

## **My Life Story**



**Tony Albuquerque, Story Teller**



**Linda Ramsey, Story Keeper**

## Acknowledgement

As we near the consummation of the Ethnic Life Stories Project, there is a flood of memories going back to the concept of the endeavor. The awareness was there that the project would lead to golden treasures. But I never imagined the treasures would overflow the storehouse. With every Story Teller, every Story Keeper, every visionary, every contributor, every reader, the influence and impact of the project has multiplied in riches. The growth continues to spill onward. As its outreach progresses, "boundaries" will continue to move forward into the lives of countless witnesses.

Very few of us are "Native Americans." People from around the world, who came seeking freedom and a new life for themselves and their families, have built up our country and communities. We are all individuals, the product of both our genetic makeup and our environment. We are indeed a nation of diversity.

Many of us are far removed from our ancestors who left behind the familiar to learn a new language, new customs, new political and social relationships. We take our status as Americans for granted. We sometimes forget to welcome the newcomer. We bypass the opportunity to ask about their origins and their own journey of courage.

But, wouldn't it be sad if we all spoke the same language, ate the same food, and there was no cultural diversity.

This project has left me with a tremendous debt of gratitude for so many. The almost overwhelming task the Story Keeper has, and the many hours of work and frustration to bring forth a story to be printed. I salute you.

To the Story Tellers, thank you for letting us share in your heart and soul. It is my prayer that some or many of the stories will influence many young persons to another level, to be enmeshed in the pursuit of learning of other cultures that make up our community and the world.

This has, indeed, been a project of "Many" for the Community. Thanks to the following who have played a role in helping to achieve the goal. The list is practically endless, first names only. You know who you are and what you did . . . sincere thanks to each of you:

Caroline, Charity, Charlotte, Bob, Dana, De Ann, Ed, Eric, Erman, Jim, Joha Oke, John K, John M, June, Kay, Kendall, Maria, Mark, Michelle, Myra, Norma, Pat, Rachel, Rob, Starr, Susan, Valerie, and special recognition to Jim Coombs, SMSU, Map Department.

Jim Mauldin  
Coordinator  
Ethnic Life Stories  
'01 '02 '03

**The Ethnic Life Stories Project....**

*...giving the Springfield community a window to its diversity through the life stories of ethnic elders.*

Liewe Se Storie Afrikaanse	Afrikaanse (2)
ÖSÖ GAY HÄY WÖ TAN	Apache
قصص من الحياة	Arabic (2)
Ga-no-du Ka-ne-he-lv-s-gi	Cherokee
自傳	Chinese (2)
Life Stories	English (5)
Histoires De Ma Vie	French (2)
Lebensgeschichten	German
סיפור חיים	Hebrew
Mayer rah-Khaan Knee-Hindi	Hindi
生きてきた道	Japanese
나의 살아온 이야기	Korean
DZĪVES STĀSTS	Latvian
ജീവിത കഥകൾ	Malayalam
OPOWIESC z ŻYCIA	Polish
Imanawangtanan Wawanaycasjas	Quechua
Povestea Vie Ţii Mele	Romanian
Жизненные истории	Russian
Historia De La Vida	Spanish (8)
പുഴയിൽ ജീവിതം	Thai
Kuwento Ng Aking Buhay	Tagalog
CHUY-N [◎] Tjĭ	Vietnamese
געשיחטע פון מאיין לעבען	Yiddish

# Birthplaces of the Storytellers

2001 2002 2003

Yohannan Abraham  
Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India

Janet Akaike - Toste  
Kofu, Japan

Tony Albuquerque  
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Martha Baker  
San Antonio, Texas

Grace Ballenger  
Shanghai, China

Ruth L.V. Burgess  
Poona (Pune), India

Sara Fajardo Calderon  
Guatemala City, Guatemala

Olga Codutti  
Rosario, Santa Fe, Argentina

Claudine Arend Cox  
Boulay, France

Adalyn Cravens  
Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

Taj Farouki  
Wadi-Hunayn, Palestine

Malca Flasterstein  
Holon, Israel

Edgar Galinanes  
Mayaguez, Puerto Rico

Reynaldo Gumucio  
Cochabamba, Bolivia

John Hernandez  
San Antonio, Texas

Yung Hwang  
Okjong, Kyungnam, Korea

Madge (Jackie) King  
London, England

Edward P. Ksara  
Tangier, Morocco

Hyman Lotven  
Kapulah, Russia

Regina Lotven  
Nancy, France

Sterling Macer  
Mason City, Iowa

Gwendolyn Marshall  
Jackson, Mississippi

Maria Michalczyk-Lillich  
Sandomierz, Poland

Edith F.L. Middleton  
Glasgow, Scotland

Loan Vu Nigh  
Thai Binh, Vietnam

Jorge Padron  
Pedro Betancourt-Matanza, Cuba

Ruth Penaherrera-Norton  
Archidona, Ecuador

Eric Pervunkhin  
Moscow, Russia

Ioana Popescu  
Bucharest, Romania

Josefina S. Raborar  
Manila, Philippines

Juan Salazar  
Tuman, Peru

Eligio Sanchez  
Mexico City, Mexico

Tong Trithara  
Audhaya, Thailand

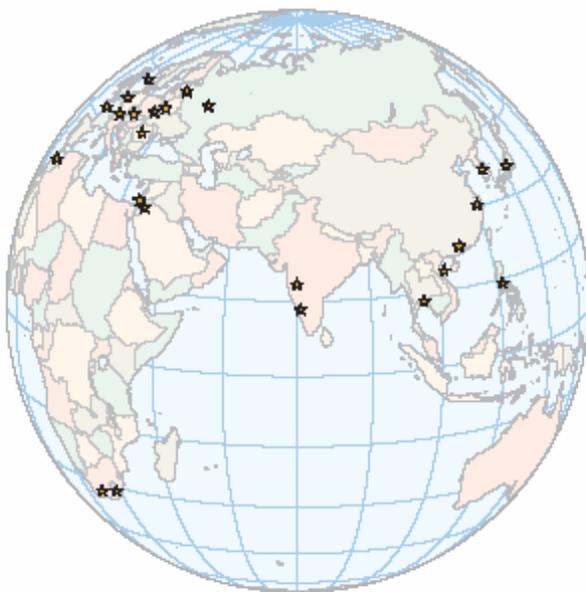
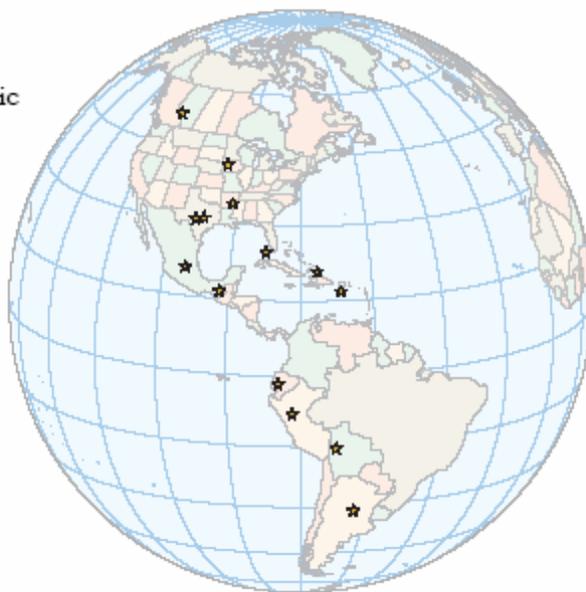
Cyril Vermooten  
Beaufort West, South Africa

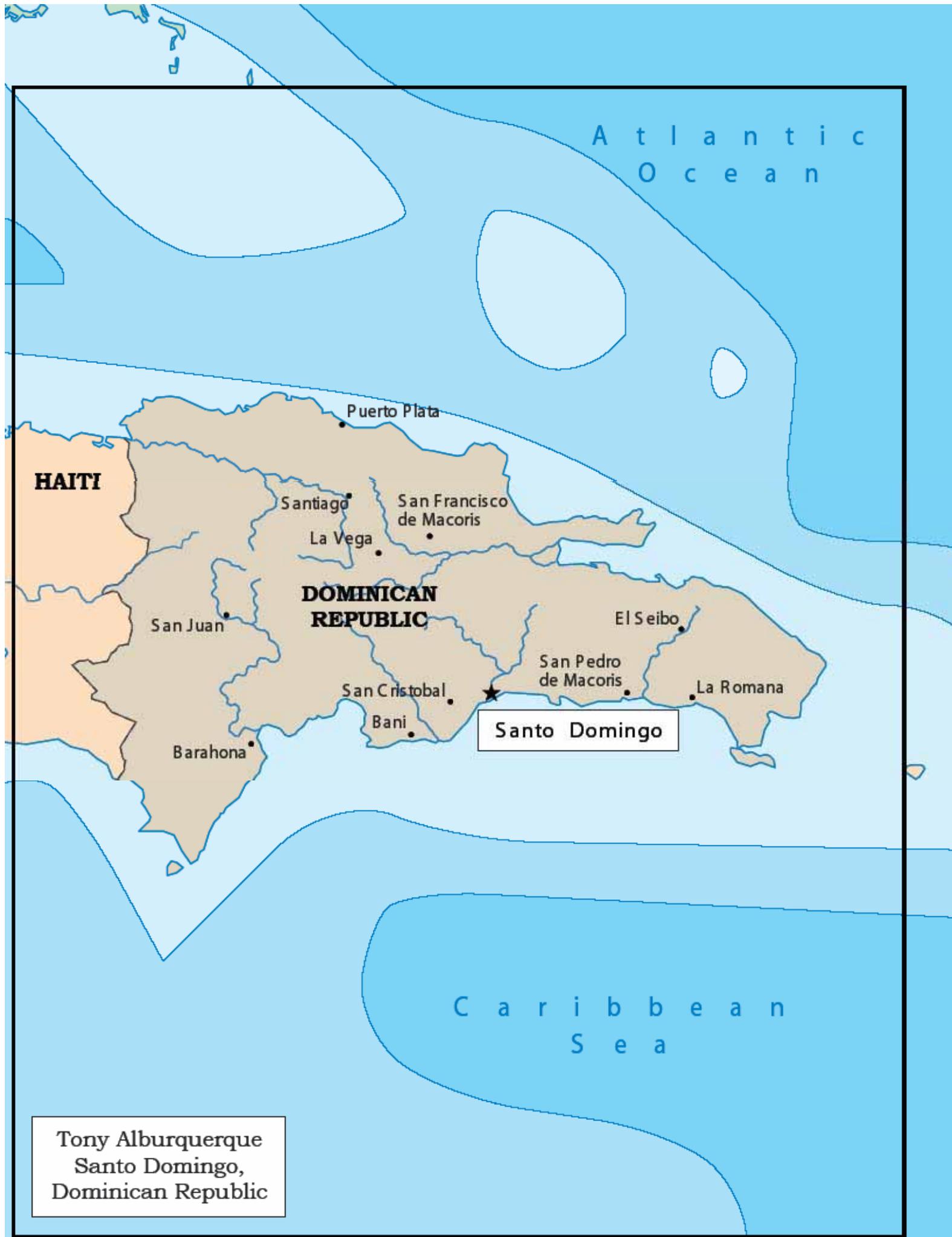
Joy Vermooten  
Nqaberie (Natal), South Africa

Ilga Vise  
Riga, Latvia

Hiltrud M. Webber  
Domnau, Germany

Tobby Yen  
Chung (Zhongshan), China





A t l a n t i c  
O c e a n

**HAITI**

**DOMINICAN  
REPUBLIC**

C a r i b b e a n  
S e a

Tony Albuquerque  
Santo Domingo,  
Dominican Republic

Santo Domingo

## **DEDICATION**

To the memory of my recently departed “Uncle Papo”, who inspired me to be someone that matters – a dignified human being.

## INTRODUCTION

It has been delightful meeting with Tony and recording his memories of life in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. His enthusiasm for life is contagious. It has also been a pleasure to meet Jim Mauldin and to help with the Ethnic Life Stories Project. What a neat way to develop awareness and appreciation for different cultures.

As Tony says: “The more variety there is, the spicier life gets.”

Sign me up for a trip to the Caribbean!

Linda Ramsey  
September, 2003

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## CHAPTER ONE: FAMILY HISTORY

My full name is Antonio Alburquerque. My name comes from St. Anthony. My mother was raised Catholic and all of us have Antonio in our names because she was a devotee of St. Anthony and that was the parish where we were all baptized. Alburquerque is my father's last name and it comes from Spain. My full name when I was born was Antonio de Jesus Alburquerque. The middle name was dropped after I became a United States citizen.

The first Alburquerque in history that we have found is the Viscount of Alburquerque in Spain and Portugal. According to the research I made in the 1970's the name was started in Spain with the Moors and it was Al-Bukir which was the name of a region in Lebanon. When the Moors were expelled from Spain everybody had to change their names to a Catholic name from a Moorish name so they changed Al-Bukir to Alburquerque and that is how the name originated. There is a town in Southern Spain called Alburquerque.



*Me at five months old.*

I was born on February 9, 1956, in a private clinic. The same physician delivered me, my two brothers and my sister. His name was Dr. Hernandez and I still remember how he looked. He was my mother's doctor and she would take us with her when she went to see him. Dr. Hernandez had a nurse who I also met but I can't recall her name. She was a very tall lady and real pleasant and after Dr. Hernandez passed away she went to work with my father's uncle as his nurse because my uncle was also a physician.

I was a big baby. My mother told me when I was born, I looked completely red and she thought there was something wrong with me but the doctor said "No, there was nothing wrong." I weighed 10 pounds, 3 ounces. I was completely bald-headed for a long period of time. The nurse called me 'Swiss Cheese'

because Swiss cheese is like a big ball and the wax is red and I looked like a ball of cheese.

I was born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. When I was born my country was ruled by Rafael Trujillo, a very famous dictator. His dictatorship lasted for 30 years. He was a real strict man. In the country at that time there was a strict order of almost everything and everyday activity was ruled by what the government wanted you to do. Santo Domingo is the capital of the Dominican Republic which together with Haiti shares the island of Hispaniola. Haiti is located on the West and the Dominican Republic is on the East.

The Dominican Republic was discovered by the Spaniards – by Columbus on his first trip in 1492. The native Indians called the island ‘Quisqueya’. Quisqueya means fertile. ‘Haiti’ in their language means the opposite – infertile. Haiti was conquered and colonized by the French and the Dominican Republic was ruled by Spain for hundreds of years. At times, the Dominican Republic was invaded by the French and sometimes invaded by the British. It looked like everybody went there for some reason or another and they invaded and they ruled the country until they were expelled. It was also occupied on two occasions by the American troops. The first occupation by the United States was in 1910 and they were there, I believe, for a number of years. They had their own president and the money was dollars and everything was Americanized during that time of occupation. Then they left. Again in 1965 the United States occupied the country for another year following a revolution.

Our land is blessed with fertile land specifically in the center of the island. For miles and miles the land is as black as you can find soil and you don’t need to do much to it. Everything grows. That was a blessing.

In the center of the island running from west to east there is the Cordillera Central which is a central chain of mountains. There are high peaks. The highest peak in the Caribbean is there and is called Pico Duarte. There are also rainforests in these mountains. Right in the center, the Cordillera is interrupted by a huge valley in the center of the island. It is called the Valley of Cibao. Cibao is an Indian word and I think it means ‘valley’. There was some speculation at some point that it was the name of a chieftain but that was never proven.

The valley is flat land and the main crop is tobacco. The biggest employer is the tobacco company which is Philip Morris. That is where the Marlboros come from. They have two kinds of tobacco that they grow: blonde and black. The blonde, of course, is used for cigarettes. The black is for cigars and next to Cuba, the Dominican Republic is one of the biggest exporters of cigars.

The north region also has mountains but not as high. Sugar cane is the main crop grown and produced in the valleys. The south portion of the island can be divided into the southeast and the southwest. The southwest portion (closest to Haiti) is desert. It is close to the ocean but it is still a desert, arid zone. Even so, it has a lot of natural resources. They have the world’s largest mine of bauxite. Bauxite is where aluminum comes from. The name of the company is Alcoa. Also they have carbon mines and they use it for batteries. That company is called Union Carbide.

On the southeast and east portion of the island they have also a lot of sugar cane and the biggest tourist area. It is probably the biggest tourist area in the Caribbean at the present time. Also in the east you find the most beautiful white sand beaches. It is amazing. The water is kind of a light green and it is beautiful. It is a resort area.

Our language is the Spanish language of course. It’s the predominant language and 99 percent of the islanders speak it. The one percent that do not speak Spanish are

immigrants from Haiti and they speak patois French which is a Haitian dialect. They speak something quite similar in Louisiana called Creole but it is not the same as patois.

Most people nowadays are employed in industries and factories. There are many types of businesses now. Still the cultivation of the sugar cane is one of the main industries. But we also have a lot of people that work in the mining industry. They also mine ferronickel. Nickel is used to make most of the coins today. They extract ferrous nickel. A company that has been there for 50 years is called Falcon Bridge. They have a huge plant there and they employ quite a lot of people.

They also have a lot of factories that are called free zone factories and these are factories from the United States mainly that are textile companies. They employ quite a large number of people producing clothing and everything that is made with textiles for sale in duty-free shops. They offer a lot of good benefits to their employees and it is quite a booming industry. If you watch carefully when you go to any store you can see lots of labels that say “Manufactured in the Dominican Republic” or “Assembled in the Dominican Republic”. These factories are located in the east and north parts of the island because that is where our biggest ports are, so it is easy to transport in and out.

In the capital city and the major cities, one of the biggest employers is the construction companies. Ever since I was a little kid a lot of people work in construction and it is always expanding. The city now is about 20 times as big as when I was born. It is just immense. When I was born there were half a million people living in Santo Domingo. Now there are 3 million because of job opportunities and growth.

In the old days many people worked in the sugar cane. As the time went by more and more of the sugar cane workers were composed of Haitian immigrants and now they are predominantly Haitians. The Dominicans don't want to do that type of job anymore so they go to the big cities and start working in something different. That's how everything changes. They want factory work or they want something that will give them benefits. Sugar cane cutters don't have any benefits at all. And it is easier and cheaper for the colono (owner of a sugar cane plantation) to employ the Haitian immigrants. They pay them not such a big salary. They assign them to some type of barracks where they live while the crop is in season for about six months of the year. After that they have to go back to Haiti.

The sugar cane plantations have modernized a little more. But you can still go to some of those plantations and sugar cane mills and you will think you are in a different era because they still have some of the ox driven carriages full of sugar cane going to the mill. It is the old-fashioned way. Not all of them are like that, but they still have some that try to conserve the old ways as much as they can. I don't know how long they will be able to hold on to that because it is more productive and more practical to just load the cane up in a train and take it to machines to do the rest. They are slowly being converted to that. But you can still see the whole process as it was done 200 years ago.

Now days one of the most flourishing industries and largest is the tourist industry. Like I said before, they had at last count 185 all-inclusive resorts ranging from two-stars to five-stars. Those are from the coast of Puerto Plata in the north to Santo Domingo on the southeast coast. The ones with the white sands have the most beautiful places especially on the southeast coast.

Puerto Plata is where Columbus first landed. He established the first fort in the New World. The ruins are still there. Since it was in the north part of the island and close to Cuba and the Bahamas, it was frequented by unpleasant raiders, Caribbean Indians, French, etc. so they decided it was not a safe place to be. After a Caribbean Indian raid when the whole enclave was killed, they decided to establish a new enclave in a different place so they went all across the northeast, east and south and they saw a huge river mouth. They decided that it would be great to build a fort there because it would be easy to see who was coming and it would be easier to defend. That place is now Santo Domingo and it has a lot of history and historic places. Nature has been kind because they still have the trunk of a tree where Columbus tied his Santa Maria. It still has the scars of the rope. It is called the Ceiba de Colon. Ceiba is a type of tree that has a trunk which is humongous. They still have many ceibas which are alive and some of them are probably 400-500 years old or more. They are so strong and so big that they stay forever.

The most striking memory of my homeland is its people. The Dominicans are always willing to party. They are happy people most of the time and hardly ever appear sad. It doesn't matter if times are hard or times are bad, they are always smiling. I like that. I remember that. Even in difficult times they find moments to make a joke out of it or make light of a difficult situation and I remember that since I was a kid. It doesn't matter what it is, they are always ready to celebrate something.

I grew up without a care – about crime or anything else. Children were held in high regard by everybody. Children were always protected and cared for by everybody – not just your parents or your relatives. If a total stranger saw you doing something you were not supposed to do, they would look after you and tell you – “Don't do that” or “What are you doing?”. They were always there to help. Kids were always treated like that ever since I was born.



*My deceased brother,  
Leopoldito, at ten months old.  
1950. Santo Domingo, D.R.*

A good memory that I have when I was a kid is that all of the neighborhood kids would gather after school to play multiple games, but they always ended up playing the number one favorite game of all – baseball. That was it. We played, you name it, all kinds of different games but baseball was number one. We had to play baseball everyday. Those are the memories I have since I was a kid.

My father's name is Leopoldo. My mother's name was Isabel. My maternal grandmother was Rosario. This is the family I grew up with – the people who

lived with me since I was born. Then my brothers are Ray and Johnny and my sister is Raitza. She is the youngest one.

My father was born in 1923 and he was born in the east portion of the island in a place called Hato Mayor. Hato is like a collection of farms. It comes from the Spanish people and is like a group of farms. They were ruled by one feudal guy in the old times. When my father was seventeen he went to study and work in the capital and he has lived there ever since. That is where he met my mother. My mother was born in 1929 in Santo Domingo in the old colonial city. They got married in 1950. My mother had two babies before me but they both died when they were less than a year old because they had an epidemic of cholera and dysentery. They developed some vaccines later on but at the time they didn't have access to any. As a consequence of that, my mother was depressed and that is why the lapse between 1950 and 1956 when I was born. Then I was born in 1956 without a problem and I was followed by Ray in 1959 (three years later) and Johnny in 1961 (two years later) and Raitza in 1963.



*Me in my horse wagon. Santo Domingo, D.R. 2 years old.*

My father is a 5' 8" stocky man in contrast with his father (my grandfather) who was a very unusual person because being from Spain he was about 6' 2" and slender. Granddad died when he was 92 years old but he always walked straight as a pole. He never hunched over - he never believed in that. He believed in good posture. He would sit down totally straight. That is how I remember him.

My mother was very short and a picture of my mother when she was young shows that she was very pretty. She had real dark hair (jet black) and her eyes

were a little bit slanted so they nicknamed her China (from China) because she looked like a Chinese person. When my mother was in her mid-twenties her hair turned white – completely white. My grandmother, Rosario, had white hair but not that young – it turned when she was in her forties. My grandfather (my mother's father) his hair turned white when he was in his twenties. My mother did not want white hair so she started dying her hair at a very young age. She would never allow us to take a picture of her with her white hair.

My father was a pharmacist and he owned his own pharmacy. My mother was a homemaker. The first memory that I have of myself occurred when I was so young that people say, "How do you remember that?" It just impressed me so much that I still remember it. The memory is about my second day at school. But I have to start with what happened the first day. I was 3 ½ years old. In Latin America, specifically in the countries that were dominated by the Spanish for a long period of time, children go to

school when they are potty trained. The reason why is because our countries are not rich countries with a lot of resources for people. The best resource is a good education. So we believe that it is a waste of time if you have a career in your twenties. The sooner you get a career, the better off you are. So as soon as you are potty trained and you talk and communicate, you go to school. And that has been like that forever. In this day and age it is the same way.

So without introduction, on my first day of school my mother took me and this is the part that I don't recall. This is what my mother said. She took me to school. We walked because it was within walking distance and I was supposed to start my first day of kindergarten. Well, I went inside the school. My mother introduced me to the teacher who was a nice lady. My mother said that I did not say a word. She said she could look in my face and see that I was terrified once I got to the school. She said she knew I was nervous because I was talking a lot on the way to school – constantly asking questions of this and that. But once I got to school it was just the opposite. I wouldn't open my mouth and the teacher said, "This is your chair." I had to sit down in my chair and desk. My mother said that she sat me there and she said that her heart was just breaking apart, but she didn't want to show anything like that. She said, "I will come and pick you up at noon." I was just terrified and she left, going out the door.

That classroom had two doors – one on each side. My mother went out one door. The teacher had asked my mother what my name was so that the whole class would know. I just gave the teacher a blank stare and jumped up from my chair and ran out of the room through the opposite door. I caught up with my mother just getting out of school by the playground. My mother said it didn't matter how much she threatened and pleaded and begged, I would not budge. I was crying and screaming and I was ranting and raving and I was not going to go to that school. Period. So she took me home.

Well, my father came from work and she told my father what happened. My father gave me a look and this part I remember. We were having supper and my father said, "I will take you to school tomorrow." And I was more terrified then. The next morning, sure enough, my father grabbed me by the hand, my mother was on the other side and they walked me to school. The teacher was there and she said the same thing and my father said "Sit down." So I went ahead and sat down. He just looked at me again and he said, "You don't move from there till your mother comes to pick you up."

They both left the room and all I was thinking about was my plan of escape out of there. All of a sudden they asked for my name again and all of that and I managed to say it, but then they were going to start doing the alphabet. Everybody had to say a letter. I remember when it was going to be my time I was terrified. I just ran out of that chair again and out the opposite door and as soon as I rounded a corner to get to the hallway I ran into somebody's legs. And when I looked up, it was my father's legs. I was paralyzed. And I remember my father just spanked me, you know, with his hand a couple of times and, of course, you know I started crying and screaming. I remember that because he just shocked me. I was never thinking that he was going to be there. He sat me down in the classroom and I was just in tears and sobbing. We were reciting the

alphabet between sobs. At the end, I remember the teacher said, “You will learn this very good because your first letters cost you a lot.” That was my first memory.

My father is still living. He is 79 years old and he is still extremely active. He has a lot of energy – more energy than I do. My mother passed away in 1998 of a sudden heart attack. It was unexpected. She always enjoyed good health and she never complained of being ill. The day she passed away, as usual, she woke up early and did chores at the house. She went to buy some stuff at a nearby market and she collapsed in the market. That was it. That was a shock for all of us, but of course, especially for me because I was here in the United States. All of my brothers and sister were in the Dominican Republic. When you are far away it is more significant. I was in St. Louis that day. That was bad.

My two brothers, Ray and Johnny, are living there. They both have their families. My brother, Ray, which is the next one following me, is an architect. He works for an engineering and architecture company and they build big construction projects. They have built some resorts and sometimes they build structures - buildings and warehouses, things of that sort - industrial types of construction.

My other brother is Johnny. We call him Johnny but his real name is Rafael. Johnny is an electrical engineer. He has a master’s degree in electrical engineering and he works for the GTE telephone company. He had occupied a high position there for many, many years. He is the brains of the family.

My sister, Raitza, is the youngest one in my family. Raitza is a banker. She has worked at the Central Bank of the Dominican Republic for many years and she is in charge of the International Exchange. She has had that position for several years. They have, of course, their own families and I have eight or nine nephews and nieces. We communicate a lot and I call my father every week. They come visit me sometimes and sometimes I go visit them.

My brothers both have the same middle name of Antonio. Raitza, since she is a girl, has the middle name of Antonia. Ray is named Raimundo Antonio and Rafael Antonio is Johnny.

When I was growing up my grandmother lived with us. And, of course, we had maids. In Latin America it is very common to have maids. At that time, the houses were built with maids’ quarters. They still do but not as much as it was before. Now things are more modern. But they still have maids.

I mostly identify with my brothers, Johnny and Ray because we are close in age. We share a lot of jokes, pranks and sports and things that we like a lot. We enjoy telling stories about things that happened in the family. I admire my brothers and sister because they are good professionals. They are good-hearted individuals. They struggle a lot and they have reached their goals so I admire that.

I admire my father because he is a warrior. He came from nothing and he managed to send us first to private schools, which was a big sacrifice for him. Then he helped us go to college – all four of us. That was commendable. He worked a lot.

I also admire my cousin Papo. He is my cousin but I call him “Uncle Papo” to show respect. Papo is a very intellectual person – very cultural and refined. His name is Rafael Moreta – it is Italian sounding. When I was a little kid we called him Papo. He had a lot of goals in life and I admire his intellect, intelligence and culture. I love to read many books and he was somebody to share a piece of literature or fine arts with. That was him. And I admire him a lot because that is his passion and if you like opera, he knows everything there is to know about that. If you like to read about literature, he knows. He is very clever – very cultured.

In 1967, after the Dominican Civil War in 1965, we moved to Puerto Rico because during the revolution my father’s pharmacy was located in the portion of the Dominican Republic of Santo Domingo where the rebels were located. So the pharmacy was destroyed with missiles and stuff. So he lost everything. Whatever was left was taken by the Red Cross or the rebels or whoever. He was left without a job. After 1966, they changed governments and the situation was real chaotic and jobs were not easy to come by. My father’s sister lived in Puerto Rico and also we have some cousins there. My father’s brother-in-law said to my father, “Why don’t you come here? I have a job for you.” So he moved there. He started working at a rum company. They have a huge Bacardi rum company in Puerto Rico which is one of the largest in the world. Next to it, there is an older rum company and they have their own port where great boats come in. That’s how big they are. Well, next to it they have another one that is a subsidiary of Bacardi. That one was managed by my father’s brother-in-law. So he found my father a job there.

After my father got situated and started there then he sent for us and we immigrated to Puerto Rico. We stayed there from 1967 to 1977. We returned back to the Dominican Republic in 1977. My grandmother was ill and she did not want to die and be buried in Puerto Rico. At the same time the company established a subsidiary in the Dominican Republic. They told my father that if he wanted to, he could be transferred there and have the same job and same position – so why not?

I was planning to study medicine and at that time I was finishing college so we moved back. I had a bachelor’s degree with a major in marine biology and also chemistry. After that, I did one more year of mathematics and physics. During that last year I was teaching Spanish literature to a class at World University.

## CHAPTER TWO: EARLIEST MEMORIES AND CHILDHOOD



*Me in 1964. Picture was taken for my passport.*

My nickname was Tony which is short for Anthony or over there, Antonio – same thing. I will describe a typical day when I was real young. In my house the day started at 5:00 in the morning for my dad. My dad would get up at 5:00 every day. It didn't matter if it was Saturday or Sunday. He was planning to get ready to go to work, but before going to work he would make breakfast for everybody. Everyday. He still does. When I was a kid in the house we just never paid much attention to it. Nowadays he just clings and clangs pots and pans about every morning. But at that time, he thought that was his contribution so he would make breakfast for everyone.

My mother would wake up after him and she would start getting us ready for school. Then she would see us off to school which started at 8:00. Now I must say that in the Dominican Republic the most important meal of the day is lunch and when I was a kid everything stopped at lunch. If you were at work, the businesses would be closed. You would go home and have your lunch and you would resume at 2:00. So that was a custom.

They had a siren that they would sound at the main fire department and that would sound all over the city. They would sound it four times a day. First, at 7:00 – that means the signal to go to work. They sound it again at 12:00 noon – that means go for lunch. They sound it again at 2:00 – that means come back to work. And then at 6:00 in the afternoon it sounds to go for supper. So that was the day – the workday.

We did not go for lunch during the school days at my house because we were in a Catholic school and they supplied lunch. But it was the same thing – stop at noon at lunch and go back. That was the way.

Then school was over at 3:30 and we returned home for the rest of the time. Once we got home my mother would make us take a shower because we were playing and doing all kinds of stuff and she wanted us to have our shower out of the way. Then we started doing homework. We had to finish it all before my father came from work at 6:00. So we had to hurry. Sometimes she would help us. Sometimes when my father came from work he would check and help us with the homework. After the homework was done and they knew that everything was OK, then we could go out and play. So we played with the neighbor kids until we were called back in for supper which was about 8:00. Supper was at 8:00 and it was light because our main meal was lunch. And it is still the same way.

Right after supper we just relaxed and sometimes we went back and played games and watched a little bit of TV until it was 9:30. And that was time to go to bed and get ready for the next day. I woke up at 6:00 because my school was the farthest.

All that changed in 1967 when we moved to Puerto Rico. It is the same as here. The main meal is supper. So we had supper in Puerto Rico by 6:00. But the same continued – 5:00 A.M. my father would be up and my mother would get up to the same routine except the meals were different.

When we lived in Puerto Rico the weekends were the best. The reason why is we lived across from the beach. We lived in a suburb of San Juan called Levittown. We lived in the first section of the suburb and right across the highway was the beach. That was, to me, the best house I ever lived in because every night you couldn't ask for anything better. You would sleep listening to the waves break and there was always a breeze. So the weekends were good because all we did was just go across and swim and fish and spend all day doing things there.

We had plenty of chores because we lived close to the beach. The houses in the Caribbean are mainly built with concrete because with the hurricanes you might lose them every year. Since we were close to the beach our house had to be painted twice a year. We had to help our father do that. We painted inside of the house once a year, but outside twice and that took awhile. The car had to be washed twice a week because of the sea salt and if you didn't want it to rust right in front of your eyes you had to do that.



*Family reunion in Santo Domingo. I'm with my Mother, dressed in white with hat and mask in front.*

We attended Catholic church on Sundays and all four of us went to Catholic schools so we had to attend all of the ceremonies. We also participated in the youth programs and they made it really fun, especially in Puerto Rico during Christmas time, so we were really eager to participate.

Our meals are really typical of Latin America. One thing I need to clarify is that we had maids in the Dominican Republic, but they would not cook. Not because they were not supposed to – it is because we didn't want them to. None of us – not me, not my brothers –

would eat unless my mother cooked it – or my grandmother. They had to prepare the meals or we wouldn't eat. I don't know why but we just ate what my mother cooked or my grandma, that's it. So that's the way it was. In Puerto Rico, of course, my mother cooked – and my dad and my grandma too.

Meals are traditionally rice and beans and meat – chicken, pork or beef – prepared different ways with different sauces. They also eat a variety of tubers with different names – yucca, manioc, yame. One of the things we eat quite a lot - it's kind of like a substitute for rice (we eat it almost on a daily basis) – is plantain. Tostones we call it – fried plantain. And, of course, we eat tropical fruits – you can find them everywhere. Avocados are quite different from the ones you find here. They are the big kind – a green variety. When you open it up it looks like it is a butternut half. They are very delicious.

We have quite a lot of fruits that are relatively unknown here. We have anon and passion fruit. We also have guanábana (soursop) which is a big fruit. On the outside it looks like greenish-brown and it has like little spikes all over but they are soft. When you open it up inside it has a white pulp and round black seeds. We had banana and pineapple. Granadillo is big and yellow and a little like a papaya. It is a little harder than a papaya and we make a heavy juice out of it. It is really delicious.

We have limoncillo. It is a very unusual fruit and it is typical of the Caribbean. You won't find it anywhere else. The tree is a big, magnificent tree and if you look, it grows in a bunch like grapes and they are about the size of a lime more or less but they are really completely round and dark green. When you crack it open the outer skin comes out and you open it up completely. It won't stick to the pulp inside. The pulp is pink but jelly-like and it has a white round seed inside. But that pulp is extremely juicy and delicious. It melts in your mouth. Young kids are not allowed to eat it because a number of them have suffocated with the seeds since the pulp and jelly is so easy to swallow and then it will get stuck. But that is the sweetest fruit that you can ever find. When you find a tree that has ripe limoncilla, it's crazy. You will not find that fruit except in the Caribbean. And they have a variety of others. Of course, they have the sugar cane everywhere, pineapple and melons of different kinds.



*My Brother, Johnny's First Birthday. Santo Domingo.  
From left to right: Dr. Aybar's wife, my Father, Johnny, my  
Mother, Dr. Aybar. Me in front.*

I remember when I was a kid a trip to the market was a treat because there were so many different kinds of fruits and it was incredible. I remember one in particular that we used to like as a kid. It is called Pomarrosa. It is an oval fruit. When it is ripe it turns a little softer outside. It has a lot of seeds inside and

actually hardly any pulp inside. But it has a lot of juice that is

quite delicious. If you open it up, you ruin it because all you see is a mass of little seeds. So what do you do? In one corner you make a little hole and you suck on it – all the juice comes out and the seeds will not come out. Just suck on it. It is quite unusual but it is very delicious. When I was a kid those were rare to find but you still can find them sometimes. It is a seasonal fruit. In the Caribbean some fruits are seasonal and some are not. But unfortunately the most delicious and rare ones are seasonal.

You know they have different kinds of bananas and different kinds of plantains. They have some plantains called rulos over there. Those are completely different than the ones that you find over here and you can not make tostones out of those. They won't form. They will dissolve. They are smaller than the typical plantain but twice as thick. They are lighter green and they don't change color like a plantain does – green and then they start shading back to yellow like a banana and then they get dark. The rulos will go from light green to black. There is no in between. But a lot of people found those very delicious. We boiled them like a potato and you make a mash.

I drew a picture of my first home that I remember in Santo Domingo. I'm not a good artist. I will describe it. It was a big house. It was all concrete with four bedrooms. They didn't have a back yard but it had what is called an inside courtyard. We still call it a patio but it is actually an inside courtyard and that was quite ample. It had a lot of flowers that my mother would plant and pot to adorn the courtyard. Our patio was unusual because normally it's in the middle of the house and all of the rooms overlook the courtyard. Normally that's the way they are but this one was on the side. It was all concrete. The floor of the house had tiles – those marble tiles that they make over there. The whole place was tiles.

I will describe it here. There was a street in front with two doors to go in the house. The living room door was never opened except when we had visitors and company. The other door was the one that was always open and when you went in, the dining room was there. That was the first thing you looked at. The family room was next to it. It was a large family room. There was a door at the end of the dining room that communicated with the inside courtyard.

If you looked straight in the courtyard you would see a little building. That was the maid's quarter. Sometimes we had two maids - sometimes one. When we had two, they both had to share the same room and it had a toilet and a sink. I don't recall seeing the shower there but I know we had that. They did the laundry in the courtyard. There was no washing machine – no dryer. The laundry had to be done by hand with the maids. There were three big granite sinks down on the wall and the maids labored there. Right next to the sinks in the middle I remember there was a square concrete box forming a small square – maybe 2 feet by 2 feet. It had a metal rack on top. Underneath that metal rack was charcoal. They would light a fire and put a huge pot on it and they boiled water and the white clothes - underwear and anything white. They would boil in that water to clean it. When they were doing that, we kids couldn't go around and play. We always did but the maid shooed us out. But you know we were daredevils anyway. The maids were always concerned that we didn't approach that. They did that almost daily outside.

They cleaned the house and helped with a bunch of stuff. They went to the market. They bought groceries for us. My mother would make a list and the ones that could read would take it. If they couldn't read my mother made the note anyway and they would go and give it to the man in the market and he would know. They would bring the groceries but they would not cook. My mother would cook. They were close to the kitchen and they would wash the dishes, clean the kitchen, put everything away, clean the table – everything they would help with except the cooking.

The kitchen was an unusual kitchen and that was the only part of the house that I hated because it looked to me kind of gloomy and creepy and I guess we made it worse because we told scary stories about it. They had a huge counter made of concrete and on top it had three holes and a cover with metal. They would put charcoal in there and would light it and would cook there. When we moved to that house it was modernized. Next to the old stove there was a propane gas stove which we used most of the time. But if you ran out of propane it was very difficult to buy a new propane tank.

The first rule of our house was to obey the adults – all of them. We had to be respectful to everybody that was older than we were – my father, my mother, my aunt, my godparents. Whoever was an adult in the house, we were supposed to be completely obedient and respectful at all times – there was no question about that.

One of the rules when I was a child was that we had to do homework when we came home from school. There were no activities permitted until homework was finished – no playing time, nothing until homework was done. My father (and my mother too) was pretty strict on sharing. We had to share everything – toys, money, whatever we had. We had to share with my brothers and sister, so that was also a big rule. So if we decided that we didn't want to share a toy, that toy was taken away from us. So we learned real quick that it is best to share or have the privilege taken off of us. Those were the basic rules. And, of course, we had other rules like everybody – we had to clean after ourselves.

I had a room that I shared with my brother, Ray. In the beginning, Ray and I were the oldest. Johnny was younger so he was with my mother when he was a baby, then he had his room with us, but that was in Puerto Rico. I remember in the first house, we had two beds opposite each other. Sometimes I used to scare him or say something real scary. Well, it backfired because then he wanted to sleep with me in the same bed and, you know, we were always arguing about that.

We always had dogs. The first dog that I remember having was a Shepherd Mix. He was called "Terry". He was not a big dog but he was kind of hairy. He was a great guardian and was real gentle with us. At the house that I described before, right across from the maid's quarter in the back yard, on one wall there was a square hole about 2 feet by 2 feet and that was the dog's house. I remember the dog would go inside there and he would look out and see whatever was happening in the yard. That one lasted quite a long time. I don't remember exactly when we got him. When I came to have some realization of

memory, Terry was there. My father said he died when he was approximately 15 years old.

Then we had a female dog after that called “Negrita” – that means Blackie. She was a black Lab and she was a great guardian too. My father used to have her in his pharmacy. The pharmacy also had a little back yard. We used to have her there so that nobody would come to the back yard unannounced. She also lasted for a long time. In 1965, during the revolution, we had to have both dogs in the house with us. Terry died shortly after that and Negrita died the day before we were going to move to Puerto Rico. We were giving her away to one of my father’s aunts that owned a flower nursery. They had some property and it was all planted with flowers. They sold flowers commercially. We were going to give Negrita to her because she was such a good dog and she would accompany them there. But the day before we left for Puerto Rico she just was dead in the morning.

We always had fish since we were little. We were fascinated with fish tanks and fish and I always liked them. I was the one that took care of them all of the time and I made sure that I read about diseases and how to do this.

As I told you in the story before, I started Kindergarten when I was about 3 ½ years of age. That was in a private school. After the first grade, then I went over to a private Catholic school called Colegio de La Salle for the second grade. I stayed there for quite a long time until eighth grade in 1966. La Salle was a prominent Catholic school there and they were famous because there were Franciscan brothers and they were real strict with the education, ethics and conduct. But I used to love that school. I used to have lunch there too. Some of the students would go home or bring their own lunch or buy their lunch in the cafeteria. Some of the students would be like semi-interns and they were provided with breakfast and lunch if you pay extra. So that’s what we did. I remember that I didn’t like that idea very much because you had to observe rigid conduct with the brothers. We had to have lunch with them and you had to really mind your manners. I thought I was big enough and old enough that I could have my own lunch with the rest of my friends. But my parents didn’t let me do that.

It was about 3 to 4 miles away from our house so I had to ride the bus every morning and then back home. That was also kind of a good memory because we had the same bus driver through all the years I was there.

Professor Keller was my favorite teacher when I was at La Salle. He was a tall, slender, German professor. At that time – in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s – the dictator Trujillo wanted the best education for the country, so he contracted teachers from all of Europe – Spain mainly and Germany. There were quite an abundance of those teachers. Professor Keller was one of the oldest ones. He taught two courses – Science and Geography. He was not just my favorite teacher. I think every student’s favorite teacher was Professor Keller because he was quite a character.

There was a teacher that I did not like at all. I can't remember his name but he was our math teacher. I had him for two years in a row – fifth and sixth grades – and he made my life miserable. He thought that I fidgeted a lot in my chair, but no other professor had any problems – just him. We didn't get along quite well.

I did not play a musical instrument. There were piano lessons provided and clarinet and guitar. But I did not like to play any musical instrument. They forced me to sing in the choir. After two years of trying that, they decided that my voice was really bad. So they kind of dismissed me from the choir – which I was really glad because I didn't like that at all.

In the Dominican Republic, we had many holidays. Most of them are centered towards the religious holidays. One of the traditions is to celebrate the Holy Week (around Easter) since the country is predominantly Catholic. So that was very important. When I was a kid it was a very solemn time. The whole week was celebrated. During Lent period on Fridays they would not allow us to eat meat. On the Holy Thursday and the Holy Friday we couldn't eat meat either. We had to attend church for those seven days and they had a thing that they called 'Processions'. They had a Saint or a crucified Christ or something and the priest would march through the streets and the people would go and see the procession. Also we celebrated traditional religious festivities like Christmas, of course.

Birthdays were very special and especially children's birthdays. I remember we celebrated our birthdays all the time when we were kids. My mother would arrange to have cakes very elaborately decorated with things that she liked at the time and we had a lot of friends over. We played games and the kids would get prizes for the games. One thing I remember which is different perhaps from the United States, is the dancing. Over there kids are not shy to dance. As a matter of fact you are encouraged and expected to dance. So at every one of our birthdays it was very common to see little kids just dancing away with girls – it was very common.

Weddings over there – especially when I was a child – I did not like to go to weddings because they made me dress up. It is a tradition that the bride would choose two children to carry the rings and a girl to throw the petals through the aisle. So, for some reason, I was always being chosen by someone to carry rings. What that meant was that my father would order a suit and I would have to go to a tailor that would measure me and here I am with a suit. Most of the time it was white. They dressed me with a three-piece suit and shoes that were always uncomfortable to wear. I would have to go down the aisle with the rings and participate and keep watching the person that was doing all of the coordination so that at their cue I would have to just go myself and do this. Then afterwards I would have to sit on the bench. It was quite uncomfortable too. It was a wooden bench in the church. But I do remember that they were very elaborate and the church was always highly decorated with all kinds of ornaments and stuff for the wedding. But that's how everybody celebrated their weddings there. It was a pretty big event.

After that, of course, they had the reception. And that was another torture because it lasted forever since we are people that are used to having fun and partying. So I was there and, believe me, they celebrated and it was one of those days that they would allow us to stay up until the wedding ended. Sometimes it was very late at night and I was quite uncomfortable and I was not allowed to take off the suit and everything because someone might want to have a picture so I had to keep it on. It was quite a torture. But that is the way that they celebrate weddings. It is a great occasion.

When I was a child, it was a tradition that children did not attend funerals unless it was a family member - a close relative. They are very dramatic and everybody grieves a different way. Latins are very emotional, especially during funerals and they will not subject children to be traumatized by the drama of the funeral. So if you see children at a funeral it is because it is a close relative that has died. Then you are required to attend. But if the relative is not a close relative or if you are real young, you are not allowed to participate. So they have to arrange for you to be babysat somewhere.

In the Dominican Republic when I was a child the biggest national holiday was Independence Day. That is February 27. For two days they celebrate. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, which is the day before, they have an Independence parade. All businesses close and they have decorated floats with different themes that will parade along George Washington Avenue. This avenue is along the coast of the Caribbean Sea and this is what is called the Malecon, which almost every Latin American country has one. A Malecon is a drive that is next to the ocean. So that's where the parades were done. This George Washington Avenue at that time was six kilometers and they organized big stages where either an orchestra would be playing or some function would be going on. You can go back and forth along the parade line and see different shows – different things going on. That was on February 26<sup>th</sup>.

On the 27<sup>th</sup>, which is the original day of Independence, they have a military parade. Of course, it is very formal and guards and military personnel actually from the Navy, Armed Forces and police will do that. So they will organize that real good.

Another national holiday they celebrate there is Christmas. The celebration for Christmas is a little different from the United States. What we do is we celebrate Christmas Eve - the 24<sup>th</sup>. A lot of people – families, relatives, neighbors – they gather in the house. They share food and drinks and they dance and the youngsters did a lot of firecrackers and different kinds of fireworks that day. They are allowed that night. That's Christmas Eve.

At 12:00 midnight they have the Misa del Gallo. They call it Misa del Gallo because it's at midnight and supposedly the rooster has some significance for Christianity. It is supposed to be celebrated to announce the new day but for some reason they do it at midnight – Midnight Mass. It's a really pretty occasion and a really nice Mass and a lot of people attend it. We attended it on occasion but not all the time.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> people will continue their celebration but in the Dominican Republic there is no Santa Claus. Children do not receive toys or anything because they do not celebrate that. Then it comes New Year's Eve – that is even a bigger celebration. Once again relatives and friends gather in somebody's house and they bring different foods, mainly roasted pork. They share a big meal and then they dance and they get together and they congratulate each other at midnight for the New Year.

It is a tradition that you have to be home at your parent's home for midnight. That's a big tradition and it doesn't matter where you are, you have to be there for midnight. Of course, it was very emotional. Everybody congratulated each other and that goes on in every house. Also in Santo Domingo (the capital) there is a tradition that at midnight the guards at one of the main forts in the city they will shoot a canon at midnight – a real loud boom. And everybody makes silence just waiting to hear that. And you hear the boom but that's it. Everybody congratulates each other and they cheer. It was a tradition every year. And we also had fire crackers and fireworks and all kinds of stuff.

The next day, New Year's Day per se, it was a custom (I don't think they do that as much anymore) to dress up nice and go out to visit friends that you haven't seen, to the movies, and to the Malecon. It was something like you needed to be seen and to see somebody else and they would dress up for the occasion. I don't know how that tradition started but that's how it was.

Then the last celebration for Christmas is January 6<sup>th</sup>. That is the Three Wise Men Day – called Dia de Reyes. That is the day that kids receive their toys. Supposedly the three wise men presented baby Jesus with presents. So that is why Catholics do that – that's the day that we present children with presents. We were all looking forward to that.

The tradition is – and it still is – that every house will have a Christmas tree and you have to put (every kid does that) a box underneath the tree. And the box will have grass in it. That was the grass for the camels of the three wise men who would be hungry from such a long trip. Next to the box of grass, you would put a drink – a little cup with whatever, it could be liquor, it could be anything to drink – and that was for the kings. You put that there and the next morning the grass will be gone and the drink will have been consumed and instead you will find your presents. Of course that morning of January 6 is pandemonium. Every kid is outside in the street and we were all showing the others what we got and playing and sharing. It was fun. That was in Santo Domingo.

Puerto Rico is like here. When we moved to Puerto Rico then we had the same as here. We had the same celebration and we had Christmas and we had Santa Claus the same as here. The Dia de Reyes is also celebrated in Puerto Rico but it is not a holiday. It is just a completely Catholic tradition so people will give kids their traditional gift there, but it is not as much as Christmas. So that was the difference. We kids we loved it better in Puerto Rico because we got gifts twice. We got it for Santa Claus Christmas and we had something extra for Three Wise Men Day.

Another funny thing is, in the Dominican Republic, the day after the Three Wise Men that is the end of Christmas celebration. In Puerto Rico, it is different. They continue it one more week – the Christmas celebrations. The reason why they call it Octavitas is that it means ‘eight more days’. That is a tradition that whoever was sick, incarcerated or away from the island, can enjoy eight days of belated Christmas, I guess. In this day and age I don’t think they do that as much, but when I was a child there, they did that. And it made sense for some people that couldn’t celebrate if they were sick or something, so they gave them an extra eight days. So that meant, in Puerto Rico, eight extra days of no school. That has changed now so that was just during my childhood.

In the Dominican Republic also we have some festival and that’s in the summer and it changes from year to year. It is called a Merengue Festival. They don’t have a specific date in the summer. It could be the end of July or the beginning of August. It is a whole week of celebration where they have also at the Malecon area different orchestras, singers, actors and actresses and they all play constantly for everybody. And it is all free. What they do is they close the Malecon (all six kilometers) to big vehicle traffic so it is just a big carnival time. Every night they have different orchestras and they play all night.

The other holiday that we celebrate is not a national holiday but it is something that is well-celebrated. It is the winter baseball tournament. That has been a tradition for so many years – even when I was a child – and we were very passionate with that. One of my best times is when my father or my uncle took us to see a game at the stadium. Winter baseball is very important there. They have players from the Dominican Republic. They have also players from the United States and they all play together. When I was a child they had four different teams – two from the capital, one from the central Santo Domingo (the Cibao) and another one from the East coast. They were the rivals. We saw so many great players and we were privileged to see that when I was a kid.

One thing that I remember with a lot of fondness was my first vacation in Puerto Rico in 1964. My Aunt Carmen (from my mother’s side) lived in Puerto Rico since 1961. Her daughter (Venecia – my cousin) and I are the same age – we were just a month apart. I couldn’t pronounce Venecia so I called her Belen or something like that, different. We were real close and I remember that Venecia was going to live in Puerto Rico forever and I was feeling kind of sad and separated. They promised me that the next summer I could go and visit. I held them to that promise and they sent me. I remember that I traveled alone and I was really looking forward to it but at the same time I was scared. I was about seven years old and I remember that they took me to the airport and I was wearing a three piece suit and tie. They talked to one of the stewardesses and they said, “OK, this is Tony and his aunt will be picking him up at the airport in San Juan when he arrives there.”

At that time the flight used to take one hour from Santo Domingo to San Juan, Puerto Rico because there were not very many jet services. So they had those DC6 airplanes with two motors and it was one of those old things, but I thought it was great. I got

aboard the plane and I remember soon after we took off it got dark and started to rain and lightning. The plane was shaking all over the place and I was so scared. The stewardess would come and sit with me and chat and tell me this and that but I couldn't talk at all. I was really scared. But she kept bringing me cokes. Well, of course, I loved them and I kept drinking and all of a sudden I needed to go to the restroom but I would never dare to do that. I was so scared and the weather was so bad. I realized that some of the other people were worried too and they were scared and I didn't go. I held it as best as I could which I had a small accident there in the airplane I am embarrassed to say. But that was the least of my worries.

When we arrived in San Juan, I remember that the first thing I saw was my aunt and Venecia in the crowd. Of course, they noticed it immediately and they proceeded to take a picture which I will try to find that picture for you. Here I am in my three piece suit in the picture and Venecia is next to me and Carmen, of course, was taking the picture. That was my first trip. But I remember that one thing is that I felt so good and they took us everywhere – to the beach, to the rainforest. It was my first trip and I was really, really liking it a lot. So that was my first fond memory of childhood.

I think the saddest thing during my childhood was the revolution of 1965. That was extremely sad. Like I told you before, unfortunately we were living on the rebel side of the confrontation. Because we lived on the rebel side, we were the ones they bombarded and shot upon. Well, what happened was, since my house was big enough and made of concrete all together, a lot of our families around the neighborhood (their houses were either hit by bombs and stuff) they took shelter in our house. So at one point my father said there were about 13 families in my house. I remember there were a lot of kids.

It was a very bloody confrontation and it lasted for 8 months. There were two days in April when they fought the more fierce battles. For two or three days we could not get out of the house because we thought we were not going to survive at that time. It was very bad.

I vividly remember that after they had a cease fire we were going to open the door from our house and I remember my father closed it and he did not want us to go out there. We did not understand why when there was a cease fire. We wanted to see and look in the street. But he didn't want us to. I remember (being a kid and being the oldest one) that finally I did manage (when they were not looking) to take a peek out of a window that I climbed that was on the opposite door. Then I realized why my father didn't want me to open it. It was because one of my friends (my same age that lived across the street) was killed and his body was lying next to my door. So that was a horrific experience. I will never forget that. I have nightmares because I couldn't believe, you know, why that had happened. I was pretty young at the time. I will never forget that.

The thing that bothers me the most is that his body was right next to the door from my house. So the question was whether he was trying to get inside my house. See, they lived across the street and their house was also a real nice, good house and they waited

the whole time there. So we saw that and we thought his whole family had been killed or were dead. But no – only him. So that was devastating for the entire neighborhood.

There were others, of course, that we knew who were killed. But that was the most dramatic. People happened to be caught in the crossfire. Some of the rebels we knew, of course. They were people that we lived with. But most of the ones that I saw getting killed were just innocent bystanders – people that were going about their business.

Fortunately for me, most of my family didn't suffer anything. We were really scared at one point when they blew up my father's business which was about three blocks from our house. He went there to see what he could salvage or take care of. While he was doing that, there was another battle and he got caught and couldn't come back home. We didn't know what had happened to him. For two nights he did not come. And we didn't know. But in the middle of the night, my mother was there praying and we heard a whistle in the middle of the night – in the silence. It was my father's whistle. He can whistle really loud and he has a peculiar whistle for when he wants to call our attention. So that we knew it was him and that he was safe somewhere because we could hear. So that kind of gave us a lot of hope. Then, of course, the next day when there was a cease fire, he returned home.

As it happened, he went with one of his workers (a young fellow) and when they got caught in the battle, they ran and they went through a fence and they went to a neighbor's house in the same neighborhood (across the street and about four houses from ours). When they got inside there my father noticed that Jacinto (that was the name of the fellow that used to work with my dad) was bleeding from the arm. My father said, "Jacinto, you are bleeding from the arm. Did you cut yourself jumping the fence?" He said, "I must have." So my father said, "Let me take a look." And when my father looked it wasn't a cut – it was a shot. Running, he didn't know that he was shot. So my father, since he was a pharmacist, he says, oh well, he just took the bullet out and took some stitches and he took care of him because there was no way that he could go to a hospital in the middle of a battle. So that was probably my saddest time as a child.

My best friend (which probably still is but we are far apart) was Adonis Laggrange. It is a French descended name. He was my best friend ever. We used to play together every day. We used to live two houses apart. His family knew my family and they were friends for a long, long time. His father used to work at the passport office and he retired from there. For 30 years he worked in the same place – he was making passports.

Adonis used to be asthmatic when he was a child. He outgrew that, of course, but he had bad asthma and they had to buy their medication from my dad's pharmacy. That is how they established some connection and he was my best friend all the time. He still lives there in Santo Domingo. I don't know if he got married because I haven't seen him in many years – probably since 1982. So I don't know much about it. But I believe that he became an accountant and he still lives in his father's house. I think his father passed away and he inherited the house. He is the only son. He has two older sisters but they married and went away.

The first present that I remember giving was a 45 record. I gave it to a girlfriend. It was a girl that lived a few houses down the block. I cannot remember her name but I know that she had a lot of freckles. I still remember the record was that song that says “If I Had a Hammer.” That was the first gift I gave to her. I thought she was beautiful. The way we met was she was the daughter of a dentist that we used to go to. I never spoke to her until we were chosen to participate in a wedding. I was the ring carrier and she was the flower girl. So that’s how we met. I was probably about eight or nine years old. I used to love to listen to music – rock and roll – when I was a kid. My uncle used to buy all these records. He used to bring it home on the weekends and listen to it with his friends. Sometimes he would give it to me if I liked it. So I had a small collection and I remember that she liked this song. I liked it a lot, so I thought OK – so I gave it to her. And I never saw her again. I don’t know what happened to her. But that was the first.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE TEEN YEARS

In the Dominican Republic, the school system is based on a European system. They have grades one through six and that is elementary. Then they have grades seven through twelve – that is secondary school. In Puerto Rico where I was a teenager, it's the same system as here in the United States – elementary, middle school or junior high and high school. When I went to Puerto Rico, I started high school and it was located maybe 1/3 of a mile from my house. We could walk.

I remember when I went there the first day. The teacher's name was Mr. Hernandez. He was the social studies teacher and also the home room teacher. So my first day I went there and I had a slip that was given to me in the office with my name and all kinds of details and I was supposed to give it to him and get a seat. I went inside the room and I realized I was in the wrong place because all I saw was big men with mustaches dressed in jeans and boots. So I thought, well, I am in the teachers' meeting. But I saw the desk and I saw that it said 'Mr. Hernandez' so I said well, "Mr. Hernandez, yes? This is for you." So he thought I was delivering a message. He looked at it and then he looked at me and he said, "Where are you from?" I said, "I'm from the Dominican Republic." So he laughed and he said, "Welcome to the class. Grab a seat." And I remember I looked around the room and everybody was looking at me. But everyone was a big man with mustache and everything and I am just a little, scrawny, small looking kid and I looked like I was about 11 years old. And they couldn't believe it. I said, "Well, that's the way it is." And that was my first day there.

In the Dominican Republic we start school early, so everyone else there was much older. I was a lot younger – the youngest one of them all. They were already past puberty. I wasn't even started. That was shocking. In Puerto Rico we attended Public Schools. Levittown High School was a very good school. We had very nice teachers.

In Latin America there is no such thing as dating for minors. They are not allowed to do that. You can have your little girlfriends and stuff but it is a chance meeting. We meet them in school and talk a little bit or if you happen to coincide in a movie theater, well that's fine but there's no formal dating, per se, because that's not allowed. When you are eighteen, yes, then you can date. Then you are allowed to date anybody that is eighteen. Now times are changing and I am assuming that they are more lax now but when I was a teenager, still we were not allowed to date till we were 'of age'. Of course, we always managed to talk and spend some time in school or in the game or in the theater.

In Puerto Rico there is a lot of entertainment for teenagers. We participated in sports. We went to the beach a lot and there are different ones. We went to movies. We went on trips. And that is a good thing because they like to organize trips. We call them giras. It is a trip either from school or from the neighborhood. They rent a bus when they decide where they will go just for the day. They will go to the beach or to the rainforest or to a campground or to caves or certain picnic areas. Then they spend the day there. We just play music and enjoy the environment or whatever. It was just like a field day. They organized that a lot. So we were always looking forward to going somewhere different.

My special buddies are very important to me and they played a big role in who I am today. To me that was the best time of my life. When I went through high school in Levittown we founded a Science Club in school and there were four organizers – Carlos Aquino, Rafael Nevarez, Ricardo Martinez, and myself. What we did was, we had an interest in science and projects and things of that nature. So we spoke to the principal of the school at that time and they told us that would be great for the school. We were given a lot of assistance. We have a lot of stories about the Science Club that you would never believe. We brought a lot of glory to the school *and* to the country of Puerto Rico.



*My Brother Raymundo's 15th Birthday, 1974 in Puerto Rico. Left to right: my Father, Ray, my Mother*

We had many different projects but we presented two projects for the Scientific Fair. One was developed by me and Carlos Aquino. The other one was developed by Ricardo Martinez and Rafael Nevarez. Both projects won First Prize at the school district level. Then we participated in the regional level and we won again. Then we participated in the national level which is at the island. We won again – First Prize. Then we participated in the All States (including Puerto Rico) level. I got Second Prize. The governor of Puerto Rico gave us a plaque and there was a big ceremony.

But Ricardo Martinez was the originator of that project. He went ahead and won First Prize in the United States. Then he went to New Orleans to participate in the World Scientific Fair in 1971, and guess what? In his category, he won First Place. They received him in

Puerto Rico like a hero and it was fantastic that Ricardo did that.

His project was based on a genetic experiment. It was based on selective breeding and he made that with fish – with tiny little fish. What happened was by selective breeding and choosing the best genes of each species, well he increased not just the size of the fish but also the survival and adaptability. He did that experiment and it was so well-done. It happens that a Japanese student at the same time had done the same thing in Japan, but not with live animals but with vegetables. Now days that's why you get corn that is twice as big as before and animals that are twice as big as they were before. Ricardo Martinez is well-recognized in Puerto Rico.

Of all four of us, the only one I kept in contact with was Carlos Aquino because he lived closer to my house. We had a lot of funny stories because after we did many of those things we were in charge of the laboratory. We developed a laboratory for the school for our own experiments and we had our own keys and everything. We burned it one day. That was one of the funny stories. And, of course, the whole school had to be evacuated.

They were not happy about it but they pardoned that because, you know, we brought so much glory to it. We were doing some type of fuel or something and something went wrong. And there was quite a lot of smoke but nothing major.

And another day we released a vicious iguana that escaped from the laboratory and went inside the chemistry class and the whole chemistry class was evacuated. I think the iguana probably had a heart attack, but nobody else was hurt. We thought we had anesthetized the animal enough and I guess it wasn't enough. We were doing some electrode experiments with brain waves and stuff and the first time we shocked the animal he went off the table and ran outside. We finally corralled it in one of the classrooms and got it inside of the cage.

We were famous for doing that kind of thing in the school. We had our own uniform. We were different. So we chose what we wanted to wear.

Unfortunately I have not attended a class reunion since I have been out of high school. I went to study medicine and I didn't attend any of the class reunions. I have seen Carlos Aquino. The last time I saw him was in 1995 on one of my trips back to Puerto Rico. He worked for the U.S. Customs and he informed me that my other buddy, Rafael Nevarez works for a chemical plant but I don't know if it is one of those pharmaceutical companies or if it is just strictly a chemical plant. Apparently he travels a lot and he moves all around the states. So I couldn't get a hold of him. Those were my teenage friends.

I worked as a teenager. My first job was when I was 14 years old. We could not formally have a job when you were 14 in Puerto Rico. But, some of us would work as youth baggers at the supermarket. I guess they were authorized to have high school kids do it. So they had a Pueblo Supermarket in Levittown that was real close – maybe about a block away. So that was my first job – a part-time job as a bagger. I would take the groceries to the car. Soon after that I found a better job as a Fuller Brush salesman. I was also probably 15 or 16 and I used to sell different kinds of products. I was pretty lucky about that. I don't know if people felt sorry for me or what but I just did better.



*My Mother in our driveway  
picking up the mail. 1974  
Puerto Rico  
(Neighbor's Dog)*

Half of my money was for my mother. The other half was for my books, my fish tanks and my hobbies. My primary means of transportation was my feet. When I was a teenager at that time, we did not drive or have cars. So I had to walk. If the distance was too far then I would catch a bus. Then, of course, some of my friends acquired vehicles when they were starting to drive. But at that time in Puerto Rico I think you still needed to be 18 to have a license to drive, so it was kind of a hassle. Then

they reduced it to 16. But we had to ride bikes still or walk everywhere we went.

Whoever was older and had a car, we just hitched a ride with them. We walked a lot. We hardly ever went out of Levittown. Levittown was a subdivision in a metropolitan area and it was divided by sections. We lived in the first section. When I grew up there they had six sections when I left. Now they have eight and it is spread out. But each section had their own commercial sector and they had their movie theater, shopping center, baseball park and basketball courts. Every section was set up the same way. If we liked the park in section 2 or 3 because they were newer or better, we would just walk there. It wasn't a big distance.

When I was a teenager I used to listen to one radio station in particular called Radio Rock which I think is still on the air. I remember that I would even go to sleep listening to Radio Rock. That was a radio station from San Juan and they played mostly rock music but they also played Latin.

My favorite TV show was the show 'Del Medio Dia' – it was the show at Noon. And the reason why is because it was a variety show and they had a lot of singers and actors and a lot of comedy. They had a particular comedian called Agrelot who was a very funny man and his character was very funny. He was an overweight man – chubby with a very funny appearance – and he would have a way of imitating voices and dressing up funny. He was simply a real good comedian. Every day he would make like a satire on something that was important – that was going on – he would make a fun sketch out of it. He would take the person involved – whether it was a politician involved in it or something – and it made a very funny thing to watch it.



*In Puerto Rico, 1972. From left to right: Ana (Uncle Papo's wife), Papo (Uncle), Rosa (Friend & neighbor), Pepin (Rosa's Husband), Isabel (My Mother), Leopoldo (My Father)*

When I was a teenager I had two favorite singers. They were both females. One was Roberta Flack. The other one was a Puerto Rican lady called Nidia Caro. She was one of my favorite singers and I always thought that she was extremely beautiful and an extremely good singer. I liked her very much. On one occasion with my Science Club buddies, we were doing an experiment – a project in a lagoon. This lagoon was by the governor's summer mansion there – a very restricted area. They wouldn't let anybody go in there, but they allowed us since we were sent by the school and we were doing some experiment there in the lagoon to restore the ecosystem. One afternoon the governor apparently had invited two actresses to his summer mansion. They decided to

go to this lagoon which was a very nice, clear water lagoon. It's actually a mangrove. The two guests decided to go to the lagoon and they saw us with a big raft there. And they asked us if we could give them a ride in the lagoon. The two actors were – one was a soap opera actress from Spain called Pilar Arenas. The other one was Nidia Caro. So I was privileged to ride that boat with them. Of course, I could hardly talk. I cannot say that I said two or three words. But that was like a dream come true there.

My favorite movie actor when I was a teenager was Leonard Nimoy – Mr. Spock. Yes, because I loved Star Trek when I was as that age. I thought that he couldn't do anything wrong.

As I said before, the Science Club friends were the ones that interested me in everything that was science and medicine and all those things that were interesting. And they were the ones and since we were so successful in what we were doing, that encouraged me a lot to pursue a career in medicine and in science.

In our culture there's no special ceremony marking our passage from childhood into adulthood for a man. For girls, yes. Here in the United States, we celebrate Sweet 16 – it's kind of like a ceremony – but it is an important date. In the Dominican Republic and in Puerto Rico and I'm sure that in the rest of Latin America, we celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> year. When the girl turns 15, that's when the girl is introduced in society. And we celebrate the 'quinceañero'. And it's just a presentation in society. That custom comes from Spain and at the time I believe that it was determined that when the girl was 15 years of age, she was available for marriage – back in the old days. That was the age that they thought it was the age for marriage, because at that time people didn't last that long. So they kept it



*Neighbors and friends celebrate my brother, Johnny's 11th birthday. Puerto Rico 1974. Johnny is the one with the yellow spoon.*

as a custom. So still every time a girl turns 15 it's very important that they take her to a club and normally it's a club that is by the neighborhood. Or if your family belongs to a particular club – the Casa de España or something. Or if you don't belong to one or if you are poor, you do it in your house. But you must present them to society. So they dress her real nice and she has to invite friends. It's the first time that she will be allowed to have male friends that can talk to her basically. This is like an adult time.

There's no special ceremony for boys. In Puerto Rico you can vote and drink when you are 18, but I think that you can not be

emancipated until you are 21. Now in the Dominican Republic it is different. There you can drink at any age. And that is something that always fascinated me. I never heard of underage drinking. I never saw – when I was a kid and a teenager – a teenager smoking either. They were allowed to if they wanted to. The parents can send you – or anybody – to a convenience store to buy beer or cigarettes for them. And they will sell it and you will bring it back to your parent or whoever sent you. Do you taste it? No. You could, but they don't do it. It's very interesting. I don't know why that happens but that's the way. You would probably get in trouble from the parents, but still it's so available – you know. It's (I guess) a different way of seeing things.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ADULTHOOD

I always wanted to be a doctor and that started since my father had the pharmacy and I saw him preparing medications and all that. Every chance we got – me and my brothers– we liked to go to the pharmacy. We were fascinated with the old time pharmacies. Medicines were prepared and we saw him mixing things (you know, this much of this and this much of that) the old-fashioned way. And so I was fascinated with that. That made me decide to become a physician and my father encouraged me to do that.



*Me, High School Graduation.  
Levittown, Puerto Rico, 1972.*

When I finished high school my friends in high school had a different idea. They wanted to study Marine Biology. I didn't want to be the only one going to medical school so I just did the same. So I studied biology and chemistry and after four years of that then I decided "What am I going to do with this?" So I just then started medical school. But that was my goal – to become a doctor. So that's how everything started.

Once I had four years of college and a degree in marine biology with a major also in chemistry, I realized that there was not really a job out there for me. And even if there was one it probably wouldn't pay as much and so I decided, well, I didn't want to waste my time anymore so I'm going to study medicine. But a friend of mine called Junior de Leon told me that he had applied to a medical school in Mexico and in the Dominican Republic. So he was going to the Mexican medical school first because it was cheaper. In the meantime, I stayed in college and I was teaching a course at the time. After a few months he came back one night and told me "Don't even go to medical

school there because they have a lot of problems – especially with Puerto Rican students – and I think they are going to close it down because they lost their accreditation." OK, so he said, "I'm going to the Dominican Republic." So he went there and then he came back and he said, "That's marvelous. You will like it."

My parents were still living in Puerto Rico. But I was determined to do that. Well, what happened was my grandmother that lived with us (on my mother's side) she was ill. She always said that she did not want to die and be buried in Puerto Rico because that was not her country and she wanted to go back to Dominican Republic. Well, since I wanted to go back to study and my father had that job opportunity there with the same company,

they all moved. So we all went to the Dominican Republic and I started medical school there.

In 1977, because of the fact that medical school was very expensive, I applied to several places. I applied to the University of Miami. I applied to the University of Puerto Rico Medical School. I applied to Dominican Republic. And, of course, I could not afford the University of Miami because room and board was too expensive. So we couldn't afford it, even though I tried to get one of those minority scholarships. At the time it was easy to get one, but they would not cover all of it and being by myself in Miami it wouldn't make much of an opportunity for me.

When the opportunity came to go to Santo Domingo, I saw that that was probably the best way to do it. So I started there. When I arrived they looked over my transcripts and everything else and they said there are certain prerequisites that are different, so you need to complete these first before you get into the medical school, per se. The system is kind of a little different. So that is what I did and then continued it on. I attended college and medical school both: medical school in the Dominican Republic – college in Puerto Rico. I left my parents' home in 1983. I got my own apartment close to the medical school.



*Me at 22 years old.  
Puerto Rico*

I have been married twice. I met my first wife in medical school. Her name was Yvette. She was a student in the medical school and she came from New York. Her parents were from Puerto Rico, but she was born and raised in New York and so her Spanish was very difficult to understand. But our medical school was in English so that didn't make much difference for her. We met there and then we got married right after finishing medical school in 1985. We got married in June – two weeks after graduation.

In 1985, I remember we already had planned to go back to Puerto Rico and find a job there. We did not want to stay in the Dominican Republic because they didn't pay much to physicians there. So we got married. It was a civil ceremony. My brothers and sister were in attendance and one of our friends that was still in the Dominican Republic because he wanted to have a full license there so he had to serve one year. So he stayed an extra year and attended our marriage and wedding ceremony.

My current wife (JoAnn) I met here in Springfield and we got married in 1991. It was in a small church in a town called Lockwood, Missouri. It was a small ceremony. I didn't have any family here and her family was from Plato, Missouri so the ones that attended were close friends of ours and their kids. And I remember that was a very strange day because there was a tornado that day that swept through Springfield the same day. We didn't know all that was happening. But when we came back from Lockwood we saw all the devastation. We didn't even know what was happening.

We have been married eleven years now. We got married on November 28, 1991. She is a teacher currently teaching ESL students at OTC. She is a typical Missourian – blonde and blue eyes. She was born in St. Louis and when she was nine or ten years of age they moved to Plato, Missouri. Her parents own a farm there. Then at the age of 19 she came to SMS to attend college and she's been in Springfield ever since.

I have a daughter by my first marriage. Her name is Monica and she is 13. She is slender – skinny. She was born premature but she made it quite well. She is pretty healthy. She looks like me – dark hair - and she loves animals. As a matter of fact, ever since she was like about five years old she said she wanted to be a veterinarian and still keeps saying that. She lives with her mother in Forest City, Arkansas – that's about 35 miles west of Memphis. She is in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

The first major unexpected turn in my life was, of course, after the revolution and we moved to Puerto Rico. Even though I had been there before, it was kind of a shock to us, to leave all the friends behind and the things that we knew and were familiar with. The second unexpected thing was me going to study medicine back to the Dominican Republic because I never planned that. In high school with my friends, we thought we were going to be big scientists somewhere with NASA or MIT or somewhere like that. And all of a sudden I ended up going back to DR to study medicine. That was an unexpected turn.

The other unexpected turn was ending up in Springfield. I never expected that. After we graduated from medical school, we went back to Puerto Rico and we were working there for the government for 2 ½ years. After that time we were kind of settled there pretty much. All of a sudden, here we are in Springfield and I will describe later on how that happened. That was quite an unexpected turn for me.



*My friend, Enrique Gonzalez, in my house.  
Levittown, Puerto Rico, 1973*

Like I said before, I was raised Catholic. When I was in La Salle, we had to attend Mass on Wednesdays. That was for the elementary and you were sometimes chosen to participate in the Mass. You were the altar boy on some occasions and you have to know very well what to do. Well, that was taken very seriously. I did take it very seriously when I was young. Some of the Masses were still in Latin at the time – not very many – and that was kind of boring for us. But one of our classes was Latin so we had to learn. And even though we hated it, later on I

became fascinated with languages. And it made it so easy for me to have a background – a sort of base in Latin – because it was easier when you study other languages. So that was my initiation into the religious part.

Then, of course you know, later on we grew up and in Puerto Rico we had a Catholic church that was maybe about 2½ - 3 blocks from the house. It was a very nice church and they have also a private Catholic school there adjacent to the church. Now my mother and my father (especially my mother) were really active in that church and the priests knew them very well. I remember that we had certain youth activities there. We used to look forward to those kinds of activities all the time. I remember we had Christmas plays and we would be the actors and we'd prepare the stage and all of the special effects, so called and we'd work hard on it. That was very nice – a really nice time. And also, of course, both of the priests there were very helpful to us and we were just like family. But the religion in my family was instilled by my mother and my grandmother. Those were the pillars of our religious upbringing.

Then, of course, back in the Dominican Republic, my mother attended church that was in the neighborhood and for many years she was part of the catechist there. She was pretty involved. When my mother passed away, I was here in Springfield (1998) and that was the church that did all of the funeral and everything else. Everybody in that parish knew my mother so the parish was full – there were plenty of people. That was very emotional. So those are my spiritual experiences.

I was born in the Dominican Republic and then I traveled to Puerto Rico and then from there to Springfield, Missouri. Those are the three places I have lived. Now visiting – I have visited many places. I have been to almost the entire Caribbean: Jamaica, U.S. Virgin Islands, Curacao, Aruba, Saint Martin.

My first job was when I was 14 years old (about 1969) at the Pueblo Supermarket very close to my house – walking distance – just next to a theater. I was a bagger. I would bag groceries and take them to the car. One thing I remember clearly is my first day at work. I had to wear black pants, white shirt and a black tie. People would give me tips every time I took the groceries to their cars. I worked four hours that day and I made so much money that both of my pockets were full of quarters. They were jingling. When it was time to leave, it was raining really hard so I ran all the way home. And I put my hands in my pockets because I was making a lot of noise all the way. But I was so excited. That was my first day at work and I already had this much money! So I remember I went home and my mother saw me and I was soaked like you never believe it. I was like a wet chicken. I said, “Forget about the wetness. Look at how much money I have!” So I emptied my pockets and sure enough, I had \$18.00 in quarters. So, I remember, I kept \$4.00 and gave the rest to my mother. And she was crying, you know, because it was my first job. That was my first day.

That was a fortune for me at that time. I couldn't believe it. But what helped me was that of all the kids doing that, I was the youngest one – or at least the youngest looking one – and a lot of people knew my family or they knew me too. So a lot of people were

just fascinated seeing me there. I guess I was lucky that day. But anyway I kind of loved work.

Then I remember one of my most interesting jobs (about 1972 when I had just started college) was at the pier. They had the docks. They have several ones in San Juan, all over the place, and the one that my father worked next to, those were like day jobs and they had a gang of people. That's a term – a gang. What it is – you go early – no more than 5:30 o'clock in the morning – and there will be a bunch of guys there. The foreman will come out and take your name and social security number and tell you what is available. And you say 'yes' or 'no'. If you say 'yes' you get assigned a job assured. They tell you right away how much they are going to pay you and what it is and that's it. It's just a day job at the docks. It's hard work – real hard.

So I used to do that and that was my teenager money – dating money, actually. If I wanted to impress a girl or go out and buy her dinner or a movie, well I would go there the day before or the same day or whatever and get up early – that's one thing – and start doing it. I worked Saturdays mainly (or sometimes Sundays). And that would give me enough money – because they paid really good. It was a hard job but they paid real good.

I remember one particular time I was pressed for money and we were going someplace fancy and you needed some money. I said "Well, I have to do this." So I got up early and I went there and, of course you know, they had signed up a job. I remember the guy said, "Do you know how to drive a forklift?" I said, "Yes." I had never seen a forklift in my life. But I said "Yes". So he said, "OK, well that's fine."

There were pallets. He said, "Do you see those barrels over there?" I said, "Yes." Those barrels were full of carbon to make batteries and they were very heavy. He said, "You put four on each pallet and take the whole pallet with four of those and then you put it right there where that crane is going to lift up that and put it in the trucks. It is enough. And all you have to do is make them ready for the trucks. Those barrels were all over the place. So you had to get one and put it on a pallet – get another one and put it on a pallet – and when you have four then you take the whole thing and you set it up on one side of the pier where the trucks (those big riggers) will come in. There's a crane that will pick it up from that spot and put it on top of the trucks. So I said, "Well, easy enough." He said, "When you finish, we'll pay you \$70.00." It doesn't matter if you finish in three hours, four hours, whatever you think." OK.

So he handed me a key in a little wooden peg or something and he said, "Here, that's the key for that forklift. Go to work." So he started talking to other people. I went there and I looked at the forklift. I am looking and looking and I could not find where the key went. For goodness sakes, he gave me this key but this forklift doesn't have anything to put the key on. But I remember that it was parked next to a water fountain. And sure enough, I was puzzled, but I didn't want to go ask him.

A man comes in – all sweaty, in a forklift – parks and starts drinking water. And when he goes up, I said, "Where does the key go on this one?" And the guy just looks at me

and he said, “Where it always goes – under the seat.” I said, “Well, I don’t know – oh there it is – I don’t know, I thought it was one of those modern ones.” He looked at me kind of funny, gets up in his seat – and I just watch him so carefully, how he maneuvered the clutch and backed up. I said, well at least I know how to make it go in reverse. How bad can that be?

So I just got in and sure enough, right underneath the seat - you see there is like a little steel box – that’s where the key goes, inside there. And there’s a button that you just press. Well, that started and I started going. It took me *forever* to make that thing go forward. And I knocked down several of those barrels and I just punched holes in several of them too. It took me the whole entire day to do that. And the sun was really hot. It took me a long time. But, anyway, I guess they noticed that I was struggling, but they didn’t say anything. They needed it done. So I was just sweating bullets in there. But I managed. They give you the pay in those little, brown envelopes. When he handed me that and I saw all that much money – at that time, that was quite a lot of money – I was so grateful. But I was so tired. That was one of the experiences.

When I was in college, I took a major in Chemistry, but I was also pretty good at math and I took a lot of math courses too – and physics. The chief of that department (of math and physics) was Dr. Hart. I admired him. To me, he is a genius. He said, “You know, you should forget about medicine and biology. You should become a physicist like me – get your doctorate. You will like it and I will guarantee you a job here.” Well, I was kind of honored by him telling me this. So I put quite a bit of interest and then there was a professor who used to teach a course called ‘Science in the Modern World’. When I finished the bachelor’s degree, this professor left. I learned he left Puerto Rico or went somewhere else. So Dr. Hart asked me, “Do you want to teach that course?” Sure enough – of course. So I taught that and they paid me. It was just every Saturday from nine till twelve. So I taught that course and then I met another professor there that taught Spanish literature. I knew a lot of Spanish literature at the time and we had a lot of conversations and several courses. He said, “Well, I am going to teach two classes at two different campuses. I can’t do this.” It was very hard for him to commute from one campus to the other because they were quite separate. So he asked me if I can do one of his classes. And I said, “Well, why not.” He said, “Since you are already in the faculty here, why not?” So he spoke to the dean. The dean said OK. So I got that course. My cousin, Venecia, that I mentioned before, she took that class and she couldn’t believe that I was teaching her. But I taught that class for two semesters.

When I was doing all that, I didn’t need to work at the piers anymore. Then I went to medical school back in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and I decided that I was going to have to come up with the money to pay for medical school. So, of course, they all said you won’t have time to work – it’s medical school, come on. So I said, “What can I do here?” Well, I devised this – on Saturday afternoon I would work at the race track. That was from 1:00 till 6:00. And Papo (my cousin) was the administrator there. So he got me that job every Saturday. We were computing all the betting from the entire country. That is a run against time, because it is all done manually and there were 30 men in a huge basement full of smoke. There were a whole group of them receiving calls

from all over the towns and cities. You had to compute all that – put it all together- for them to decide. So that was quite a challenging job, but it was also real fun.

So I did that and it was good money for just one afternoon. But that was not enough, of course. So I lucked out because when I went to medical school I met a fellow there that lived in Chicago. His name was Mohammed Javedulah. We called him Javed for short. Since he was new to the Dominican Republic and I helped him find an apartment and do all that (since I knew the area very well), he immediately liked me a lot.

This man had quite a lot of money and he decided he wanted a big apartment in a very nice area because he was going to bring all of his family while he was going to medical school. That puzzled me so I said, “How can you afford to have your family here? You have a nice house in Chicago. Why would you bring all your family here while you go to medical school? How will you keep them like that?” He said, “Oh, that’s no problem. I have many businesses and they run by themselves.” So comes to know, his business is selling medical and laboratory equipment – new and used. And he owns (in Chicago) a company called Lane Instruments. That’s off of Tindall Park in Chicago.

After a few weeks, I was interested in all those things, of course, and he said, “You know, this place here in Dominican Republic, is so ready to have better technology and they can’t afford it.” I said, “That’s the problem that most people can not afford the price of the big medical equipment.” He said, “Well, you know, we also have used, refurbished equipment that is absolutely, almost half price and I am quite sure that they probably could afford it if I can put a subsidiary here. And if I have somebody that can help establish it, that would probably be really good.”

To make a story short, I said, “That’s me. You got your man here.” So he and another partner that we had, (Enrique Calvo – he was Cuban origin from New York) all three of us decided that we were going to do it. And we did. We rented a place at the mall – the Plaza Naco – and we started selling the basic medical equipment. But we also had fliers and we advertised in the major clinics and hospitals – all kinds of medical equipment at a price (it was difficult to find a better price) and with the same warranty as a new one. So the business went up and up that you would never believe. We had quite a lot of business.

In a short period of time we made enough money that I said, “Well, I have enough money now to pay for my medical school.” So we started doing that and I remember that sometimes we would get a call – and we were busy, we were in a class or something – so we had to send somebody, so we started hiring employees. All of a sudden we had about four or five employees. We did quite well. So that’s how I was able to afford medical school. I paid for it. So as you can see, I did a lot of stuff.

The saddest part was when it came graduation time and then I got married to Yvette and we wanted to go back to Puerto Rico. That was going to be the end of my partnership there, but I had to do it. Javedulah didn’t care about being a doctor. He went to medical school just to please his parents. His parents were from Pakistan and they were in the

business of making steel medical instruments in Pakistan. They sent him to the United States to become a doctor. Instead he became a businessman. So they were always rehashing – you need to become a doctor, you need to do that, you promised that – so you better do good on your promise. So he said, “All I want is the title to show my family.” So he got his title and he said he put it in his office there. But he’s not interested in doing medicine.

But I was. So he understood that – that I wanted to pursue my career and, of course, I went to Puerto Rico. When we arrived in Puerto Rico I lived with my cousin, Venecia, for awhile till I got a job. And that took me about a month or so. Then we signed up and we worked for the state. Our assignment was in a small town between mountains called Adjuntas – which means ‘brings together’. That was our first assignment and Adjuntas was about 10,000 population in 1986. They had a community hospital with 30 beds (which for the town was a fairly good size) and an emergency room. There were six physicians and we ran everything there in the hospital. We stayed there about two years and four months or so. The whole town appreciated us and we interacted a lot with the community. There was no place that you would go in the town that they would not stop you – doctor this, doctor that. You could see the hospital from the house we lived in. It was right across the street almost. Hardly ever I got a full night’s sleep because they would come and knock on your door all times of the night. If I wanted a weekend free, we had to go out of town. We couldn’t stay. We had to leave town.

So we worked really hard there. Until – one day that we were real busy in the morning – the clinical director’s secretary came over and peeked in our room and she said, “Doctor, the clinical director wants you and all the doctors to go to her office whenever you get a chance because there is a lady from the United States that wants to talk to all the doctors about some medical stuff.” So we thought it might have been a pharmaceutical representative or something like that. We said, “Well, we are pretty busy. I don’t think I’ll have time for that.” But she told all the doctors the same thing.

Well, at noon, we went to the lunchroom and the secretary came back and said, “I can’t believe you guys. That lady is still waiting in there and nobody went out there.” I said, “What lady?”

The secretary said, “The lady from the United States. She is still at the clinical director’s and it is pretty embarrassing. She has been patiently waiting there for hours.”

So I felt sorry – and my wife at the time (Yvette) said, “OK, let’s go see what it is.”

When we arrived there – the lady was from Puerto Rico to begin with – she introduced herself. She said, “My name is Marie Turner.” And she said, “I come from Springfield, Missouri.” I had no idea where that was. She said, “I work for the federal government – for the Bureau of Prisons – and I work at the U.S. Medical Center in Springfield, Missouri. I am the nurse recruiter and I am here to recruit bilingual personnel (people that know Spanish and English) to work there.”

She gave us pamphlets of all the opportunities and we listened to everything. Of course, my ex-wife was fascinated with all this because she didn't like Puerto Rico. She wanted to come back to the States all the time. So after we studied that at home, she decided, well, why don't we apply. So we applied and, sure enough, we received a letter in a couple of weeks to come for an interview. That's how we ended here.

Now the SAME lady, Marie Turner, is the one that put me in contact with James Mauldin. And not just that, her mother (Rosa) is from the same town of Adjuntas – that's why she was there. Marie grew up there in Adjuntas and all her family lived there. When she mentioned it to me, she said, "Well, you know, I'm from this town and my father and mother are here. My mother is Rosa Muñoz. When she mentioned that, I said, "Doña Rosa Muñoz from El Saltillo?" El Saltillo is one of the neighborhoods in Adjuntas. And she said, "Yes, that's my mother and my father." I said, "Mr. Muñoz is your father?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Well, they are both my patients." Small world.

They came to visit here in Springfield a couple of times. They came to visit her. They passed away last year. But they came to visit her here and they would not leave her alone. They said, "You need to call the doctor." So I had to go and spend some times with them. They were so grateful. They were getting older, but they were both my patients.

So that's jobs I have held. The last one is this one here. I am a Physician's Assistant at the U.S. Medical Center for Federal Prisoners here in Springfield, Missouri and I've been there since 1992. As a matter of fact, I started working there in November of 1989, as the interpreter because they didn't have a position open until 1992. In 1992, I started as a Physician's Assistant. Until now, I have been working there.

That is a very challenging job – very interesting and unusual. You have to provide medical care for inmates – federal inmates – and you have to provide the same care as the community standard. At the beginning, you can imagine the cultural clash when I came from a small town in the center of the island of Puerto Rico to here to provide care for inmates in the center of Missouri. It was quite a shock. Fortunately for me I get along real well with people and I like medicine. I take it very, very seriously. I am not a perfectionist, by any means, but I try to be the best at what I do and that helped me a lot, because they appreciate your professionalism and your demeanor.

So that is one thing they appreciated there. Besides I took it very seriously – my job. I wasn't afraid of engaging in anything. I have a lot of experience in medicine. I have seen a lot and I am no stranger to treating patients so to me, it comes easy after doing it for such a long period of time. I guess that they saw that I was so confident with what I did. They liked me from the get and go. So it made my life easier because I was humble but professional all the time. That's the best I can describe to you how I managed to integrate myself into that culture there. I'm pretty observant so in a few days I kind of got a glimpse of what people were like and what they liked and what they didn't like and so I managed to survive.

I like the challenge of my job. I really think that it's a very important, challenging job. It gives you an early retirement which is always welcome and good benefits and good hours. And of course, I like a lot of the people I work with. They are really fun. They make the job easier because they are fun to work with. Most of them are extremely good professionals too. I like them.

## CHAPTER FIVE: LIFE MISSION

I truly believe that my mission in life was just to become a doctor and practice medicine. I enjoy doing a lot of things but that's the one thing that I enjoy the most. I think that is what I am best at. So no doubt about that part. Ever since I set my feet on my father's pharmacy, that was it. I knew that I had to be involved with medicine. That's what happened very early when I was a kid. I like to help people too and that is one way of doing it better.

I have not yet realized my mission. I still have a lot of things to do. One of my dreams is having my own clinic – my own practice – where I can be my own boss and do my own hours and my own things and have my own equipment and train people to do things that I enjoy doing and helping people out. One day when I retire, I will probably do that. I probably will set my own practice. I don't know if it's going to be in the Dominican Republic or whatever, but the more I think about it, you're more independent if you do it elsewhere. Unfortunately, medicine here in our country is so regulated and there are so many guidelines and restrictions – things that you have to do because that's the law. Other things that you know they work and you know you can try this to help the person, but they won't let you. That sort of thing is sometimes frustrating.



*Medical school first year in Dominican Republic. ID card 1981*

So through the years I have seen both worlds and I can easily compare both ways of doing things. Every country has good and bad. Here we enjoy a lot of technology that helps a lot. Over there we don't have that much technology which, in a sense, that's not a good thing. But, on the other hand, since you don't have the recourses of the technology and the machine, you have to rely a lot on your brain. That is what keeps us sharp. Once you get comfortable and complacent – relying on machines to tell you what's wrong with you – you kind of become dependent on that.

The day the machine malfunctions, you too malfunction. But when you really use your brain to apply to these things, you don't care if the machine is working or not working. You are confident – you know. That gives you a better sense of accomplishment than anything else. I think that's why I like to just do that and I don't know, work in that kind of environment – no more limitations.

I always liked medicine. There was a time that I mentioned before when I was in high school, that due to the impetus of youth, I just wanted to do what my friends were doing and try to be trendy and decided to study marine biology. But fortunately I didn't deviate too much from my path.

My greatest accomplishment in life, I guess, was becoming a doctor. That's probably the best thing I can describe. Second to that was just having a child – having Monica – because I was resigned not to have one. My ex-wife had two miscarriages before Monica. She was told by more than one physician that she would not be able to have anymore. So Monica came as a miracle. That was a great accomplishment too.

There were two points that were the lowest ones of my life. The first was losing our first children. When my ex-wife miscarried the first time there were twins. She was almost six months pregnant but they were really slow growing and they couldn't survive. That was devastating for me because I was scheduled to take the medical board exam around that time. She miscarried two weeks before the test. So that kind of put me in a difficult position there. I still went and took the test but my mind was not in it and so I had to take it again because, of course, I didn't pass it that time.

The lowest of the lowest points in my life was when I lost my mother because we were very attached. She came to visit me here in Springfield and I was looking forward to seeing her right after Christmas. She came to visit me in the summer and I told her that I was going to try to go to the Dominican Republic and see her right after Christmas. I was looking forward to that and then she passed away suddenly and I was generally hurt. So that was really shocking – one of my most depressing times.

I think I have a lot of high points in my life. The first high point I guess was when I started college and I felt like I was on the way to becoming somebody. I felt real proud that I had accomplished that.

And, of course, after that – being a doctor – graduation day – and having your diploma from the dean of the medical school and people that you considered to be close to god in medical school. Now you are a colleague like they are. So that was a nice feeling. It was an eight year program.

I think that the most rewarding aspect of my life is to make somebody feel better. That's pretty rewarding. In my career when I take care of sick persons and you see them get better because of what you did, that's pretty rewarding. That's probably the most rewarding aspect.

There were various people who had a profound influence on my life and some of them I mentioned through this narration. The first one was my cousin, Papo. He instilled a profound influence because he was so knowledgeable, cultured and prepared and I saw that he was one of the persons in my life who was most sought after because of his knowledge of things. That influenced me a lot. When someone was having some difficulties with language or any other question about literature or life itself, he had a variety of things that he mastered so he was kind of a guy that you looked forward to ask anything because he would know a lot of things. So he influenced me a lot.

The other one was Dr. Hart. He was the Dean of the Physics and Mathematics Department at college. He was a physicist at school and for a long time in his career, he worked for the General Electric company. He was one of the chemical engineers there and he developed a lot of the plastics that we now know and use. He was a real good scientist and an excellent human being too. I used to admire him a lot because I used to admire his intellect. He was a great mathematician – probably one of the greatest I've seen. I used to admire his character. I remember one of the things I enjoyed the most was when I was taking advanced physics with him. There were some brilliant students in the class – real brilliant. They were very challenging. These students were always looking for things to challenge the teacher, you know. I remember sometimes they would come up with a problem – something extremely difficult. I don't know where they found these things, but they would put it there on the board and they would ask Dr. Hart, "What do you think about that? How do you solve that?"

I remember he used to be a tall man, with dark hair and a dark mustache, but very fair complexion. He had the habit of putting his lips under and we said he almost kind of swallowed his mustache – you know. But that's the way he was thinking. And then he would look at the problem on the blackboard and he would go like that and he would kind of almost swallow his mustache. Then when he just said, "OK, that's that", I knew he had the solution right there. Then he just started saying, "Well, this is this, and this is this" and done. I tell you that the guys would just adore him because sometimes we said, "Is this guy from this planet or from somewhere else?" Because his demeanor was like that all the time. He was a great thinker too. So I admired him. I admired the way he was. He was a very talented man and he influenced me a lot.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE LATER YEARS

I am presently employed at the U.S. Medical Center for Federal Prisoners here in Springfield, Missouri. After retirement I will more than likely go maybe to the Dominican Republic or similar place and establish my own practice. Since I like to solve problems, I like to diagnose more than anything else so I think that's what I will do after I retire. I will put a clinic and train some people to run it and do this and that - and I will just diagnose things – problematic things. I think that will be a great help and it's something that I always wanted to do. It's one of those areas that you are your own boss and since nobody else will be doing that, you are free to do whatever you consider is necessary to help. So that is what I will be doing. Hopefully I will train some people to help me with that and I won't have to work so hard and can enjoy part of my retirement too.

I am not an elder in this community, but I have done several things here in Springfield. The things I have done have been mainly for the minorities. When I started here in the early 1990's, we had a group that would meet occasionally at the newspaper and usually they were different members of the minorities and it was like a work group where we kind of discussed issues regarding the community in Springfield – the minorities. I did that for awhile. I attended several other meetings and gave some ideas and opinions and things that might improve the community. Then I also provided my services as interpreter for the court here in Greene County and Federal Courthouse here in Missouri in a couple of occasions. I don't do that much now because now there are paid interpreters there. They are always available.

I also became an ambassador for awhile of newly arrived Hispanics in the community. That was in the early 1990's too and since a lot of people in the community knew me every time they got an Hispanic trying to establish himself here in Springfield, well, they said, "I know who can help you." They called me and I, of course, gave them, you know, an orientation to the city and tried to help them.

I wish I could do more for the community but, of course, with my job and responsibilities I have I can not do any more, but we still do some of that. From time to time I get a call and try to help somebody that is trying to establish himself here in the community.

Most of my time I am at work and sometimes (I try not to) but sometimes when I'm out of the job, I'm still thinking about it. During my free time I try to dedicate as much as possible to my family and do things with my wife and with my daughter – spend time with them. I spend a lot of time in my yard. My wife loves flowers and I help out with her flower gardens and keeping the yard really nice.

Also I read a lot and I still do. That has been the case since I was a little kid. I love to read. I have read a lot of interesting things. I used to read a lot of literature in Spanish and scientific papers and magazines. Lately I just read a lot of fiction more than anything because it is easy to do. But I'll say that 50 percent of my reading is medical articles and

books and updates just to be refreshed with my career. You have to keep up. That's a requirement.

One of my hobbies when I was younger and single was movies. I used to *love* the movies and I used to go frequently to the shows. I liked that so much that I joined a movie forum – first in Puerto Rico and then in the Dominican Republic. We would see a movie and then critique it afterwards and I enjoyed that quite a bit.

When I came here to Springfield, I met a gentleman from Iran here who was very knowledgeable about Hollywood and cinematography and he was a critique of the cinematographic art. At his house he has quite a collection of movie and cinema. When I found that he liked that, I told him that I liked that too. We started talking and we immediately became real good friends. He is retired and we formed a group and met once a week or so – maybe once every two weeks. We would see a movie together and then we just discussed it. That was a nice group and I enjoyed that too. Now he has moved away. He went to another state I think and we lost track. The group was dissolved, but I am still passionate about movies. Every chance I get I have to go to the movie theater.

I have quite a lot of favorite movies. I like the old ones a lot. I think the best years for movies were the 1960's and 1970's. Nowadays they make good movies but they don't have the same character that they had at that time. Probably one of the best Hollywood movies was The Godfather, of course, and that's one of my favorites. But I also enjoyed some of the European movies and I particularly enjoyed some of the French cinema and the Italian cinema and also Spanish cinema. Some of my favorite directors are from Italy and Spain – Bernardo Bertolucci and Pedro Almodovar. That's part of how I spend my time when I get some free time.

If there were a beach or an ocean nearby that would have been my number one priority, but unfortunately none of that is nearby.

I don't have any published works. I have done papers in college and the university and that was done just for that – not to be published publicly. The topics were just various. Most of them were related to science – scientific papers and stuff.

I don't have any grandchildren yet. My daughter is only 13.

I have several best friends and I cannot make a distinction between them. My very first good friend was Adonis Lagrange like I mentioned before. He was my very best friend when I was a little kid – the first friend I ever remember having.

Then as a teenager, Carlos Aquino was my very good friend. We lived close by – we were in the same neighborhood. We founded the Science Club in high school. Since he was the closest one to my house we were just hanging around all the time together.

Then, after I got older, of course, I was in Puerto Rico. Adrian Acevedo was a real good friend. He was also our colleague. He still practices in Puerto Rico and we are still really good friends.

Then in Springfield I have three really good friends that I spend most of my time with. One is Dr. Eduardo Ulloa who is a Doctor of Psychiatry from the Dominican Republic. Then my good friend Carlos Tomelleri. He originally was born in Argentina, grew up in Colombia and he is also a Psychiatrist here. And then Edgar Galiñanez is from Puerto Rico. He is also a Psychiatry Doctor. I have known them ever since I came to Springfield, except Carlos who arrived in 1994, but the other two arrived when I came here at the same time. So we are very good friends and our families would get together and we celebrate family birthdays and holidays and Christmas and we always get together.

The thing I value most in a friendship is being there when you are needed. I value that a lot and I try to be that way. There is a tendency for friends to get together for fun times - when there is something fun to do, activities, etc. But there are occasions when something is wrong or if you are in a difficult situation, or your friend is. Or something has happened to the family or if they are going through hard times and that's when it is important to have a friend that you can count on and help in those difficult times than in the fun times. So that's how I value the friendships. When I have something to cope with and a friend is there to lend a hand or something like that, that is a valuable friendship.

Also when we share things like we are family – that is valuable too in a friendship. Those people that I mentioned before, they are like that. We are all the same. It's not just for the fun times but also for the difficult times. We are there like we are family. And I value that sense of friendship.

I think in part it's because of our culture. We are so family-oriented and we treat friends the same way. When you establish a friendship with somebody, they are like your family. There is a lot of familiarity between friends and formalities are put away. In my country (and the same thing in Puerto Rico), friends can come anytime they want to. They are welcome anytime – like family. You know they are good friends. They will visit you. They don't have to announce themselves or ask permission to come to your house. They will just go and that's the way it is over there. I think, up to a point, that is a valuable thing, because it's like having an extended family. That is extremely valuable. That's how we get advancing in life. If I have a son or a daughter and my car breaks down and I cannot take them to school in time, you don't need a family member to do that for you. Your friend will be there to do it. It's just that kind of interaction that goes on.

If I could, I would have stayed in Puerto Rico. If I had to do something differently – I'm not trying to diminish what I have accomplished here in Springfield – it is just that I always thought that if I had remained there, I would have accomplished more. When I go back there to visit and I observe my friends that I was practicing with, I see that they are

completely satisfied with what they have accomplished. They have a tremendous practice. They have developed a lot of friendships and families and they are doing what they really wanted to do.

This last time that I went to Puerto Rico (that was four years ago) I went with my wife and I visited a friend in the town where I was practicing. His name is Ramon Perez. He told me that his goal in life (and that was before I left Puerto Rico) was to have his own practice in that town which he loved and adored. All of his family was born there. They were descended from Basques from Spain. His father used to own a sort of like a 7-11 type of business in the town. For many, many years or so the whole town knew them. His father was getting very old and he told him, "When you are ready you can take over – get this business and do whatever you want with it." He said, "That's my goal. Once I get enough money, I will rebuild this business. And I will make it my own practice." Well, he did that.

Four years ago I visited with my wife and I went there. Of course, I knew that he had his own practice so we went inside there and I remember that we got in the door and there was a waiting room and there were people all over the place waiting to be seen. Most of them were elderly people. So I walked up to the counter where the receptionist was and, of course, everybody started looking. Who are these people? You know seeing this blond lady, blue eyes, American – you know. I asked, "Is the doctor in the house?" The receptionist said, "Dr. Perez, Yes. He is with a patient right now. Do you have an appointment?"

I said, "No, I don't have an appointment, but he better get out of that office right now." She just looked at me kind of serious and I said, "Well, don't even tell him. I'm going to go there." I meant to turn around and the lady probably thought that he was in some sort of trouble of some kind. When she was coming the other way, I guess he heard me and recognized the voice. He left the patient he was talking to, came out in the hallway and saw me. And we hugged each other. He is a big guy. So he hugged me and picked me up in the air and yelled. He told the patient, "Pardon me, Excuse me, but this is like my brother."

Then he met my wife. He told my wife, "You know, you see all those people out here and all the patients I have? I owe it to this man here. Because when he left Puerto Rico, I inherited all of his elderly fans." I used to take care of geriatrics and elderly people. He said, "I inherited them all." So, you could tell that he was very accomplished. He was very happy doing what he was doing. And he was extremely successful in his practice.

When he saw me there, he thought I was coming for good. He thought I was going to stay. I said, "No, I'm just visiting, as a matter of fact." And he shook his head and he just said, "I don't think you are doing the right thing. You belong here." I said, "Well, you now what, sooner or later, I will come back and we will do what we need to do." And we left it at that.

I would like to relive some of my life, especially my teenage years. I enjoyed those so much. I have so many fond memories, that I would relive that in a heartbeat. Those were my favorite years. I was happy and I enjoyed the teenager years like I don't think anybody would. I would do that again if I had a chance. Those were the best times. High School was the best for me. Those friends that I had – you couldn't ask for anything better.

My wish for future generations is that I would ask them to become somebody. That is to me, always the most important thing anybody can do. If you dedicate yourself to being somebody – somebody productive, somebody, you know, useful – not just to society but to your family also – I think that's a good value. Like I said before, my father was a firm believer in studying. He said, "I will not leave you money because I don't have it. But I will leave you something better than that. And that is an education."

And he truly did, because there are four of us and four of us became professionals. He struggled a lot and sometimes I think, "Well, if he hadn't paid for school and expenses for all four of us and given us all that, maybe he would have some money now." But, you know, he thought that was his priority. I think he was right. And I'm going to instill the same thing in my daughter too. The best legacy I can give you is a good education. That's the only thing.

I always think that all material things can disappear, be taken away, or fade. You know you can have a big home and it can be repossessed or a fire can destroy it, or who knows you might lose it in a lawsuit. If you have a good car, it's not going to last forever. You can have a lot of money. You can lose it. I've seen that. You know it's not a permanent thing. But what you know, nobody can take it away from you. I always told that to my daughter too. I said, "You know, once you get a diploma and it says here 'You are a veterinarian', nobody can take that away from you. You are never going to lose that. You will always be a veterinarian, no matter what happens because that is what you know. I believe that. That's one of the most valuable things somebody can have is what they know. That belongs to them and nobody can take that away. So I wish that the future generations would concentrate on becoming somebody useful. Not just for society, but also for the family, because I believe that family is the most important thing.

I also would like to see the concept of family being kept. I know it is difficult in this time and age. There are a lot of immigrants that come to this country. I know a lot of families that come from different parts of the world including Latin America. I see how their generations adapt to the life in America. Even though they have come from a strong concept of family that is in our culture, that is not as strong once the generations are raised here. That is a shame. I believe that that is absolutely a shame. I think that should be the opposite. I will encourage everybody – every immigrant, every minority that comes here – to secure their family values and instill that in their offspring. Don't let that fade away. That is, to me, something very valuable.

It avoids a lot of problems because in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico (especially nowadays) there is a lot of criminality and drug abuse – these modern

problems – that are affecting our countries too. Of course, it has an impact in the family – the structure of the family. Even in this day and age, when I go there and I see all that happening, I still see that young people – young generation – have respect for their parents that I don't see here. I see that going on and I wish that they will never lose that – even in this day and age when we are having all these problems with society now days. That is in part because of so many years and centuries of being instilled with 'the family comes first'. You have to respect and recognize your family and I guess that was ingrained in the mind and it still goes on. I still see that.

The respect for your mother is paramount in our country. That's your number one thing. Your mother is sacred in our countries. The biggest insult that you can confer on somebody in our countries is to say something bad about their mother. That is the biggest insult for anybody, because that is sacred. The most sacred thing that you can have is your mother. So, you see in the news about this fellow – this criminal – that is robbing a bank. You see that in the news and it only takes one appeal from the mother for him to step down and he will do it. And that is an amazing thing. They still have that respect. No matter how your mind is distorted, they still have that respect.

One of my experiences when I was going to medical school was to go to the psychiatric hospital which is the only one there. (In the Dominican Republic you have to do a clinical rotation for three months in psychiatry.) It used to be outside of the city limits. It was like an old-fashioned psychiatric hospital. It was very depressing to go there. It was something like medieval. Of course, the patients that were there – some of them were really sick, real mentally sick and psychotic – they still, even though they were psychotic, respected their mothers and recognized them. I saw that there because sometimes we were working on visiting days and these guys were just nonsense. They were violent psychotics. Nobody could calm them and nothing worked. But it takes like, the mother comes to visit them and sees them and it is just a big change. They will yell at the doctors, they will yell at somebody else, they will insult this person – but not their mother. You know, it was something different.

There were eight interns doing that rotation. I was the only one from the Dominican Republic. The rest were from other countries, including the United States, Brazil, Pakistan, Trinidad. I think there were eight of us from eight different countries. And they would marvel about that – that there was so much respect for the family. I tried to explain to them, "Well, that's our nuclei – everything revolves around the family here." That is pretty much Spanish. It's pretty much the same in other Latin American countries.

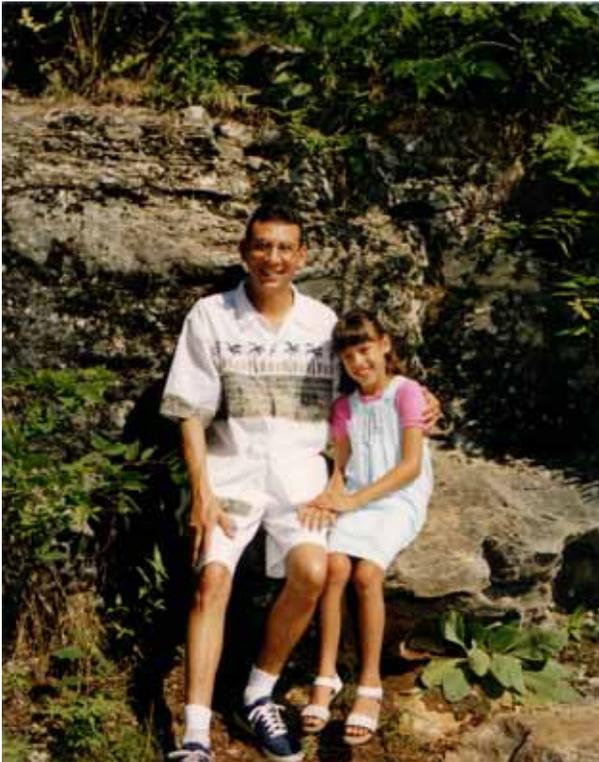
So that's why I expect from future generations that they not lose that – that they still instill a lot of family values. Even though they live in different countries, I wish they would keep that strong sense of family within them – maintain that.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: MY SPRINGFIELD EXPERIENCE

I arrived here in November, 1988. I arrived from Puerto Rico and like I explained before, it was because this nurse recruiter (Marie Turner) went to the place I worked recruiting people. We both applied. We got a letter to come down here for interviewing and here we are.

I came here because they were needing bilingual personnel to work for the Center here. So it helped me that I was fluent in Spanish and I was fluent in English. I studied other languages too. I understand a lot of Italian. I can speak a little bit of Italian too and I can read it. The same with French and Portuguese. So that kind of helped.

When I came here to Springfield that November, it was close to Thanksgiving. I don't know if I felt welcome or not, because I didn't see anybody to welcome me. I came from Puerto Rico – a town where people are out in the streets all hours of day and night. It's very noisy. It's heavily populated. The streets are always full of people. It doesn't matter what. It's full of cars. Neighbors are constantly visiting each other – passing by and stuff. Well, I was here in Springfield and I didn't see a *soul* in the street. *Nobody!* I arrived here about 11:00 at night. It was cold like crazy. I was with my first wife and we arrived here.



*Me and my daughter, Monica.  
Springfield, Missouri.  
2000*

At the airport we had a taxi. I didn't know anything about this place so I had to tell the taxi driver to take me to a hotel and I said, "Can you take me to a hotel that is close to the U.S. Medical Center for Prisoners?" He said, "OK." So he thought that we were coming here to visit a prisoner. So he was kind of suspicious looking. But he took us to a hotel – I can't remember right now where it was. I think it was located close to Sunshine Street and Glenstone somewhere. And he said, "Well, if you are going to the Medical Center, this is the street. This will take you straight to the Medical Center."

OK, so we stayed there. Well, it was 11:00 at night. There was hardly anybody – there were no cars - there was nothing. It was so cold and we were so tired, that once we secured the room we just fell asleep. Well, the next day I'm thinking I'm going to wake up and this is going to be full of people and

cars – like a big city. Well, we got out and we went to the lobby. My first question was, “How do you get around here? Do you have a subway?” No, no subway. OK – “any train or bus service?” No, no train. OK – “Well, we need to go to the Medical Center at some point.”

“Well,” he said, “you don’t have transportation. Then you have to take a taxi.” OK, well that’s fine. But I had Marie Turner’s number, so I called her. She said, “Oh, good, you’re here. Great! Where are you?” I told her and she said, “I’m going to be there in 10 minutes.” So she came and she was the one that oriented us to Springfield.

She said, “Let me take you to my house and introduce you to my family and my kids.” That was very nice of her. I remember going from the hotel to her house. It was about a 10 minute drive and in all of that 10 minute drive, I only saw cars and NO ONE in the street. Not a soul. And I am just thinking, “This is a ghost town. I don’t even know where we are.” Ghost town. It was such a dramatic thing. It was so cold and then they had a storm and ice was on the ground right after Thanksgiving. It was a big mess.

So the first person I knew was her and she, of course, invited us for Thanksgiving at her house and I met the family. Slowly we started knowing people. Fortunately, the first people that we met here in town were people that worked at the Medical Center too. They knew that we were going to work there so they were very friendly and helpful. That helped a lot. Since we didn’t have any children, we didn’t have to worry about schools or any of those things. So that’s how we started here. That was our welcoming.



*Current family, Springfield, Missouri.  
From left: Christina, Nicholas, Monica,  
Adrian, & JoAnn  
1999*

Also, I remember calling my family and my mother. They asked me, “How do you like it?” And I said, “Well, they have a tremendous amount of trees. It’s like a jungle. It is very clean. But they hardly have anybody.” I said, “There’s no people or they are all hiding. I don’t know where they are.” I remember saying that to my mother.

And then there is an anecdote. This is part of how the culture differs from one place to the other. This lady, Marie Turner, decided that she was going to show us a little bit of Springfield and she took us to several neighborhoods one afternoon. I think it was the second or the third day after I was here. She drove around certain

nice areas and showed us the main things in Springfield like the center of the town.

After she drove us around for awhile she said, “Well, I would like to invite you for supper.” OK, Great. And that was one of my first experiences here. She said, “How would you like Mexican food?” OK, that’s sounds wonderful. I said, “I don’t know any Mexican food except ‘taco’.” Because in Puerto Rico then, Mexican food was not popular. I don’t remember seeing a Mexican restaurant in Puerto Rico, except Taco Bell.

So she said, “Oh no, this is a nice restaurant. You will like it.” I said, “Good, let’s go.” So I am here thinking I’m going to have the atmosphere that we have over there - that you are going to relax and spend a long time there. Well, we arrived at the restaurant and it was called Mexican Villa at National Street and Bennett. I remember we got our table and here comes someone who asks for our drinks and we order our drinks and they gave us a menu right away. So I said, “Well, they expect us to order right away. Well, that’s fine.” See we don’t do that in our countries. You go in, you have something to drink and they ask you, “Are you going to have dinner?” Yes, OK. They ask you, “Shall I bring the menus?” Yes, they bring it. But, here they just hit us with everything right away.

I remember that I didn’t know what to order. My ex-wife was really picky at eating too. So I opened the menu and looked at it and I didn’t say anything, but then I was trying to see if there was something I could recognize. And I remember there were some names that sounded funny. Finally I think I ordered some sort of chicken something. I said - OK, something I recognize. My ex-wife, I don’t even remember what she ordered, but after that they brought the meal and we ate it and then right after that they asked if there was something else and they brought the bill right away. We paid and Marie grabbed her purse and was ready to leave and I said, “My God, we just got here.” But maybe they were in a hurry – I didn’t know what was going on. We went back home.

That night my family had called and I called back home and they said they were trying to call me before. I said, “Well, we were out. This lady took us to eat at a Mexican restaurant.” And they said, “Oh, Mexican restaurant.”

Yes, so I am telling my experience and I said, “Well, it is like we always suspected. They eat a lot of strange things in Mexico. You know the first thing on the menu is that they are selling burros!”

Family: “Burros?”

Tony: “Yes, they are selling burro – meat. It’s just some weird stuff.”

Family: “Oh, my God, did you eat that?”

Tony: “No, of course not. How am I going to eat burro. I just ordered some chicken.”

Family: “OK, well good, you know, be careful.”

Tony: “Yeah, OK.”

I said, “Well, everything that I had been told is true about Mexican food. That’s what they eat.”

Later, is when I understood that *Burrito* is NOT *Burro*! It’s just the name of the food. In Spanish, Burrito means “small burro” so I thought they were eating baby burros.

Later on, I explained to my family, that No, No, No – it’s just that they call it that way, but it is safe beef. That was one of my first experiences when I came here.

A lot of people here have a natural curiosity about my background and people want to know. Well, a lot of people here ask me, “Where are you from?” I say, “Well, I was born in the Dominican Republic.” They have a lot of questions about that. Some of the questions that they ask me are, “Is that in Africa or South America?” I say, “Neither.” So I have to educate. Then the second thing is – when I mention Puerto Rico – they say, “Oh yeah”, because they recognize the name. And then they start saying some Mexican words and I say, “No, no, no, it’s quite different.” Because they believe it is close to Mexico so people think it is the same, or part of Mexico or, I don’t know. You have to elaborate on things. But they really express a genuine interest of knowing how it is, how the people are, what you do – things of that sort.

I have gone several times to different elementary schools here and shared where I’m from and a little bit of history and culture. I always tell them, “Hey, you know the Dominican Republic is the first country in this hemisphere. It was the first city founded by Columbus. That’s where he went first.” Then they understand where I am coming from. Those are the opportunities that I have to share with school kids. One time I went to SMS and spoke to a class there. Another time I went to Greenwood Laboratory School with Ms. Norton’s class. I had to explain to them about my background, where I came from, what I do and how things are done differently. That is a great opportunity to share.

Sometimes the Newsleader has written some articles and they asked my opinion. I remember there was a baseball season where the St. Louis Cardinals had a great slugger called Mark McGuire. He was in a race to be the leader of all times in home runs. There was another fellow from the Dominican Republic called Sammy Sosa, at the same time in the same race. Who was going to finish first? People were expressing their opinion. I had a call from one of the reporters from the Newsleader and he asked me my opinion about what I thought. The next day my opinion was in the paper too. So I have time to share those things. I tell them, “Yes, when it comes to baseball, I saw all those people. I interacted with them. Sometimes I ate in the same restaurant and saw them. I saw where Sammy Sosa was born and I saw his family’s house.”

My current wife and I went to the town he came from. We saw where he practiced. We saw the neighborhood where he lived. It was in a town about 30 miles east of the capital city – a place called San Pedro de Macoris – where all of the most famous baseball

players come from. 'Macoris' is a word that we made into Spanish. It was an Indian word called 'macorix' because of the chieftain who ruled that land.

That town produced two things – sugar cane and baseball players. They are both excellent - Excellent baseball players and excellent sugar cane. Their sugar cane is mainly used for rum – the production of rum – with molasses. They have molasses and they make rum the old fashioned way, aged in white oak barrels that were brought from Spain a long time ago. They will give you a tour of their refineries. You see these 500 gallon barrels and they are huge. The moment you walk in, you know that's ancient, ancient wood. It is quite a sight.

My daughter, (Monica) after my divorce, went to school first in Memphis, Tennessee and then in Forest City, Arkansas. Since she was born here, of course, - even though her physical complexion looks Latin – her actions are completely 'hillbilly'. So she's had no problems in school.

It is easier for the newer generation – children from immigrants or children that are born here. Of course, they adapt better to the culture here and they tend to deviate from the parents' culture. For us – the people that grew up in Latin America and come back over here – it is a little difficult to integrate completely. First of all, we develop a taste for a food and a culture and we try to preserve that. We like that. We keep up the tradition. And that's why my daughter says, "Why do you cook a lot of rice?" I say, "Well, because that's what I like and that's what I grew up doing."

She says, "When you guys get together, why does everybody talk at the same time?" That's another example of our cultural identity. They do. Everybody wants to speak their mind. One wants to outdo the other. That's the way it is. So that is kind of a little loss in the newer generation, but I wish that the sense of family never gets lost. I can not stress that more.

It is everybody's responsibility to welcome minorities. I believe that the more variety there is, the spicier life gets. There are a whole lot of contributions that people can make – a lot of positive things that people can bring – new influence and a new way of seeing things. It doesn't mean necessarily that it will change your way of life – but it will add to it. That is also something that should be appreciated. There is a lot of talent in our countries and a lot of people with good intentions and a lot of people with good family values. All they need is a chance to demonstrate that.

It is amazing, but there are a lot of professionals in our country – not just professionals like you see everyday, but good ones and brilliant people. They unfortunately immigrate because they want to get the best for the family and here is where the technology is. Here is where inventions are made. They immigrate for that reason – just to provide something better for their family. But at the same time they are really good professionals. They are really well-educated people. Unfortunately they can not demonstrate that because of the language problem.

Their system of education is mostly European – in the entire Latin America – except Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is American-based. But in the rest of the 22 countries of Latin America, it's European-based education. You know for example, we use the metric system. It's different here. If you ask a Latin, "How many miles away is your house?" – well, that guy might be an engineer in his country (and probably a very good one) but he probably doesn't understand what you are trying to ask him or say. You will think he is a dumb guy but he is not. He is actually an intelligent person. He's trained differently. So if you ask him, "How many kilometers away is your house?" Oh, his eyes will shine bright. OK, now he's talking my field.

That is a problem - to integrate yourself when you have been taught differently. I can see that as a hurdle. Sometimes it is a little problematic for people to realize that. To switch in your customs is also a different thing too. I know families that come here and then all of a sudden you talk to them. You are the neighbor and you try to welcome them and the next thing you know they are knocking on the door of your house or going in with something and you ask, "Why is he doing this?" or "Why is he coming here like that?" You think he is intruding. But he is doing what he is used to, you know, what his custom is. He doesn't mean to be offensive. It's just that's how it is.

"Why do they speak so loud?" Because that's how we speak. We are loud people as compared to Americans. We are festive. We can't go inside a classroom without whistling and saying 'Hello' to everybody loud. They say, "Why is he doing that?" That's what we are used to in our country. If you go to our country, that's what you will see. Done everyday. Once you grow up in that it is very difficult to readapt. But they do. All they need is a chance. And that's my message, you know. Just give them a chance and you will see a lot of positive things being done for the community.

Also, one last thing – and it's very important also – is to not lump everybody because we tend to do that. We tend to lump each one. We call Latins and we think Latins are just one country or just one culture. A lot of people have emphasized that a lot too at times and through the years in Springfield, but it is essentially the truth. If you go to Argentina you will see that it's a completely different world than going to Puerto Rico or going to Mexico. They are completely different. If you go to Ecuador you will see that it is completely different from the Dominican Republic. Not just in the way they speak the language (the language is Spanish) but in the way the people interact with each other – in the way they do things, the organization of the country, the housing, the architecture. You see that they all have their own culture that is symbolic of their country. There would be a lot of things that they would have in common with others, but there is also a lot of things that we don't have in common. They have their own existence and their own way of doing things. So we cannot lump all of them together.

I believe that we enrich our lives through culture. I hope that my life story brings you, the reader, a little understanding of mine. And I also encourage you to read more about others. God bless this melting pot of cultures.

## RECIPES FROM DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

### Mangu

2 servings

2 green plantains  
1 tbsp butter or margarine  
1 cup of milk  
1/2 tsp of salt

Peel the plantains and cut in 4 pieces.

In a medium pot, put 3 cups of water and bring to a boil.

Add the plantains to the boiling water and boil until they are soft and easily broken with a fork.

Add the salt and boil for 5 more minutes.

Take the plantains out of the water and put them in a small container.

Mash the plantains until they look like puree.

Add the butter and milk and mix well.

Use some of the water to soften more.

Serve as soon as possible. You may serve it with fried eggs, sausage, cheese etc.

## **Rice and Beans**

6 servings

2 cups of rice  
1 tbsp of oil  
1/2 tsp of salt  
1 can of red beans  
2 or 3 chunks of cooking ham or salted pork  
2 tbsp of adobo \* (see recipe below)  
8 oz. tomato sauce

Wash the rice until water runs clean. Place in medium size pan and add water until about 1/2 an inch above the rice. Add oil and salt. Over medium-high heat, bring it to a boil uncovered. When the rice is almost dry, reduce the heat to low and cover for 5 minutes. Uncover and let dry. Then turn off.

In medium sauce pan, heat the pieces of ham over medium heat. When the ham is turning brown, add the beans with the water from the can. Sprinkle the adobo and add tomato sauce. Cover and let cook over medium fire for 5 minutes. Reduce the heat and add salt. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes. Serve over the rice.

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**\*Adobo**

1 tablespoon garlic powder  
1 tablespoon onion powder  
1 tablespoon dried oregano  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/2 teaspoon pepper

Combine all ingredients and store. Use as directed in recipes.

## **Sancocho (Stew)**

8 servings

1 pound round beef in chunks  
1/2 pound pork meat with bone

### Vegetables

2 tomatoes  
1/2 pound of sweet potatoes  
1/2 pound of summer squash  
1/2 pound of potatoes  
1/2 pound of ñame (pronounced nyah meh) – a type of yam)  
1/2 pound of green plantains  
2 ears of corn

1 onion  
1 sweet pepper  
1 green pepper  
1 tbsp of salt  
3 leaves of coriander

4 cloves of garlic  
1/2 cup tomato sauce

Cut the meat in chunks and wash. In large pan, boil 3 liters of water and add the salt.  
Cut all vegetables and wash. Add all the vegetables and meat in the pot.  
Bring to a boil uncovered. Once boiling, reduce the heat to medium and cover.  
Cook for 10 minutes, then add the onion, sweet pepper, green pepper and coriander.  
Cook for 1 hour covered.  
Add the garlic and tomato sauce and add salt to taste.  
Cook for 45 minutes at medium low heat covered.

For variation, add chicken pieces or goat meat with bone.



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