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JORGE SALAS

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TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: CHARLENE A. KEYLOR, 1/1979

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COSTA RICA, 1973

AGE 29

NASH: Today is February 25, 1975. I am speaking with Mr. Jorge Salas who comes from Costa Rica and came to the United States in 1973 at the age of 29. Mr. Salas, tell me something about the city or town where you grew up.

SALAS: You want to talk about my country, right?

NASH: Yes.

SALAS: Well, my country is Costa Rica, and this is a small country. We have two million people. You know, the

habitation is two million and the central city, the name is San Jose. We have about five hundred people. And the second city, the name is Alajuela. It is about three hundred people too. And at west is Puntarenas and Limon and Heredia, Cartago and Jaun Acasti. In Costa Rica, the principal production is coffee and sugar and cacao. You know cacao?

NASH: What about Costa Rica, let's say is unique in Latin America from the other Latin countries. How do Costa Ricans differ from some other Latin countries? Is there any answer to that?

SALAS: No, I don't think that is true.

NASH: Then I won't ask it. Tell me something about your family and the place that you grew up.

SALAS: I got married in October '66.

NASH: Tell me something about the family into which you were born.

SALAS: Okay. We are born in Costa Rica.

NASH: The name of the town?

SALAS: Yes.

NASH: The name of the city or the town is Costa Rica?

SALAS: Costa Rica, yes. The town is Costa Rica, right, and the city is San Jose. And I got married October '66.

NASH: What did your mother and father do? How many children were in your family?

SALAS: We have three kids, one boy and two girls. The boy, seven years now, and the girl five years.

NASH: You are talking about your own family, right?

SALAS: Yes.

NASH: But I am asking about your family, you mother and your father. How many people were in your family and what did your father do?

SALAS: My father is a farm man. He has a coffee farm now. The name is Jorge too. And my mother's name is Islani. I have four brothers and three sisters. The names are Herman, Manuel, Jose Louis, and Rafael. Now the girls are Dejenier, Georginna, and Alicia. They are my brothers and sisters. My father is 78 years now and my mother is forty-six years.

NASH: What was the town like that you came from? Can you describe it? The town where you grew up. What was the place like? I mean not Costa Rica, but the town itself.

SALAS: My father was born in Alajuela and my mother too. Whole family born in Alajuela. You know, the second city?

NASH: Yes.

SALAS: Yes. I was in Alajuela, I was living in Alajuela about for 15 years. In the year '66 I went to San Jose because I got a good job with the Shell Company, you know. You know, the gasoline company? That is it. Because I am accountant. You know the accountant? And I get a good job

in the finance department, Shell, Costa Rica. And in Alajuela country, in Alajuela city, the pay is low and in San Jose I get more money.

NASH: Was life very different in San Jose from Alajuela?

SALAS: Yes, it is more different because in Alajuela there not too much companies and it all is in San Jose. And San Jose is the big city, you know.

NASH: And it's only 500 people.

SALAS: That's right.

NASH: Did you meet your first people from the United States in San Jose? Was that the first contact you had with people from the Unites States when you went to work for Shell Gasoline?

SALAS: Yes.

NASH: I suppose you met people from the United States there in San Jose. What was your impression of these people?

You came in contact with the culture, more culture maybe from the United States.

SALAS: Yes, and I help explain to you, right? When I go to San Jose I see the American people, you know, and make a friendship there. They are living now in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They are living in Pennsylvania. I was talking to them about the United States, you know, and I got their interest, you know, for about the United States. And my friend say, "Well, Jorge, anytime you go to the United States, maybe we help you." Do you understand?

NASH: Yes.

SALAS: But I don't need it, these friends, because, you know, I make the old business, you know, about this and I come to the United States.

NASH: You mean you applied for a visa?

SALAS: Yes.

NASH: Did you have to wait long?

SALAS: No, because I worked for Shell Company for six years in their finance department, when after this I buy the gasoline station with the same company. Do you understand me? And I take this station, the gasoline station, for two years. Well, I say, "Okay, that's it, no more. I am going to the United States." Well, for the visa I don't wait for too much time. About one week.

NASH: What kind of visa was it? Was it a tourist visa? It was a tourist visa.

SALAS: No.

NASH: No, it was a residency?

SALAS: No. It was not residency. I get the visa for four years. You know, it is a multiple, right? I waited for one week. That's it.

NASH: And you were married at that time? How did your wife feel? Did she want to come to the United States too?

SALAS: Yes. My family is in the United States. They are in the United States.

NASH: Your wife?

SALAS: Yes, my wife and my two kids.

NASH: But you were married in Costa Rica at the time and she wanted to come and she wasn't afraid of anything?

SALAS: Yes. I get married in Costa Rica, yes. And I come to the United States and my family I leave in Costa Rica. And now they coming to the United States last year.

NASH: Tell me what your first impressions were when you got here. Where did you come. New York?

SALAS: Yes.

NASH: And when you got off the plane, what were your first impressions?

SALAS: Oh, beautiful city, you know.

NASH: It must have been very big.

SALAS: Yes, very, very. And it is a terrific city, right? And when I come to New York and I take the Pan American flag you know. Make this one stop in Guatemala, second stop in Washington, D.C. After these two, New York. And when I am in the plane, I see New York as beautiful city, you know, and I come in the wintertime. It is beautiful because in this time it is snowing. It was snowing, right. It was beautiful impression, right.

NASH: Where did you go when you first came here?

SALAS: When somebody come to the United States, I say, "Okay, I am going to--" looking for job, right? Okay, and about four days after I came to New York I get a job in Kosher Frietos, you know, Kosher Frietos?

NASH: Kochie Frieto.

SALAS: Kochie Frieto. That's right. Well, I was working in this Kochie Frieto for three months.

NASH: How did you find it? Did you just walk in off the street or did a friend help you?

SALAS: Yes. The Colombian friend helped me for the job, you know, for the Kochie Frieto job.

NASH: Do they have Kochie Frietos in Costa Rica?

SALAS: No, we don't have them there. No.

NASH: No, that's Puerto Rican.

SALAS: Yes, that is Puerto Rican. That's right. And, well, I got the job and, you know, in the Kochie Frieto I am their cooking man, right? Do you understand me?

NASH: Very.

SALAS: Anytime in my country I made that, you know, but when I come here, I say, "Okay, I need the job. I make anything, you know."

Rica NASH: How did you feel after working as an accountant in Costa  
and coming to the United States and cooking Kochie Frietos?

SALAS: Well, I feeling good, you know, because I say I need the  
job, right. I make anything, you know. And, well,  
I feel good in this job, you know.

NASH: How does the salary compare, the money that you were making?

SALAS: Yes, I get the pay for ninety dollars a week.

NASH: And what had you been making in Costa Rica? About how much?

Costa SALAS: Well, you know, the rate is one dollar for nine colones  
Rica. It is about 800 colones.

NASH: Well, in dollars. How many dollars were you making as an  
accountant in Costa Rica before you came? In dollars.

SALAS: Okay, about 200 dollars for a month.

NASH: Two hundred dollars a month?

SALAS: That's right.

NASH: So you were making less.

SALAS: Well, you know, in this country, the cost of living is too high, too high. In the country when I am working in Shell Company, you know, I get 1500 colones, 1500 colones, yes, and you live so-so. You don't go, I explain, to expend too much money because, you know, your rent is too high, and the cost of living is very, very high. I told you when I was working in Kochie Frieto. Well, I was working in this Kochie Frieto for three months, maybe three months. Now, after this I get a job in a supermarket, in a (?) supermarket in (?) for one month, but in this time I don't speak English well and the man said, "Jorge, no ore job for you." Okay? It is all over. I go home now. Well, one week after this, ;eave this job, I get the new job in a supermarket where, you know, the Fresco Food.

NASH: (?)

SALAS: Fresco Food, you know that. Okay. The Fresco Food, you know is big supermarket, but I am the pourer.

NASH: Porter.

SALAS: Porter, that's right.

NASH: (?) clean up.

SALAS: I clean the floor and the basement, all things. Well, I was working for four months and the same time I get the other job at mighttime in a factory, in a plastic factory. It is on Fremont and Boston Road.

NASH: So you were working two jobs at once.

SALAS: To jobs. Two full-times, you know. I get up at six o'clock. No, sorry. Let me think. I get up at 11 o'clock night. I go to the factory because I start 12 o'clock to 8 in the morning. After this I going to the supermarket. I start 9 o'clock to 5, 6. I go home, maybe 7 o'clock. I sleep in five, six hours a day only. But work for two jobs in one year.

NASH: Did you lose weight?

SALAS: No, it was okay because, you know, when I go home I am very tired. I sleep very good. (?). My aunt said,

"Jorge, do you want more eat?" I say, "Okay," you know. But this time I feeling good. After this I get this job in a supermarket too in the daytime, you know, in the frozen--I am the frozen man and (?) man now.

NASH: Did you hold these two jobs because you wanted to bring your family over and save money? Had your family come yet when you were working like that?

SALAS: Yes, you are right. I get the two jobs because I need the money. I don't like stay here and my family in my country and my kids. I need the kids, I need a family, you know. I needed to get more money because I wanted to bring up the family, you know. Well, I get this, you know, and my family, they are coming, they come here. Yes, they came in April '74.

NASH: Was it hard for your wife to adjust to New York City? Was it hard for her when she first came here? Did she miss her country?

SALAS: Yes, that's right. It is too much different, right. But anyway, and I get, you know, the old thing, what I want and now I get a good job and my family is here and everybody is happy, you know.

NASH: Well, what is going to happen? Are you going to become a permanent residence or are you a permanent resident? How are you going to work that out?

SALAS: I don't understand.

NASH: Are you a permanent resident?

SALAS: I get the lawyer and he make all the business about this, you know. But he said (?) wait for a long time because, you know, the (?) now for the immigrants, and the United States don't want give the resident now. You understand me? But now he take old papers, all information, all things, you know, and now he have all the things and I don't know what happened. I wait for I don't know how many times. But I want to get the resident, you know, because I want to stay here. I want to stay in the United States for a long time because I want to give to my family, you know, to my kids, I want to give the good education, right. Do you understand me? Because I don't have money, but I make the, you know, here and I want they get a good profession, you know, because it is good for them.

NASH: And what about you? Do you think you will ever get the chance to become an accountant again like what you did in Costa Rica?

SALAS: That's right, but I need to learn English well, but I get any job about the accounting, you know.

NASH: Are there many Costa Ricans--do you know many Costa Ricans in New York City?

SALAS: Oh, yes. In New York City and (?) too. Well, in the other place, you know, in San Francisco. But in New York I know too much people.

NASH: Where are the Costa Ricans? Where you live are there many Costa Ricans? Do many Costa Ricans live in that neighborhood?

SALAS; Well, I know six families, you know.

NASH: Are there Costa Ricans grocery stores?

SALAS: No, no Costa Rican grocery store, no.

NASH: Well, it doesn't sound like it has been terribly difficult.

I mean are there a lot of things that are hard to get used to? Have there been things that are very difficult for you in the United States?

SALAS: No, not too much. But, you know, do you want to get anything, you say, "I get this," you know, and you make it, right? You want this, you get. Do you understand?

NASH: So you are very hopeful. You feel with that that you will get it, good.

SALAS: Yes.

NASH: Alright, it has been very nice talking to you. Thank you.