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Viamonte, Maria Interview

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Stockton Immigrant Women Oral History Collection

by Sally Miller

VIAMONTE, Maria (Cuban)

January 13-22, 1981
Interviewed by Mitzman

Transcribed by Robert Siess

[TAPE 1, Side A: January 13, 1981]

[Begin Tape.]

MITZMAN: And early experiences in the United States. And then I'll ask questions about things such as your experiences in schools, other people from your country, your family, and your community. Okay? Could you start by telling me something about your early life, before you came to this country? Maybe think about things like where you were born, how long you lived, did you live in the country or the city, approximately when you were born, when you came to the United States, through which countries and why, how old you were, brothers and sisters, those kinds of things.

MARIA VIAMONTE: Okay. I was born in the city of Havana, and that's the capital. It was in 1926. And my early life, I spent it mostly at the Isle of Pines, which an isle second in size to Cuba. I spent there around ten years. Then I left the island with my parents, and I went back to the Province of Havana until I moved here. My early life was mostly the child of a teacher and a

pharmacist, where we had to live right at the site of the federal prison where he was the director of the pharmacy.

MITZMAN: That's interesting. You must have had interesting experiences living in the federal prison.

VIAMONTE: Yes, very many. We had eyewitnessed a lot of – not a lot, but several escapes across the cordon. And also at least one very bad hunger strike.

MITZMAN: On the part of the prisoners?

VIAMONTE: On the part of the prisoners. Then they were yelling and screaming and pounding and all of that.

MITZMAN: So did you actually live on the prison grounds?

VIAMONTE: Yes. The employees lived right at the border of the prison grounds so that it was convenient for the employees to go to work. There were 14 houses assigned to the top employees.

MITZMAN: Okay, so we were talking about the houses.

VIAMONTE: Anyway, these houses were for these employees, 14 of them, so they were in a horseshoe setup almost outside the limits of the prison grounds. But everything that went on in the prison, we knew it and often heard about...

MITZMAN: Did you have extra security around your home?

VIAMONTE: Yes. We were within the security cordon, but we really didn't have to deal with it much except that they saw when you came in, when you left. And then when there was something that worried them, we probably were asked to go to town or something. Spend some time away or something of that nature.

MITZMAN: So this was the prison in Havana?

VIAMONTE: No, this was the federal prison in the Isle of Pines, which was a prison for major crimes. We had interesting experiences because some of the well-behaved inmates were given privileges to work in the home. So we had inmates that worked as cooks or gardeners or things of that nature.

MITZMAN: What kind of relationship did you find that you had with the inmates?

VIAMONTE: Very good, because the ones we had any kind of contact with were the well-behaved. They were dressed in white clothing as opposed to the blue clothing of the common, the less-trusted types.

MITZMAN: Right. At this time your mother was teaching?

VIAMONTE: Yeah. She was teaching in the countryside, way away. We used to ride with her daily, and it was about a two-hour drive up there and back home. And as far as I remember, she was teaching all the time. So my father worked at the prison and that's where our home was, but we had to ride with my mother to her...

MITZMAN: To go to school. And is that were you went to school? Where she taught?

VIAMONTE: She always took us to school whether we were in her own class, which is the way it was at the beginning in the rural school, but then she got transferred to one of the main towns, which was much closer. And then we still attended the same school even though we might have ended up in other classes. But we always went with her to school.

MITZMAN: Okay, so after you left the Isle of Pines, you were about ten years old roughly.

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm. Yeah.

MITZMAN: You moved back to Havana?

VIAMONTE: Yes. We moved back to Havana as a result of my father taking competitive examinations for the directorship of the University of Havana's hospital. Pharmacy. And then my mother eventually got a transfer back to the city of Havana, so we lived there right across from the university campus. There I finished my high school education at that location, and then went on to normal school after a very synthesized high school program, because I was accelerated. And then I went to normal school.

MITZMAN: Which is like a college?

VIAMONTE: Yeah, it's like a two-year college. And then on to University of Havana's School of Pedagogy, where I went for a year and a half. Then as a result of coming here to the states, I had to discontinue.

MITZMAN: So you left in the middle of your way to becoming a teacher. To move to this country.

VIAMONTE: Right.

MITZMAN: Now what were some of the reasons behind why you left Havana? Was it your whole family or just yourself?

VIAMONTE: No, it was just myself. I decided to live dangerously. I traveled here with a friend of mine twice. We just chose California because it was the farthest away from home we could afford.

MITZMAN: Oh, I see. A little freedom and independence.

VIAMONTE: And no particular reason except I met who is my husband today.

MITZMAN: While on a trip here.

VIAMONTE: Right. I came to summer school at the University of California.

MITZMAN: At Berkeley?

VIAMONTE: At Berkeley. And I met my husband there. So we got very friendly and continued writing when I went back home, and the following year came back again, and we just decided we were gonna get married.

MITZMAN: And when was that that you got married?

VIAMONTE: We got married in '53.

MITZMAN: So you moved back here to marry him.

VIAMONTE: Right. Well I didn't really move, I just came back on a visiting trip again. I had my round-trip ticket. I wasn't staying for any odd reason. So then my father came for our wedding and we got married here.

MITZMAN: Have you lived in this country ever since you got married?

VIAMONTE: Right.

MITZMAN: Were you both students at the time, or were you out of school at that time?

VIAMONTE: I had enough units to have a credential then, so I began teaching right there. And my husband was finishing up his last year at the University of California, Davis.

MITZMAN: And he was studying...?

VIAMONTE: So he was studying, and as a veteran, he received some financial assistance, and I was teaching, so we made a lot.

MITZMAN: And he is an engineer.

VIAMONTE: He's an engineer. Mechanical engineer.

MITZMAN: So he was finishing school while you were teaching.

VIAMONTE: Right.

MITZMAN: Okay. After you had moved here, did any other members of your family move to this country after you moved here, or are they all pretty much in Cuba?

VIAMONTE: No. Like my sister came to spend a vacation with us. Or an extended vacation. And she met the man that she married later, and she stayed. But my parents always lived back here, except for my mother, as a result of the new regime there and the fact that my father passed away. Being the only child, because my sister later on died, so it was just herself and me left. So we decided that it was best for her to move over here.

MITZMAN: So she was able to move here too.

VIAMONTE: So she's lived here since '63 I believe.

MITZMAN: When Castro came into power, what kind of difference did it make as far as you being able to visit Cuba? Were there big differences?

VIAMONTE: Yes, big difference, because the last time I was there was in '59, and I was already quite leery about me staying there in that I didn't know if I could get out or not. Because especially with the persecution of anything and everything that was American, there were strong suggestions that they might close off and not let me come back. And I was there by myself visiting with my two children, while my husband was here.

MITZMAN: I see. And your mother was there at the time.

VIAMONTE: Yes.

MITZMAN: Did she have a difficult time getting out of the country when she decided to move here?

VIAMONTE: She did. It was probably about six months before she ever got any confirmation to leave the country. And then not to the United States because there were no more flights or communication with the United States. So she had to go to Mexico through a claim that a cousin of mine established on her leaving.

[End of Side A.]

[TAPE 1, Side B: January 15, 1981]

[Begin Tape.]

MITZMAN: Okay. I was going over the tape that we made the first time, and you had mentioned that you had witnessed some escapes from the prison. And I was wondering if you could maybe relate perhaps the most interesting or most violent or one that you might remember.

VIAMONTE: Well I remember one particular case where the guards at the cordon, they had towers all around the cordon where the watch was always there. So we saw about three men that went over, and the other side they had a wire fence. Security wirefence. And we saw the guards actually shooting at them, trying to stop them.

MITZMAN: A large group?

VIAMONTE: No, there were about three men.

MITZMAN: And did you see if they got them?

VIAMONTE: One fell, and the other ones just kind of got lost in the bushes. We couldn't see much beyond that.

MITZMAN: Do you feel like you lived in fear of a prisoner getting out and coming to your homes?

VIAMONTE: No. We never had that fear at all. That just never seemed to be the case at all.

MITZMAN: When they took off, they just took off.

VIAMONTE: They just took off. They wanted to get out of there, period.

MITZMAN: Do you remember anything about the conditions of the prison?

VIAMONTE: Not a great deal, but the buildings where the prisoners were were pretty good buildings, and good-sized. They were in a set of five, set like this in a rectangle with one circle building in the middle. And all the corner buildings were where the prisoners had their cells. And when you went in the buildings, we were taken on tours, the cells were all along the edges of the building with the windows out. And then there was the central patio where the security more or less kept the watch. And they were all masonry buildings, you know, rock buildings. They were very stable, very old-fashioned in the way that they were not shifty buildings of any

kind. They were there to stay. And then the central building where the circle was, that was generally the activity areas, where the diners were and most of those type of group activities took place. And then one of these was the hospital. It was split in half, and one was the hospital, and then probably had a pharmacy there. And then there was an administration building up in front that the homes were built around. But we never – we did get tours in there, and I remember being shown how they all came to their diner and lined up, sit down, and there was fair discipline there. They didn't run around like loose geese.

MITZMAN: It was a real prison. Okay. I had some more questions too about the school you attended. You said you went with your mother to school. About how far was that away from where you lived? Do you remember?

VIAMONTE: I remember it took about two hours to get there.

MITZMAN: By car?

VIAMONTE: Yes, by car. And so I figure it must have been about... These two hours were not so much the distance, but it was in certain areas, there was a lot of difficulty in the roads, because the rains would come and wash off the road, and we'd have difficulty getting across sometimes and so on. But I'd say it was probably something like 75 miles or something like that. Not miles, kilometers.

MITZMAN: And now you said you first attended a rural school. You said your mother was transferred to a main town. Was the school system there for the island all one district?

VIAMONTE: Yes, the whole isle was one district.

MITZMAN: And so she could be shifted around when she pleased.

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: And were the rural school and the main town about the same distance from where you lived?

VIAMONTE: No. It was about 1/3 of the way from where we lived.

MITZMAN: To the main school.

VIAMONTE: Yes.

MITZMAN: Much closer then.

VIAMONTE: It was closer, so it was less of a hassle.

MITZMAN: And I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about your school experiences. I'm just gonna kind of go through the schools that you mentioned you attended.

VIAMONTE: Sure.

MITZMAN: And maybe anything you might remember of interest. First of all, the schools on the Isle of Pines.

VIAMONTE: Yes. I forgot to mention that I went to a Spanish-speaking school most of the time, except for two years that I went to an English-speaking school at the same island at the same island. It was a private school. I always went to public schools with my mother, she was a public school teacher. But that was a private school.

MITZMAN: Did you go there to learn English?

VIAMONTE: Yes. I was there for two years because there always was a very good-sized English-speaking colony in the Isle of Pines, because they were very much engaged in the farming of especially citrus fruits. The pink grapefruit was their big product. And this brought a lot of Americans, or supposedly Americans. English-speaking anyway. And they had enough of a population to set up a school.

MITZMAN: So you were able to attend the American school. How did, in the Isle of Pines for example, how did the American school compare with the Cuban school you were going to. The Spanish school. Were they very similar in what they offered?

VIAMONTE: Yes and no. I really didn't feel that much a difference between the two.

MITZMAN: Just language?

VIAMONTE: It was mostly the language, and of course the idiosyncrasies were different, and the whole setup was different in that the customs were different, so from that point of view, there are some things that I thought were this way and they were not. So they were changing.

MITZMAN: But school subjects and things, basically the same.

VIAMONTE: No, basically the same. Same major subjects and same expectations.

MITZMAN: Did the public school in Cuba teach religion?

VIAMONTE: No, it never has.

MITZMAN: It never has. It's separated. Okay. What about the high school you went to in Havana?

VIAMONTE: In Havana, I went to a private high school.

MITZMAN: English?

VIAMONTE: No. The only time I spent in an English-speaking school was two years, and it was in up to 8th grade. And in the city of Havana, I went to high school there, it was a private school, small. I don't think we were any more than a hundred students in the school. It was a school that was ministered by people who were recommended to us as very professional and so on, and it turned out that way.

MITZMAN: Very academic?

VIAMONTE: Very academic.

MITZMAN: And the normal school you said would be similar to a junior college, a two-year program.

VIAMONTE: Yes.

MITZMAN: And that was just a general education program?

VIAMONTE: It was mostly general education, and we spent probably one whole quarter practice teaching to elementary. Because it only gave us a certificate for elementary instruction.

MITZMAN: And the School of Pedagogy was beyond the normal school?

VIAMONTE: Yes.

MITZMAN: And that was just more preparation for being a teacher?

VIAMONTE: Right, yes. It was more into the higher level college and education in general.

MITZMAN: How and why to teach?

VIAMONTE: Yes.

MITZMAN: Okay. And when you went to the University of Berkeley, when was that? Do you remember what year that was?

VIAMONTE: I think it was in 1951.

MITZMAN: And what did you study that summer? Was it education again?

VIAMONTE: It was education and it was statistics.

MITZMAN: You went there for one summer, was that right?

VIAMONTE: One summer.

MITZMAN: And I was wondering, you had mentioned that before you Havana, you left before you had finished your degree. And then you said after you got married, you started teaching. Did you pick up a degree here in the United States?

VIAMONTE: I took several courses in the University of Berkeley in this graduate program that is by correspondence. So anyway, I worked my way up through that, and that was on my own. I had no real goals. I just tried to kind of keep up. But then I had all my credits evaluated and so on, and I actually entered Stanislaus State College. So I went two years there in order to...

MITZMAN: Was that after you married?

VIAMONTE: Oh yes. That was ten years after my second child.

MITZMAN: I see, so that's when you got your credential. You had mentioned that you were teaching while your husband was finishing school. Was that like substituting, or a private school?

VIAMONTE: No, it was teaching. It was public school teaching. It was on a provisional credential, and it was for three years after we got married, because after that time, I decided I wasn't going to work anymore for a while, because I had two children by then.

MITZMAN: And where were you teaching during those three years?

VIAMONTE: I taught at Yolo County in Sacramento, and also in Stockton.

MITZMAN: Okay, I'll go into your other teaching a little bit later. I had some other questions about your sister. When was it she came to the United States? You said she came for a period of time and then married here. Do you remember when that was?

VIAMONTE: I can't remember the date right now. Well, I'll tell you, it was 20 or 23 years ago.

MITZMAN: And she lived here about how long?

VIAMONTE: She lived here about three years.

MITZMAN: And then your father died in Havana, right? About how long ago was that?

VIAMONTE: That was about in 1960.

MITZMAN: And then your mother moved here in '63? Is she still living in this country?

VIAMONTE: Yes, she does.

MITZMAN: Does she live near you?

VIAMONTE: She lives with me.

MITZMAN: Has she lived with you since she moved to this country?

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Okay. Now you had mentioned that your cousin was able to come here because you have a cousin who had a claim on her. Can you explain exactly what that is?

VIAMONTE: That is a method that was used for a while, trying to get people out of Cuba. The government of Cuba was not accepting any claims from relatives that resided in the United States.

MITZMAN: What does it mean? Kind of "I have someone who lives here and I want them to live with me," that sort of thing?

VIAMONTE: Yes. It's a way that you go through the embassies, and you go to the foreign embassy and you say, "I have so-and-so there, and I would like this person to come and live with me. Sponsor them." So in that case, the foreign embassy will work through the national embassy at that country and try to process, to get it out.

MITZMAN: And so she got processed after about six months into Mexico.

VIAMONTE: Right.

MITZMAN: And then were there any problems with her coming from Mexico into the United States?

VIAMONTE: No real problems, because I was sponsoring her, and it's a matter of sponsorship when you're trying to get into any country.

MITZMAN: Alright. We'd better get stopped.

[END OF TAPE]

[TAPE 2, Side A: January 15, 1981]
[Begin Tape.]

MITZMAN: I need to have your full name.

VIAMONTE: Oh Lord.

MITZMAN: I should probably have you write it down!

VIAMONTE: Okay, the full name translates Mary of the Angels, so it's Maria de los Angeles, just like the City of Los Angeles.

MITZMAN: D-E L-O-S?

VIAMONTE: Yes, but those are two separate words, so my full name would be four words long. And then my maiden name was Viamonte.

MITZMAN: Is that an unusual name, or is that a fairly common Cuban name?

VIAMONTE: No, it's not common. It's not unusual either, but it's around.

MITZMAN: And then I wondered if you have any Cubans who you knew in Cuba who live around you or who you continue to stay in touch with in this country.

VIAMONTE: Only in the last seven or eight years, maybe less. Until then, I didn't know any Cubans at all.

MITZMAN: And how have you met the people who you now know?

VIAMONTE: We met through an effort of getting people from the different Spanish-speaking countries together that we have carried out in the Stanislaus County area.

MITZMAN: That's a special organization?

VIAMONTE: It's a cultural organization, and we have in it representatives of most of the Latin American countries. We have of course Mexico, Nicaragua, Costa Rica. We have Chile, Peru, Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, and Spain. So we have in some instances just one or two people.

MITZMAN: And you were instrumental in helping set this up.

VIAMONTE: Right.

MITZMAN: Was it basically set up as a way of forming as a group to share common background?

VIAMONTE: Yes. We share activities. We put on activities for the children in the group to maintain and further the culture.

MITZMAN: Do you have a name for the group?

VIAMONTE: Yes. It's the Hispanic-American Society of Stanislaus County.

MITZMAN: And that's open to anybody with a Hispanic-American background.

VIAMONTE: Yes. Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Oh, I see. And that runs just like a cultural club.

VIAMONTE: Cultural group like you find probably some stemming from church groups, although this is not tied in any to the church.

MITZMAN: It's just based on the background. Okay. When you first came to this country, did you feel that you had any problems because you were Cuban? In other words, particularly along the lines of discrimination because you were Cuban.

VIAMONTE: No. I never felt any problems of that nature.

MITZMAN: Okay. When you came here, of course you married someone who was English-speaking. Did he speak Spanish at all?

VIAMONTE: Very little. He understands a lot, but he doesn't make it...

MITZMAN: So you basically spoke English in your home or with friends.

VIAMONTE: Right.

MITZMAN: When you were growing up as a child – I'm gonna kind of jump around a little bit – were you assigned to do regular chores? And was that part of the custom in Cuba, for children to work within the home? Or were you pretty free?

VIAMONTE: We had some chores, yes, even if we had help all the time. We had domestic help most of the time. But I can remember clearly that I had to set the table for dinner, and I was to make my bed, and to take care of my clothes if they needed repair. I put buttons on and I was taught how to mend and all that.

MITZMAN: Was that typical for Cuban children?

VIAMONTE: Well, it depended on the social and economical class. I will say that probably in my home we were asked to be more responsible than the average at the same status.

MITZMAN: What status would you give your family? I know both of your parents were professionals.

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Were they among what you would call the upper class?

VIAMONTE: We were in the middle class. And probably in the upper middle class in the, you might say cultural aspect. Economic, I don't think so, because the economics of a professional family is not very high. Never has been anywhere.

MITZMAN: As it is here, right. Okay, who made family decisions in your family? Was it your father or your mother or a combination?

VIAMONTE: I think they were a combination, although when my father said no...

MITZMAN: He had final say.

VIAMONTE: That's it. That was it.

MITZMAN: They kind of agree unless they disagree, and then he decides. Is that typical within Cuban families, do you think?

VIAMONTE: Yeah, I would say so.

MITZMAN: Did you have any disagreements with your parents?

VIAMONTE: I had a lot of disagreements with my father. Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Can you give me some examples of some that were particularly strong, and how you dealt with those?

VIAMONTE: The most that I've had was probably in the area of social activities, in that he was very close to us going places or doing any activities that were not very closely supervised, chaperoned. And by the time I was 20, for instance, some young people my age were doing some activities on the sly, without someone chaperoning, but I was never there.

MITZMAN: Even until you left Cuba then, you were completely chaperoned all the time.

VIAMONTE: Oh yes, yes.

MITZMAN: Everything was controlled. Oh, that would be very difficult. So how did you handle it? With arguments, or did you have to be submissive, or?

VIAMONTE: I just tried him not to know some of the times.

MITZMAN: You were on the sly.

VIAMONTE: Yeah. I was on the sly too.

MITZMAN: You felt, was it a bit easier to do that than to try to argue with him or to reason with him? There was no getting around his feelings about that.

VIAMONTE: Yeah. Mmhmm. I don't think so.

MITZMAN: My next question was going to be about dating. Was dating allowed as long as it was chaperoned?

VIAMONTE: Yes. Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: About how young? Or did it vary?

VIAMONTE: Well, fifteen years old was the youngest you would be allowed to go to anything like dancing to a club or anything of that sort. Everything else up to that age was more like a family situation. You know, outside, you'd have to be at least fifteen years old.

MITZMAN: Now, the dating, since it was heavily chaperoned, did that tend to be until the time that you were engaged?

VIAMONTE: Oh, and including, yeah.

MITZMAN: Until marriage you were chaperoned, and that was all?

VIAMONTE: Absolutely, yeah.

MITZMAN: So probably very strict social pressures against, like, premarital relations and living together and things like that? Unheard of.

VIAMONTE: Right. Oh, no, no! They were nonexistent.

MITZMAN: Did your parents, because I realize you married in this country, but if you had stayed in Cuba, were you in a situation where your parents would have been people who would have arranged a marriage or had a great deal to say who you married? Or was it pretty much up to the young people?

VIAMONTE: No, it was very much up to the young people.

MITZMAN: Did it matter in that society that the parents approved? Was that felt to be an important thing to have?

VIAMONTE: Yes. Very much so.

MITZMAN: And if they did not improve, did marriages tend not to happen?

VIAMONTE: Well, sometimes they happened anyway, because what you found is that the father and the mother might split in opinion, and then one might support the young couple. And if that happened, well the other one had not much farther to go.

MITZMAN: Okay. Did your parents feel that it was very important that you get married? Like in many societies, it's the goal that the daughter will marry and have children.

VIAMONTE: Yes, yes, I think so.

MITZMAN: Very important.

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: If you had not married, they may have been disappointed.

VIAMONTE: Especially to my mother. To my father, I don't think it made that much difference. I think he was intent that I as a woman got a career so that I wouldn't have to worry about whether I got married or not, so I could be self-sufficient.

MITZMAN: Oh, I see. Okay. That's good. When you got married, did your parents know that you were going to get married?

VIAMONTE: Yes.

MITZMAN: Did they approve of the marriage?

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: And your father attended, right?

VIAMONTE: Right, right.

MITZMAN: Now, when you were married, how long before you had children?

VIAMONTE: One year.

MITZMAN: You had children right away. Okay, how many children did you have?

VIAMONTE: Four.

MITZMAN: And can you tell me about when they were born and what their names are?

VIAMONTE: Okay. Well, the oldest one was born a year after our wedding, and he was born in Stockton. Then the second one also was born in Stockton. That's where we lived for a few years after my husband graduated.

MITZMAN: Because you were both working in Stockton?

VIAMONTE: We were both working. Then the third and the fourth were born right here in Modesto.

MITZMAN: Where you still live.

VIAMONTE: Yes, where we still live. The first two were born within about three years between. Then the last two were more spread out. So their ages are now 29, 27, 21, and 19.

MITZMAN: So there's a spread. What are their names?

VIAMONTE: Michael, the oldest one. The second one is David. Then Karen, and the youngest one is Jeffrey.

MITZMAN: No Cuban names.

VIAMONTE: No.

MITZMAN: Was that your choice or your husband's, or just the things you like?

VIAMONTE: It just happened, yeah.

MITZMAN: Have there been many Cuban influences on your children? Like you happened to mention that group. For example, have you had them experience Cuban food, celebrations, things like that?

VIAMONTE: I think you could say easily that my first child, Michael, was very strongly influenced, because his childhood was during the years that I went back home several times.

MITZMAN: And he traveled with you.

VIAMONTE: Right. And he spent extended vacations there. And to this date, he can't think of anything more wonderful than those years that we visited back there.

MITZMAN: He really enjoyed being back there?

VIAMONTE: Right. Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: And how about the other children?

VIAMONTE: The second one, he was there several times also when he was young, and although he understands Spanish well and he speaks some, it just didn't mean that much to him.

MITZMAN: And the other two don't really have any experience.

VIAMONTE: The other two, no recollection.

MITZMAN: Do they speak Spanish?

VIAMONTE: They all speak Spanish.

MITZMAN: Did they learn from you?

VIAMONTE: Well, yes, my oldest one learned from me, and being back home repeatedly, he speaks Spanish quite well. The second one, well I already told you. And the other two, my mother came to live with me in '65 I think. So the two younger ones got their Spanish from her, because at that time I was working outside of the home and she was caring for them.

MITZMAN: Was she only Spanish-speaking?

VIAMONTE: Yes. Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: The next thing I want to ask is about the relationship the children had with their grandmother. Was it a close relationship since she was with you?

VIAMONTE: Yes, it's always been very close.

MITZMAN: Are your children now married?

VIAMONTE: No, none of them is married. The girl, Karen, she was married but she has separated from her husband.

MITZMAN: Does she have children?

VIAMONTE: Yes, she has one child. Four years old.

MITZMAN: Now, she lives with you? Is that right?

VIAMONTE: She has off and on, but she's not living with me at this time.

MITZMAN: But she lives near you.

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Do your other children live near you?

VIAMONTE: Yes. No, there's one that lives in Southern California.

MITZMAN: Have you stayed fairly close to your children?

VIAMONTE: Pretty much.

MITZMAN: Do you think the relationship you've had with your daughter is similar to the one you had with your mother?

VIAMONTE: No.

MITZMAN: How is it different?

VIAMONTE: My daughter, after the age of twelve or thirteen, she became very rebellious. And we've had many traumatic breakages of our relationship, because it's been very difficult. And now that she's over the rebellious stage, it's better, but nothing like with my mother.

MITZMAN: You and your mother were much closer then. Much, much closer.

VIAMONTE: Oh yeah. Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Within the Cuban society, do the elderly normally live with their children? Let's say a woman who is 70 years old and her husband has died. Does she normally live with her children?

VIAMONTE: Yes, normally.

MITZMAN: And of course your mother lives with you.

VIAMONTE: Right, so she's following that pattern pretty much.

MITZMAN: Do you think in the future, when you're 75, that you will live with your children?

VIAMONTE: I doubt it.

MITZMAN: You won't follow that custom?

VIAMONTE: I don't think they would be willing. Although my oldest one probably would care. In fact, he has asked my mother if she would like to move in with him.

MITZMAN: I see. Does he live in Southern California?

VIAMONTE: No, this is the oldest one that lives in Modesto. He has his own place and has asked her several times if she will come visit.

MITZMAN: And she says no.

VIAMONTE: Well, she says no. [laughs]

MITZMAN: Okay, so you think your kids wouldn't be too thrilled about it.

VIAMONTE: I don't think so.

MITZMAN: How would you feel about it?

VIAMONTE: I don't know. I really haven't placed myself in that position.

MITZMAN: It's a lot of years away, I know.

VIAMONTE: I think the only good thing about it probably would be enjoying my grandchildren.

MITZMAN: What do you think are the best things of your children's lives? Growing up, what were the best things in their lives do you think, having grown up in this country?

VIAMONTE: Um... [pause]

MITZMAN: Anything good about their lives here, or any particular influences that you felt were good because they grew up in this country.

VIAMONTE: I don't know that they have had anything better here than they would have back in Cuba, for instance. Received or gained anything more here than they would have.

MITZMAN: Okay, so it wouldn't have made a big difference on them.

VIAMONTE: I don't think so.

MITZMAN: Is there anything that you see as less desirable here in this country?

VIAMONTE: I think that there is a problem here, and my husband and I have had great problems with this, the tremendous peer pressure that they have been exposed to here.

MITZMAN: And you don't have that in Cuba?

VIAMONTE: No.

MITZMAN: Because Cuba, of course, is very family based, so you don't have that. And that has caused many problems.

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm. Oh yes, mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Okay. Yeah, I think that is unique to American culture.

VIAMONTE: Right.

MITZMAN: Okay. Do you think your life since you have lived in the United States has been very unusual, or typically American?

VIAMONTE: Unusual to me, or?

MITZMAN: Unusual as for someone living in America. I know a typical American is kind of a non...

VIAMONTE: No, I don't think so. I think it's been pretty standard.

MITZMAN: Pretty usual.

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Do you feel close to Cuba?

VIAMONTE: Not anymore. I used to up to the beginning of the new regime. But after that, everything's so alien that I don't feel any...

MITZMAN: So you're really not affected by things that are going on there.

VIAMONTE: No.

MITZMAN: Do you have any relatives who are still in Cuba now?

VIAMONTE: Yes.

MITZMAN: Do you keep in contact with them at all?

VIAMONTE: Yes. We do write during the holidays and during a few occasions like that.

MITZMAN: Do you consider yourself a Cuban or a Cuban American?

VIAMONTE: Cuban American I think.

MITZMAN: Because you've assimilated things from both cultures, is that what you feel?

VIAMONTE: Right. Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: How do your children view themselves?

VIAMONTE: My oldest one considers himself to be Cuban American, again because he was the one that was the most influenced. And probably my daughter has some concept of being Cuban American, but the other two, no.

MITZMAN: The other two are just American kids.

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Would you go back to Cuba?

VIAMONTE: Not unless it changed a great deal.

MITZMAN: A great deal. It had a new leader, the whole bit.

VIAMONTE: A lot different.

MITZMAN: Okay. Why don't we stop there?

[End of Side A.]

[TAPE 2, Side B: January 17, 1981]

[Begin Tape.]

MITZMAN: A couple more things I had failed to get the other day. How did you feel the colleges in Cuba and the United States compared?

VIAMONTE: I think in some areas, some of the knowledge is watered down, higher level knowledge. Over there, you're on your own. More independence.

MITZMAN: Do you think they go through more material? In other words, when a student comes out of a high school there, are they more advanced academically than a student here?

VIAMONTE: Yes, out of high school. Definitely. And they're black and white. You just either make it or you don't.

MITZMAN: There's no room for this shuffling someone along. Alright. Were you encouraged to continue to go to school? Was that very important, just within your family or the whole country?

VIAMONTE: Within my family, but I think you probably could say that the culture, the idiosyncrasy of Cubans is that education is important, or was until the new system took over.

MITZMAN: Pre-Castro.

VIAMONTE: The pre-Castro era.

MITZMAN: Right. It was very important, and everyone went.

VIAMONTE: Right.

MITZMAN: In other words, equally important for girls and boys.

VIAMONTE: Right, right.

MITZMAN: Okay. So it wasn't unusually that you went through high school and started college.

VIAMONTE: No, that was commonplace.

MITZMAN: Now I had a question about religion within the country. You had mentioned that religion wasn't taught in the schools. Was it an important factor in your life during the time you lived in Cuba?

VIAMONTE: It was important, because we did have religion instruction, at least I went, religion instruction after the regular school day. And my family, especially on my mother's side, my father was a little bit of a renegade, and it was just some things you couldn't see, and he didn't say anything about it, he just didn't follow it.

MITZMAN: And what faith was that?

VIAMONTE: That was probably most of my life at home. Oh, faith, I thought you said face. Okay. That was Catholicism.

MITZMAN: Have you continued to follow that faith to today?

VIAMONTE: Yes.

MITZMAN: You have not changed your feelings about it. Pretty much the same.

VIAMONTE: And I am married to a Protestant.

MITZMAN: Have you had any particular problems because you're Catholic and he's Protestant?

VIAMONTE: No. I went ahead and got married in the Protestant church, but then later on we married in the Catholic Church.

MITZMAN: Before or after you had children?

VIAMONTE: I think it was after we had children. But we've never had any conflict this way. I've respected his beliefs, which I admire and, you know, why not? But he has never interfered with mine. He doesn't understand mine as well as I think I understand his, although he has been in the last few years coming closer to my concepts and understanding.

MITZMAN: What about your children? What have you done for them? Have you led them through one, or both, or neither?

VIAMONTE: I waited with my first child about four years before I introduced any real religion.

MITZMAN: Which is unusual for Catholics.

VIAMONTE: Right. I just thought that I'd give him a chance if he wanted to raise the children Protestant, but he didn't make any particular effort.

MITZMAN: So you did.

VIAMONTE: So then I started baptizing them. I had them baptized and took them to religious classes, and so they've been raised Catholic.

MITZMAN: And they're Catholics.

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Now your mother worked outside of the home pretty much full time for as long as you can remember.

VIAMONTE: Right.

MITZMAN: Was that unusual for women in Cuba?

VIAMONTE: Yeah, probably for her generation, it was unusual.

MITZMAN: Most women stayed at the home with children.

VIAMONTE: Yes. Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: When your mother came to this country, did she work?

VIAMONTE: No, she was already retired back home.

MITZMAN: How about family size when you're in Cuba? Was it really encouraged to have large families, or were small families encouraged, or was it a do your own thing?

VIAMONTE: It depended. If you were middle class, you were discouraged from having a large family because of the idea that, would you have enough to raise them as you want to raise them. With an education and all their needs supplied. But your lower class had a lot of children, and your farmers had a lot of children.

MITZMAN: Very similar to the United States.

VIAMONTE: Very similar.

MITZMAN: What was the thing you liked most about living in Cuba?

VIAMONTE: Well, I think the society itself is a lot less complicated than here. And government. Much less complicated, because you have here the state governments, which are a whole government in themselves, plus the federal government, and over there, government was emanating from the central source, which is the national government.

MITZMAN: And that was everything. There wasn't the city, county, state?

VIAMONTE: There was city, but with very limited powers.

MITZMAN: So you liked the less complicated structure.

VIAMONTE: Yes, it was a lot simpler.

MITZMAN: What was the thing you liked least about Cuba? Or was there anything you didn't?

VIAMONTE: Nothing really stands out. I really would have gone right back home if I hadn't been married.

MITZMAN: Do you think you would have stayed once Castro came into power? Do you think that would have made you want to leave?

VIAMONTE: Probably, yes. Because when I was back there during the time that he had already overtaken the government, it was pretty impossible to stand all the propaganda. On the phone, you had to listen to one other tape before you could make a phone call. You went downtown to the city streets and there were loudspeakers, motherland or death, you know. This constant propaganda everywhere. You read a newspaper, and you had to first go through all the propaganda before they gave you the news. You listen to the radio, it was the same thing. On TV, you could see only their programs. There nothing, very few, one or two left of the non-political programs, and it was just like that all the time. Also, you had your block committee, which was watching every step that you were taking, and who was coming to your house, who was going, what were you buying.

MITZMAN: Was that like a neighborhood committee?

VIAMONTE: Yes. So it was pretty unbearable.

MITZMAN: Oh, I see. So you had a small taste of that, and you knew...

VIAMONTE: I would not have stayed there at all.

MITZMAN: You don't think you would have become part of that government, huh?

VIAMONTE: Well I'll tell you, when Fidel Castro first came to be known, as a matter of fact, his brother, who is today in government there, was a close friend of a close friend of mine. A very

close friend of a close friend of mine. And so I got to know some members of his family and him by a little distance. And it was the belief of most people that he was going to be change for the better.

MITZMAN: Ohh. He had popular support then.

VIAMONTE: Right. But it started turning the other way, and if you read that chapter over there in that book, at first, it was appealing to the people who were the victims of the wrongs of the dictatorship that preceded him. From that point of view it was fine. But as soon as he took over, he started attacking, gradually, all the institutions that were democratic and everything, so you could see right away what it was all about. So there was no way, even after having been for change, which I was.

MITZMAN: That you could support him for that kind of change.

VIAMONTE: No.

MITZMAN: Okay. When you first came to the United States, you had visited here twice before you came here and were permanent. What things struck you as the most difficult to adjust to when you first moved here? And I realize, of course, you got married right away too, and that's always an adjustment. But what about life in America do you think were the most difficult things initially for you to deal with?

VIAMONTE: Well, basically I think it was proper interpretation of the culture. And I admire my husband for that, because he put up with it. Because I would interpret things sometimes in a different way than they should have been.

MITZMAN: Can you give me any examples?

VIAMONTE: Well, expressions and reactions and so on. Things of that nature. I would react one way, and it was wrong. And he would tell me later on, this is not what they meant. You just don't say that. So that was the most difficult thing.

MITZMAN: And you didn't have any problems with the language, because you knew English at that time?

VIAMONTE: My English, compared to now, I'd say it was limited.

MITZMAN: But you could communicate.

VIAMONTE: But I could communicate. And I had a good vocabulary in Spanish, which, if you get right down to the nitty gritty, you can profit from it.

MITZMAN: When you first started teaching, were you working with Spanish-speaking students?

VIAMONTE: No, I was teaching first grade, and I was adequate. I didn't have any difficulties.

MITZMAN: Alright. When you first moved here, of course you got married right away. Did you have any particular expectations?

VIAMONTE: When I came here?

MITZMAN: Right, like say the first time you came here, or on return trips. What did you expect? Did you have anything?

VIAMONTE: No, I had no expectations.

MITZMAN: Just go and see what its' like sort of thing?

VIAMONTE: Right. Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Did you have any hesitancy to stay in this country after you were married, to live here?

VIAMONTE: No, not after I got married.

MITZMAN: Was there anything that happened in the United States besides expressions that really surprised you? You didn't expect, you'd never seen in your country?

VIAMONTE: Well, I never saw that older people stood by younger seated people, and never stood up and gave them the seat.

MITZMAN: Oh, okay. Treatment of the elderly.

VIAMONTE: Right. And I was very family-oriented, and I had a lot of difficulty. This is what you might add to your first part. I had a lot of difficulty accepting outsiders.

MITZMAN: As what?

VIAMONTE: As friends.

MITZMAN: Just talking with them and becoming close. You tend to be family-oriented otherwise.

VIAMONTE: Right. Because I had very few friends outside my family. And I'm talking about extended family, because my cousins and aunts and extended family, not just the home family. We had no real friends outside the extended family.

MITZMAN: In Cuba, did the entire family live together too, or right near each other?

VIAMONTE: Sometimes, yes, near each other. Not in the same home.

MITZMAN: But you'd spend all your time together.

VIAMONTE: Right, yeah. Most of our activities were family-related.

MITZMAN: Was it difficult for you to adjust, just having your husband without that family being close? Was it hard for you to get used to?

VIAMONTE: You mean did I feel alone or lonely?

MITZMAN: Yeah, without that family around you.

VIAMONTE: No, not really. I was so busy with the children.

MITZMAN: Okay, I'm gonna stop there.

[END OF TAPE]

[TAPE 3, Side A: January 21, 1981]

[Begin Tape.]

MITZMAN: Okay, I need to get some more names. Your husband's name.

VIAMONTE: Robert Hatch.

MITZMAN: Okay. And your parents' names?

VIAMONTE: My father's name was Innocent Viamonte.

MITZMAN: Okay. Does that mean something?

VIAMONTE: Well, his feast day is on the Catholic religious calendar's date of the, do you know in the Bible in the history of the birth of Jesus, there was the day that all innocents were persecuted and killed by King... I forget his name now. Who had fears of the child becoming competition to him as the power. So he sent out his officers throughout the land of that period to search and find all babes, and they were all killed, and Jesus was saved. So that's the Day of the Innocents.

MITZMAN: Oh, I see. So he's named because of that. Innocent.

VIAMONTE: Yes. And it's a very common name.

MITZMAN: And your mother's name?

VIAMONTE: Mercedes. Like the car.

MITZMAN: Alright. That's unusual. And your sister's name?

VIAMONTE: The same, Mercedes, but we used to call her [Spanish accent] Mercy.

MITZMAN: Mercy, like the fridge. Is that typical to name daughters after mothers?

VIAMONTE: Oh yes, very much.

MITZMAN: Have you ever felt discrimination in this country because you're Cuban?

VIAMONTE: No, I don't think so, because I don't think most people know I'm Cuban right off.

MITZMAN: With a name like Hatch. [laughs]

VIAMONTE: And just I don't have a label on my forehead, probably because my type is not that different and it doesn't set me apart with a different group.

MITZMAN: How about when you first came here, when your English wasn't really fluent?

VIAMONTE: No. Some people thought I was French, others thought I was Italian, but nobody in general could tell that I was Cuban.

MITZMAN: You had mentioned the one organization you belong to for Hispanics. Are there any other groups or organizations you belong to?

VIAMONTE: No, not really. Although for a while, I belonged to the professional women's organization in Modesto.

MITZMAN: How about recreational activities?

VIAMONTE: None really.

MITZMAN: Alright. What was your first paying job?

VIAMONTE: My first paying job was back in Cuba, a teacher's job for second grade, and that was... well, I had just come out of normal school. 1950 I guess.

MITZMAN: And you taught there. So you did work with him before you were married.

VIAMONTE: Yes, mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Can you tell me very briefly your teaching history? You started in Cuba and you taught there for a while. Can you go from there very briefly up to the present?

VIAMONTE: Alright. Back in Cuba, I taught for a parochial school, and then also I held a position at a night school teaching English as a foreign language. And that's what I did there before I moved here.

MITZMAN: In the 1950s.

VIAMONTE: Right. And then when I moved here, I taught in Sacramento, at Yolo County, and I think it was a year there. And then in Stockton for two years, and then I stopped teaching. I retired.

MITZMAN: For your children.

VIAMONTE: For the children. Then I was off for about ten years. And then started again. I started in this district.

MITZMAN: Which was about how long ago?

VIAMONTE: '65.

MITZMAN: So you've been in Manteca for 65 years.

VIAMONTE: Right.

MITZMAN: And you've been in Lathrop for how long?

VIAMONTE: Well permanent, I'd say four years I think.

MITZMAN: Longer, because [] taught with you in '75. So this would be maybe your sixth year or something. Was that your first year here? It was year-round school.

VIAMONTE: No. That was sixth grade, right? It must have been six years, because I was teaching seventh and eighth grade the year before. Six years.

MITZMAN: Okay. So you never worked during the first ten years of your children's lives?

VIAMONTE: Well, by the time I did retire, I already had two children.

MITZMAN: Oh, so you did work for a while.

VIAMONTE: Right, during the first two, three years of my marriage, that's two years of children. So two years.

MITZMAN: And then ten years off and then back. Okay. Do you enjoy working?

VIAMONTE: Yes, I do. Sometimes it gets a little frustrating.

MITZMAN: Yeah. Okay, my next question is what do you think is the most satisfying and the least satisfying thing about the work you've done.

VIAMONTE: The most satisfying is to see my efforts are not lost and that those who learn do gain. And the most frustrating is just the opposite.

MITZMAN: Do you feel that you, as a woman, have been limited as to what kind of jobs you can have? Or, I know you've always been a teacher. Do you think that, if you wanted to get out of teaching into something else, that you would have limits on you because you're a woman.

VIAMONTE: I'm sure I would, yes.

MITZMAN: How about as being a Cuban?

VIAMONTE: No, I don't think so.

MITZMAN: Just the fact that you're a woman.

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Okay. Can you think of any particular jobs that you think you might not be able to get into if you wanted to? Or anything that maybe in the past you might have considered doing, but you didn't because you didn't think you could get into it.

VIAMONTE: No, not really. I think if I had been intent enough, and in particular pursued it, I would have made it most probably.

MITZMAN: Did you have any difficulty – of course, it was only for two years, and then again later – while you were working and had children, did you have any difficulties because of that? Were there any problems caused by the combination?

VIAMONTE: I think that I was frankly not putting out as much in both areas. The children and teaching. Because I remember sometimes going to school with not very much sleep, because the children would wake up in the middle of the night, and that didn't do anything for me. Plus I think my children were spending their time at the sitter's, and I didn't think that was right, because I should have been raising them, not the babysitters.

MITZMAN: Do you think it's better for a woman to stay home with her children?

VIAMONTE: I definitely think so. Throughout their infant and early childhood, I think they should be with their parents.

MITZMAN: With the mother.

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Okay. Did you have any problems in this country, at the beginning or any time, since your husband was an American – did you have any problems, conflicts with his parents or with yours because it was a mixed marriage?

VIAMONTE: Nope. No deal.

MITZMAN: No problems at all. Okay. You mentioned within your home that your mother and father agreed on decisions, but if your father had a decision, he overruled.

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: How about in your marriage? Have you followed that tradition too, or is it different?

VIAMONTE: No, because in my marriage, I have had a pretty different situation. It's been that I have had to make the toughest decisions more often than not, because my husband, for one reason or another, it's been easier for him to sit back and let me do all the toughies. And so it's not been like that.

MITZMAN: So when you had children, you mainly were responsible for raising the children.

VIAMONTE: Yes. Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Did you raise your children in the same way your mother raised you, or do you think it was different?

VIAMONTE: No, I don't think so. I think it was different.

MITZMAN: In what ways, or why?

VIAMONTE: Well, I don't know. It seems like, in many ways, I've always allowed my children to use, more of their own reasoning ability than perhaps they did. And one thing I didn't do, which my mother did a lot, was that she relied on me for a lot of things. And I didn't think that was fair.

MITZMAN: Oh, I see. So you're taking some responsibility off your children, more than what you have.

VIAMONTE: Right. Yes.

MITZMAN: Okay. What's your greatest satisfaction as a mother?

VIAMONTE: As a mother? Jeez, there are a lot. [laughs]

MITZMAN: Okay. Name them all!

VIAMONTE: Well, as a mother I could say probably just seeing them get ahead in life.

MITZMAN: What were your greatest concerns as a mother?

VIAMONTE: As a mother, I had a lot of concerns with the influence of drugs in schools where my children were, because it was a very strong influence. A lot of concerns with that.

MITZMAN: Are your children independent?

VIAMONTE: Yes, most of them. The oldest one is not as independent as he should have been. Should be. He suddenly turned really independent when he was not old enough to use enough wisdom. Then he

had a lot of knocks, and then he came back home, and then it took him a long time to go through the process of becoming independent again.

MITZMAN: At the ages they are now, do you think they're similar to what you were at that age? Or are they very different?

VIAMONTE: Probably my youngest one is more like I was. And the oldest one, no, not like me at all. The second one has some things of mine, and my daughter has a lot of ability and desire for independence. And in this way, I think she's a little bit like me in that if she decides to accomplish something, no matter what stands in the way, she's gonna do it. In that way I think she's a little like I am.

MITZMAN: Okay, great.

[End of Side A.]

[TAPE 3, Side B: January 22, 1981]

[Begin Tape.]

MITZMAN: First of all, are you an American citizen?

VIAMONTE: Yes.

MITZMAN: When did you become a citizen?

VIAMONTE: First of all, one actual reason that we have to become one is because you can only work in school districts – well, I don't know if this has changed, but at the time, you could only work for the government in any of its forms three years without your citizenship. So at the end of three years, I either took citizenship or I couldn't continue to work in the same field. At that point I sided with the fact that the new system was operating in Cuba, and I could care less about going back there after that, and I didn't feel like I belonged anymore over there, so the combination of the two influenced me to go ahead and get my citizenship. And until then, I didn't feel like I belonged here.

MITZMAN: Oh, I see. And then once you became a citizen, you belonged.

VIAMONTE: Yes.

MITZMAN: And when was that? What year? Do you remember?

VIAMONTE: My gosh, I can't remember when it was. I think it was in the early '60s.

MITZMAN: Now your mother's lived here for about 15 years or so.

VIAMONTE: Actually, it was almost ten years or so after I came.

MITZMAN: Before you became a citizen? Oh, I see.

VIAMONTE: Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: How about your mother? Has she become an American citizen?

VIAMONTE: No. She has only a residence. And she just doesn't think that she has to. She still has a lot of attachments that she can't get rid of. And a person of her age, you can understand that. Plus, she's 84 already, so you know.

MITZMAN: Yeah. She's content. When you first came to the United States, what things did you think were good about the United States?

VIAMONTE: I think the United States is a much more open society in general. Work-wise it's a great deal more open than I would dare say any Latin American country.

MITZMAN: You mean to women?

VIAMONTE: No, to everybody period. If there's a job to be had, the average person will get it. While in Cuba and I'll say most Latin American countries, you have to know somebody.

MITZMAN: Alright. What did you feel when you came to this country was the worst thing about this country?

VIAMONTE: I don't know, because some of the images I got at the time are kind of erased by now.

MITZMAN: Can you remember any of them? Even if you've changed your mind. We're particularly interested in your initial experiences here and reactions.

VIAMONTE: Well, I felt that most of the people were rather impersonal. But this again probably stems from the fact that I was very family-oriented. This idea of bumping into somebody and saying "I'm sorry" and just going on, instead of really feeling sorry about bumping somebody.

MITZMAN: It's very superficial.

VIAMONTE: Very superficial attitude toward many things. And also the fact that – this really did strike me – that I found people would tell somebody off with a smile. Really sticking it to them, but with a smile. That really puzzled me to death.

MITZMAN: Because you're used to what?

VIAMONTE: Well, if you're mad you're mad. And it's perfectly alright to show you're mad.

MITZMAN: In Cuba.

VIAMONTE: Yes.

MITZMAN: And you don't think that's so acceptable here?

VIAMONTE: I don't think so.

MITZMAN: I agree.

VIAMONTE: You can't show it here, because then you act uncivilized or something like that.

MITZMAN: People get real tense too. Okay, looking back at your life, what do you see as the great changes in your life? The things that have happened that have made a real change in the direction? Or have there been?

VIAMONTE: I think I've become quite independent here compared to what I was at home and what I could have been.

MITZMAN: What you would have been allowed to be.

VIAMONTE: Right. Because I can think of one fellow that while I was back home, almost to the time that I came, he was thinking of me seriously. I was sort of letting him have his way, but anyway. If I had ever married that fellow, I would have had to really tow the line.

MITZMAN: Typical Latin.

VIAMONTE: Yes, right. Mmhmm. And as far as my life with my husband, I might say that I have complete freedom to decide and do what I want. He'd never, never interfere in any way. He might, "Well, maybe it's for your advantage to do it this way or that way."

MITZMAN: But it's your decision.

VIAMONTE: That's my decision.

MITZMAN: That's very important. How did World War II affect you? You were living in Cuba at the time. Did it have an impact upon you?

VIAMONTE: Not really. The only thing that I remember was after World War II, that I had already met my husband and I was back home and there was some talk about the Korean conflict.

VIAMONTE: So anyway, it didn't affect me hardly in the least.

MITZMAN: Cuba really wasn't involved.

VIAMONTE: No. In fact, it was a boon to Cuba because sugar prices rose quite a bit. It was the time to do that. And if anything, it actually benefited me indirectly. We didn't own any sugar production or farms, but my mother benefited from that because her father had one, and she got a small part of it. She got quite a bit out of it.

MITZMAN: And it probably helped the general economy too, I'm sure.

VIAMONTE: Right. Mmhmm.

MITZMAN: Okay. At the time you came here from Cuba, you had no problem leaving Cuba, is that correct? When you initially left? How did you get out of the country?

VIAMONTE: Getting out, no problem, because the United States and Cuba have a pact, like Mexico and the United States, that you can move back and forth. All you had to do is have your passport, and that was it. That's all. And if you came visiting, 30 days was the standard, so as long as you follow that, it was alright. But in my case, since my husband and I were talking about getting married, I wanted to have the door open to stay here indefinitely if I chose to. So then he suggested, his uncle was a retired Rear Admiral in the Navy, that he would sponsor me. So he sent in the papers necessary, and that's how I came.

MITZMAN: And you were able to stay as long as you wanted.

VIAMONTE: Right.

MITZMAN: Although once you were married, you could have stayed here anyway, right?

VIAMONTE: Yes, right. But I didn't want to use that, because I wanted the freedom to do what I wanted.

MITZMAN: How do you feel about the Cuban refugees who are coming to this country now?

VIAMONTE: This last wave, I have found the people are very different from the earlier refugees.

MITZMAN: Refugees of your time you mean.

VIAMONTE: Yes, like the refugees from the '60s on to this last wave of refugees that came in. They're very different. These people think that the system owes them a living. That was not the case at all with the Cubans of the earlier period.

MITZMAN: You had to come and make yourself.

VIAMONTE: Make yourself.

MITZMAN: Whereas they feel that it should be given.

VIAMONTE: That's right. And I'm sure it's the result of the system over there, which has not given them any sense of applying themselves, because everything and everybody is just cut and dry. Nobody receives more for any special efforts, and they don't know very well being in business for themselves. Everything is flattened down.

MITZMAN: Do you think they should be allowed in this country?

VIAMONTE: Not in the numbers they're coming, and not a certain element that has come.

MITZMAN: What element is that?

VIAMONTE: The element I'm talking about is the group of people who have definitely been found to be antisocial. They have behaved antisocially and they have a record and so on.

MITZMAN: You mean criminals?

VIAMONTE: Yes.

MITZMAN: So you feel there's a good number of criminals coming out of the country?

VIAMONTE: Yes, and if not the ones that are loose already, I think the ones that are still in control of the government, I seriously think that we should send those people back. And if they don't take them, just drop them with parachutes or something.

MITZMAN: [laughing] Here they are!

VIAMONTE: Well, the Cuban government did the same thing. "Here they are. Take them."

MITZMAN: That's right. Just put them on boats and kicked them out.

VIAMONTE: So I find one solution very simple. Just take them to Guantanamo Bay, which is a U.S. base. Open the gates at Guantanamo Bay, the ones that lead to the rest of the territory, and just say, "Out you go!" Because why not?

MITZMAN: Alright. How do you feel about the women's liberation movement in this country? I would assume that when you were in Cuba, there wasn't one.

VIAMONTE: No, there wasn't any. And my view is that there's two problems we have to deal with, and if you're a working person, you know better than the one who is not. And that is, when you are working away from home, you have to carry out two jobs. The home and the outside. And this is one reason why I think that a lot of women, even if they have the opportunity, cannot really take on heavier responsibilities outside of the home, because it's just too much. It's not that they don't have the ability, that we don't have the ability, or we don't want to do it. It's that sometimes it's too much. And also, I feel that women in the armed forces, the only women that could really function is the women away from the front lines, because you get women in the front lines and then start to sexual abuses. Mostly if they are captured. Men don't have that problem. So there's just different areas that we are not functional in because of being women. Plus a woman that wants to stay home and take care of her children, then more power to her. We are not all born to do the same thing. We should all have different areas of competency.

MITZMAN: Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about that you'd like to tell me about?

VIAMONTE: I thought about something the other night that I thought we should probably touch on that. But you know, I just can't remember right now.

MITZMAN: Okay. Well if you think about it, we can get back together.

[END OF TAPE]