long stair.
When I was a small guy, it was crazy. He had a big accident,
and needed surgery here. He remembers.

SIGRIST: What else do you remember about that accident? Tell me the
story about falling on the stairs.

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) I remember the stories that my mother told me.
Every day, he remembered waiting for his Daddy when he came
home from work. He waited at the top of the stairs. When he
could see his father, he'd go down the stairs. And then go down
another stair, and then, while running, he crashed to the floor
and hit his forehead. Then, they went to the hospital. He has a
mark here because he's crazy. He jumped in the bath and
crashed again. Two times.

SIGRIST: And you have a scar right over your nose.

A. FERNANDEZ: He has a line. In school, they called it the Devil's Cross.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what kind of food people eat in Chile.

A. FERNANDEZ: In this time?

SIGRIST: At that time, in the 1920's what kind of food did people eat in Chile?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) Ah, normally we ate a meat soup, beans, corn, spaghetti...

SIGRIST: What kind of meat was in the soup?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) Beef.

SIGRIST: Did you have animals at your house?

FERNANDEZ: No. No. No.

SIGRIST: You said your father was in the construction business? What kinds of things did your parents do for entertainment at that time? When your grandfather wasn't working how did he spend his leisure time? What did he like to do for himself when he wasn't working?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) Same as me. A handyman. We're doing something all the time. Something all the time.

SIGRIST: Were there games that people played when they weren't working at that time?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) No. I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Who came to America first?

FERNANDEZ: My father.

SIGRIST: Why?

FERNANDEZ: (looking at immigration papers) Carlo Fernandez, December, 1928. My mother, June, 1929.

SIGRIST: So your father came first.

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) My grandfather came first because he wanted to change life for my daddy, for their sons. And then we can see here, five or six months before they came. My grandmother and my three uncles, my father and two uncles.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when your father left for America?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) From there?

SIGRIST: From Chile?

FERNANDEZ: No.

SIGRIST: Do you remember getting ready for you to go to America?

FERNANDEZ: Nothing! Nothing! (laughing)

SIGRIST: You were just a little kid. What work did your father get when he first came to America?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) He worked at General Motors in Tarrytown, New York. We go there tomorrow.

SIGRIST: Do you know how he got that job?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) He remembers he worked in the painting department.

SIGRIST: Painting the cars, but does your dad know how your father got the job? How did he go about getting the job when he first came to America?

FERNANDEZ: Ah, no.

A. FERNANDEZ: He say, my grandfather is saying, you grandson. Because all through the war he say to me, I'm coming here because I like this country. It's the same reason. For her and for me. Right now, I bring my daddy, my mom, because I want my daddy to remember everything here. Seventy-three years old.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the ship that your family took to the United States in 1929? In 1929 do you remember what the name of the ship was that you came on?

A. FERNANDEZ: Ah, we have a picture. An uncle of mine, and two friends of my father still live here.

A. FERNANDEZ: I don't know what the question is. He saying two friends of my grandfather and one uncle still live here.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about being on the boat, coming to the United States?

FERNANDEZ: The boat?

SIGRIST: Yes, when you left Chile in 1929, do you remember being on the boat that came to New York?

A. FERNANDEZ: The name?

SIGRIST: Or anything about that experience?

A. FERNANDEZ: He say, he only remembers when he goes on the boat to go back. He went to the bakery in the boat, because the people liked him. They bring cake and everything. He go all day there. Because he ate too much. (laughing)

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever tell you anything about when the ship arrived in New York in 1929? What happened when the ship came to New York in 1929?

A. FERNANDEZ: When they came in? What happened here?

SIGRIST: Yes. What happened? Did his mom ever tell him anything about what that experience was like when the ship first arrived in New York?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) He said he remembers so slow, the mother talking here. She speaks English with the people. He don't remember nothing. He speak English. And then he remembers something about a beach. A long beach and the ocean. This is remember something. The beach and the mother saying he's talking in English. He say, I don't remember that!

SIGRIST: Is there any knowledge about what happened at Ellis Island with the family? Did they come to Ellis Island?

A. FERNANDEZ: Of course!

SIGRIST: Are there any family stories about that?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) He said they don't know nobody here. He remember something when they coming here and then we go to, they go to Tarrytown, somebody lived in the other side of the house, Mrs. Trotty, other people coming here. Mrs. Trotty had a

son the same age as my daddy, they played. That's what he remembers.

SIGRIST: Did your parents learn to speak English?

FERNANDEZ: (In Spanish) My father, I believe. I don't remember. My mother, she did too. But she had a problem. She spoke very little English. Very little.

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) He say, my grandfather, he believe, he talking in English, because he work in the big factory, you know. He remember my mom, my grandmother, have a problem, she talking so little English. So little.

He say, he think in where my grandfather working, maybe the manager talking in Spanish and English. Same right now. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: What memories do you have of that one year that you spent in the United States?

FERNANDEZ: Wooo. (responds in Spanish)

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) He remember when he live here his mom talked to him when they go back.

SIGRIST: Go back to Chile?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) Yeah. He have a truck, a big truck...

SIGRIST: A big trunk.

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) Pick it up. Trunk, yeah. He go to street, he talking in English, he go to street, and when the car coming, the police stop everybody because he go for the car. He remember this.

FERNANDEZ: Nothing more. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Why did the family go back to Chile?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) My grandfather he worked in a car factory. He worked inside for painting. I'm thinking he washed the car before painting. He have too much water. You know, the winters here is too cold. This is a problem when he's sick. It's too much. The doctors say, you go back to Chile, or you'll stay here forever.

SIGRIST: So for health reasons they returned.

A. FERNANDEZ: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Were there other people from Chile who lived in Tarrytown?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) You have an uncle Joseval in New York, and Uncle Jose, and he has a cousin here. Artemio is the name.

SIGRIST: Were they all working in the same factory?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) No. When his cousin came, he was fourteen years old. He stayed here for 15 years and then go back to Chile.

SIGRIST: So the other relatives eventually went back also. It was when you returned to Chile that you remember about the bakery on the ship, correctly. Are there any other memories you have about the experience of going back to Chile?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating). No. No. No. He's too young. He say, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: I was wondering if he remember arriving back in Chile. Did the family live in the same house when they want back?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) Yeah. The same house.

SIGRIST: Who lived in the house while they were away?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) His uncle, my grandmother's sister, and two sons.

SIGRIST: When your dad came back to Chile, did all those people remain in the house? Where did they go?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) When they go back, they looked for another house. Because she had a husband and everything.

SIGRIST: Did your mother and father ever go back to America? After they moved back to Chile in 1930, did they ever go back to the United States?

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) No. No. No.

SIGRIST: When was the first time you went back to the United States?

A. FERNANDEZ: Now.

SIGRIST: This trip. Right now. 1996. Yes?

FERNANDEZ: (in Spanish) Exactly. Thanks to my son.

SIGRIST: What are your impressions of the United States now that you're here for the first time? What does it all look like?

FERNANDEZ: Fantastic. Beautiful.

A. FERNANDEZ: He love it.

SIGRIST: What do you like about it? What are some of the things that you like about this?

FERNANDEZ: (in Spanish) Empire State. Chrysler Building. Central Park.

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) He remembers something about Central Park because one week before we go there, my Dad remember. He know the lake. They have boats for rent. He said it's the same. He remembered.

SIGRIST: Remembered from back, sixty some odd years ago.

A. FERNANDEZ: (translating) He like the people, the car, the highways, the freeways. He thinks that's wonderful.

SIGRIST: Do you still live in the house in Chile that you lived in as a child?

A. FERNANDEZ: No. We moved. I'm born in the same city as my daddy. But then we moved about twenty or half hour away to another city. We own a big house right now.

SIGRIST: Before we end the interview, I was wondering if there's a little song, or a little poem or a prayer that you could say for us on tape in Spanish that you learned as a child?

A. FERNANDEZ: He's thinking about this for me. My grandmother's thinking.

FERNANDEZ: Una paloma blanca, (Una paloma blanca, I'm just a bird in the sky, Una paloma blanca, Over the mountains I fly, No one can take my freedom away) (sings a couple of lines) I don't remember. (laughs)

SIGRIST: That was great. Mr. Fernandez, thank you very much. And Mr. Fernandez, thank you very much. We've never had a father/son

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tag team here before, but I appreciate you letting me interview you both. And I hope you enjoy the rest of your visit here in New York.

This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Jorge Fernandez and Alejandro Fernandez, on Wednesday, July 24, 1996 at Ellis Island. Thank you gentlemen.

END OF INTERVIEW