

Name of interviewee: Miguel Bezos
Date of interview: October 20th, 2016
Name of interviewer: Steve Velasquez, Bill Yeingst
Length of Interview: 73 minutes

SV: Today is October 20th, 2016, I'm Steve Velasquez I'm here with Bill Yeingst and Rachel Wood and we are here interviewing Michael Bezos here at the National Museum of American History. Good morning Bezos.

MB: Good morning. Good morning

SV: How are you?

MB: It's a pleasure being here.

SV: Thank you, thank you. So I just we can start, could you please state your name?

MB: My name is Miguel Bezos; I go SV Mike here [inaudible] with my family.

SV: Mr. Bezos, can you tell us when and where you were born?

MB: I was born in Santiago de Cuba in Cuba, September 29th of 1945.

SV: And can you tell us the name of your parents, please?

MB: My dad's name is Salvador Bezos. My mother's name is Cesarea Perez. So, my full name, in the European tradition, is Miguel Angel Bezos Perez Ares Cortes, and there's more but we will stop there.

SV: And you have brothers and sisters, correct?

MB: I had but they passed away, but yes I had an older brother, Salvador Bezos and my older sister Elisa Bezos.

SV: And they were much older than you?

MB: They were much older. My brother was 11 year older and my sister about 10 years older.

SV: About 10 years older. Where did you grow up?

MB: I grew up in Santiago, in Santiago de Cuba in a family of three kids and been that I was the youngest SV far, I considered my self looking back that I was fairly spoiled. With having an older sister and older brother, I could get away with things that they never they get away with. According to them. But I had my great

memories of my childhood; we lived in Santiago, which is the second largest city size wise in Cuba and the rest of the family, the Bezos family, lived in the Providence of Camagüey, separate in more in the rural area. So, our house was always full of cousins that would come into town to go the school, attend universities and what have you. So, at any point in time, they will be a couple of three cousins living with us, and that's what I remember, it was a very busy household but full of life.

SV: Yeah, yeah. And so, where did you go to school in Santiago?

MB: I went to school at the *Colegio de Dolores*, is a Jesuit nun school in Santiago. I was there, oh my goodness, I don't know. From kindergarten or first grade until they closed the school as a result of the Castro Revolution in the early 60's. I think I didn't finish my 3rd year of high school. I did get to finish it. So that was I went to school, It was... It turns out that is the same high school that the two Castro brothers attended, many years earlier. I don't know whether that's relevant or not. But that's a fact.

SV: Wow. That must be exciting to talk about. So, you were... and so what did your parents do?

MB: So, my dad is a businessman. He didn't have a formal education. He doesn't get.... If I recall the conversations where he probably went to 8th grade or something like that, but he had a tremendous business mind. And he own a lumber mill where he would purchase a timber from other places and cut it in different sizes and then sell it to from construction, different shapes and sizes. That's what his business was. My mother, mostly a housewife, but she also had, I remember, that she had her own business store, where they sold baSV's clothes, material, this sort of thing. I still have memories of going to the store and being in the way mostly, but I loved it. I also loved to go to the lumber mill but at that didn't happen until I was older because of the a little bit more dangerous.

SV: The safety, the safety yeah. [CROSSTALK] So, do you remember Castro coming to power and what was like for you? You remember anything?

MB: Oh yes. I have vivid memories. Actually, I remember even before that happening, for many, many years it had been a lot of arrest in Cuba SV activists to try to get rid of Batista. So, in my hometown in particular in *Oriente* which in Santiago was kind of the [inaudible] of this content for many year this been going on. Long before Fidel, who was from Havana, came into the picture, there were a lot of shootings and kind of actual violence against the local government, and of course it was a retaliation back and forth and then I think it was, if I get the dates, the dates correctly, 26th of July of 1956, Fidel and a group, I don't remember how many, they did come into Santiago and they attacked a [inaudible] in Santiago. It failed and he was incarcerated at that time, and the reason I remember that I believe because it's [inaudible] was only maybe half a mile from our house. There

was a lot of shooting going on and then after that, there were a lot of... the government forces security in city and what have you. And so I remember that vividly. And then, a few years later, couple of years later, Castro was released from jail. He went to Mexico from where he form a group of combatants that came back to Cuba and that started the Revolution that everybody now remembers. But SV then the government had pretty much secured all... SV... actually, they have been killed all the other leaders that were anti-Batista, so Castro was the only one left and then was the memory that pretty much everybody has of him, but then at lasted until January 1st of 1959 when Batista left Cuba and obviously the Guerrillas were able to come into the cities and full the new government. Actually we all expected to have elections coming up at least is what we were told, that was going to happen and it was until within a year that things changed and SV then it was too late, you know, pretty much everything was taken care of. So, anyway we ended up of that. I have very vivid memories of those periods.

SV: What did your parents think? Were they supporters of Castro I would imagine... I mean I don't know. Do you remember?

MB: They were. They were, they were very, very few people in Cuba there were not supporter of Castro. You know, they were doubts about how serious they were about, you know, not being communist associated or not, but for the most part, everybody was supporting them. I say everybody, obviously not everybody. But the large majority because they want to get rid of Batista as being, you know, someone that taking over power, not through legal means, elections, or what have you. So yes, and that sense, the majority of the people wanted him out and I remember... because of the business my dad was in, the lumber business, which means that you were out if you have friends that go out into the force and harvest the trees and have this friends of his will come in contact with the rebels in the mountains. So, they would come in and SV then I was in the office, I don't listening of this stories, I always found them fascinating of what they said of they met with him and say hello. Well my dad was... he knew what was going on but obviously he was not a participant in that aspect. But it we all, I say we. I was 16, I'm sorry I was about 14 at the time but still I remember that the day that they were able to, the rebels were able to come into town. It was a very festive time. Everybody wanted that to happen.

SV: So, I'm curious that how do they change? How did that change from initial support to then sending children away? How did that work with your family?

MB: It was gradual, but it was within a short period time. The first thing that happened was, as I mentioned, the idea of elections and kept been put off until the decision was made, "This is not going to happen. Or we are going to be Marxist Leninist government." Then, the next step was the Nationalization of foreign industries, and this is one of those stories that we hear all the time like you know, a lot of people said: "it's okay. Nationalizing foreign industry that's okay." They're

taking advantage of us. Then the next step was nationalizing some of the Cuban industries, said: "That's okay. They're Cuban industries," and so on. But anything [inaudible] my dad's little business was taking over, I was in the office with him when the army with someone from [inaudible] office came in with the papers and that will taking over your business and my dad said the few choice words and he grabbed SV the arm and we walked out and that was the end of that. But then, it kept going to the point, if you owned a barbershop, that was taking over, everything. There was no private property. So, it was kind of those things that you say: "That's happening to other people. That's happening to other people." And SV the time happens to you, you look around and everybody's gone. So, that was my dad's business, being taken over and many other industries but what also happened at that same period time is old schools were been shout down while curriculum was being changed from the curriculum that going on for many years in Cuba to a socialist, communist story. So, I, at that time, was not doing anything, except going to my dad's business and helping out until was nationalized, and that was kind of the genesis of the idea of idea of getting me out of Cuba. I didn't have anything to do, just going to school and I really didn't want to a school to have a different bend to it. And the other options, if I were to study in Cuba, was to get a job or join the military or been drafted SV the military. They send out to Russia or whatever happened to be. So, the idea heading me out became more of a need for my parents, and perhaps I'm moving forward but that's when they became aware of these visas that were being given almost freely. Everybody was in those days mimeographing and passing them out and with that in hand, I applied for a passport and the process for... between the time that I applied for the passport that gave a signal to the government that I wanted out, until I actually left, was given the permission to leave, was about a year time. In during that period of time, I had to ... my parents had to get a certificate indicating that they had paid all their bills, telephone bills, electric bills, public bills, you know, that they were up today. They also had to get a copy of my penal records which at 16, you know, I haven't been to jail, but there was just things that you had to do in order to get it. At one time, a group of officials came in to our house and surveyed my room so that when I did leave, everything that they surveyed that was there, had to be there when I left. So, I couldn't get rid of anything in the mean time that was kind of that thing. It was just kind of you know, in a way they were letting kids out but at the same time they also just a free I want to leave and they made it hard for you and the family to take that... made that decision.

SV: Do you remember having any conversations with your parents about this decision and about where you'll be going?

MB: It was mostly one sided... "You're going." Yeah, you know, I had no desire of leaving Cuba, never thought of coming to the United States. It was... it was not something in our radar screen, but they really wanted me out of there because, obviously, what will happen to me in the future was very questionable and my options staying in Cuba were not that good. It was uncertain what will happen to

me when I arrived to the United States. It was you know, anybody's question as to what could happen, but at the same time they did not anticipate this being a forever decision. This was a very temporary decision. It was just going to be for a few months or a few years and then you'll be able to come back and we'll be reunited and of course it didn't happened but so, with that mentality, they were able to... I'll add something else. My mom and dad, they also realized, you know, my older brother, he was a civil engineer, and there were not allowing civil engineers or professionals to leave. My sister was a teacher, so she couldn't leave. And the way they rationalized it is so, you know, they can leave, you can and if you stay and you end up going to the draft or you're sent to Russia or whatever they send you then all of us have to stay because you know you are now part of this, but if you leave then we can figure out whether we can leave or not or you come back so, it was... it was a little bit of logic to it in terms of allowing them to have a little more flexibility in what options their family would have if I were able to be out of the country.

SV: Did you, at sixteen, did you know anything about United States?

MB: Oh yes, yes. I mean obviously school, read a lot about it. I was taking English in school and my brother married and he think... no, it was my sister, my sister with a group of her school friends for some school activity they went to Miami. You know, I mean it was there [CROSSTALK] It was a some sort of a trip, so that was kind of the extent of my knowledge of, you know, the United States. Other than, we had American cars and I knew the brands, I knew the years, I knew the shape. I could tell you a 56' Buick coming and going, you know, I mean it was so to that extent we had American products, most of them manufactured Cuba, called Colgate, Palmolive, of course we called them Colgate. But still it was so to that extent I was about you know my knowledge about.

SV: Did you know anybody in the United States or there's any other family? I mean were they actually just sending you without any knowledge of what it would be here?

MB: Well, they knew, they knew from other families they have to send their kids out either school friends of our of mine or just friends of the family. That with this visa on the... which I was leaving that there will be, there will be someone on the other side that will take care of us quote, unquote. We didn't know what that meant, but that it wasn't like we were going to be out in the streets trying to figure things out. But there was somebody out of there that would feed us and give us shelter. So that was the extent of the information that we had and my dad... my dad and my uncle, his brother, had talked about this, and actually my aunt, their younger sister. They had decided that three cousins would leave of the same time or at least we applied to go in the same time myself, my cousin Angel, and my cousin Rafael. At the last minute, just towards the end of the process, my aunt decided that she wasn't ready to let Rafael out, but so I got the permission to leave Cuba on the 21st of July of 1962. Those are dates that all of us have in our minds;

we'll never forget those dates. My cousin left the very next day, my cousin Angel and Rafael never left, he still in Cuba and we correspond with him, you know, it's a sad, sad story, but we do the best we can with him and try to help him out, but he did remain.

SV: So, you remember that they were leaving? What was going through your mind? What were your parents telling you? Can you tell us a little about that day that you were gone?

MB: I'll tell you what I remember. And I have no idea whether there is or you know true facts or whether they are just kind of over the years you know, settled to be, but I do remember getting a telegram. We lived in Santiago which is on the southern east coast of Cuba, and we got a telegram that says "Your departure time is on the 21st of July." And I think we had just a day and a half to get from Santiago to Havana where the departure was. So we... my dad drove the family. It was just my mom and I, to Havana, and then at the designated time, they drove me to the airport. And I remember that they could not stay at the airport; they were not allowed to stay there. They just dropped me off. And they had to drive off and park someplace else. They were not allowed to walk with me into the airport and so I did. I walked into the airport with SV little suitcase, which in those days, and this changed almost daily or weekly what you could take out or not take out and so on. But I remember that I could take out three of everything: three shirts, three pants, except one pair of shoes. I don't know who did the math on any of this but that was that was what I was able to take out. And you go through an interview process as you go through different levels of checking in. And I had with me a little religious stamps that are very, very common in the Hispanic communities, communion, first communion or baptism or actual deaths or whatever. And I had a number of those that my mother had assembled and she had written the telephone numbers of people that she knew that were in the States. Just in case I needed help. But they were not in a situation to take care of me, so it wasn't expected that there would assume that responsibility. It was just, you know, if I get a chance or if I got into trouble whatever there was a phone number and they let me have those. They didn't take those away from me and... but... I boarded the airplane. It was a Pan Am Flight. Probably a D.C. six, five or something like that but it was a short flight and landed in Miami, and I remember as we were walking into the airport building itself from the tarmac, there was a gentleman there that was asking: "You're on a company," or you know, "which visa did you come out with," and you know, I just told them, you know, "I came out with this." These are from Father [inaudible] okay, would you stand over here and older kids or families, because there were families coming out different way. So, we were the group of those kids that came out SV ourselves were put in vans and taken to the different camps location. The girls had a separate camp from boys and I don't know the rationale how they divided, who went to which camp. I ended up calling... going to camp Maticumbe, which I believe at that time was one of the largest camps in terms of size and I'll tell you a side story. If I may just before I forget it, in Maticumbe, in my mind was in the middle of the Everglades,

snakes, and mosquitoes as big as helicopters and this is the image that I had. Many, many years later, because of my work, I was transferred to Miami to work there and SV then we had... My family consisted of two boys and a girl and my wife. So I had been telling them the story about Maticumbe and how miserable it was, so I said: "Let's get in the car. We're going to drive to camp Maticumbe." So we get in the car one day, one weekend. We drive out to camp Maticumbe and my whole story just collapsed, because it turned out to be about half an hour from just half a mile from a big shopping center. You know, there wasn't a single mosquito to do it. So, my kids looked at me and said: "Really?" You know it. My credibility just totally collapsed, anyway. But get this mind photographs of what it... what it was and sometimes it grows would be on balance.[CROSSTALK]Yeah, right.

SV: So, what was like food like in Maticumbe? I mean, how many kids were there? What was the daily routine?

MB: So, there were about 400 kids and I think that I get that number because I read it someplace else, after. I had no idea how many kids were there.

SV: But you mind if it was a...

MB: It was a big camp. There were many, many and many numbers of different, different size army tents. There were big army tents and inside the different ones they had names or numbers. I don't know how you can identify them. But inside the tents there were three tier bunks and the last ones were at the very top. So, this seniority help and the older of the kids had been there longer. Now, this was one 1962 and this camp had been open since my guess is I think 1960 or something. So they'd been getting kids since then and what the purpose of those camps were to hold these kids, feed them, shelter them, until either their relatives or parents will come out of Cuba that they could be reunited and in the meantime, they'd try to find a place for them to go to with either families, foster homes, orphanages, you name it. Different places all over the U.S. that would take in those [inaudible] refugees, you know. This was during the Cold War and we were refugees from a Cold War action, so Cubans get preferential treatment in terms of the handling of our situation, relative to a number of all the refugees and I said perhaps, the Vietnamese, when the Vietnam War ended were probably in that same support because of the U.S. involvement in what was on. So finding places for all or all of those kids until our parents or relatives would come out, and then they reunite that was the mission of this group of churches and even though it was led SV the Catholic Welfare. It was all the churches were part of it, including Jewish community; there was a large Jewish community in Cuba and several kids that came out SV themselves or place or the Jewish community when they came out. So the life of the camp was very interesting. I recall, there was a huge mess hall, where we all had breakfast lunch, in there. And then, I remember, there was a pine tree which... there were hundreds of pine trees but one designated that said: "Mathematics" or another one that had a sign that said: "Geography" and

another one of the said: "English." So, you go to these different areas and pretend you're going to school and SV then my cousin Angel had come out, so there was two of us and we get through the loudspeaker, which it worked all the time because they were there were calling different kids, different names to come to the office, so you knew that when you went to the office something was going to happen. And most likely the friend so you left behind wouldn't see you again because that meant that you were going someplace else or so they call our name and we go to the office and I remember when we walked in and there was two suitcases. I remember vividly they were the ones I had the you know plaid material with zip up on the top. I'm sure that, you know, probably you have some of them, out there somewhere. There were very... everybody used them in those days. And on top of each of those two suitcases was a heavy coat and my cousin and I looked at each other and said we were in trouble, and they flew us to Philadelphia and there, we were picked up and then driven to Wilmington, Delaware, where we were going to stay for however long we needed to be attending a high school, there in Wilmington. And there were 18 of us, Cuban kids age 15 to 16. I mean, 15 to 17 attending high school and we were in a house. That was at that time... there was a priest in charge of us and it was, it was a tremendous experience, you know, I'm sure that you hear horror stories about what terrible experience some of the Peter Pan kids, Peter Pan name didn't come to exist until much later really this was not anything that we talked about of those days, but kids came out of my company, a lot of them, the young ones not such a wonderful experience because they... First of all, there was a lot more trauma of they're being SV themselves. We were, we were sixteen. So with you know it was a totally different mentality, and we were... There were eighteen of us together, which meant a lot. We were the same situation, and even though we were in Wilmington, Delaware, and we had no idea where women [inaudible] was relative to anything else when we first arrived, but at least we have each other. And we became very close. To this day, a lot of us still talk to each other and hang around, and we actually visit with the priest that was in charge of us this tremendous experience. So it was... In the middle of all this chaos, it was a wonderful experience.

SV: So, what was the name of the priest?

MB: Father James P. Burn.

SV: Burn.

MB: Old Blade of St. Francis de Sales. He is in retirement home right now; his health is not doing well. We went to visit him a lot and earlier this year, maybe May or so, but he is doing quite well.

SV: So before I whether to ask, how long were your monthly [inaudible] for you until Delaware?

MB: Weeks. Probably we arrived in July, we were they are the beginning of the fall course. So, you know [inaudible] sometime in August.

SV: Of August.

Mb: Yeah. So we were there weeks. Well when we were in Maticumbe, I remember also that on a weekly basis they would put us in buses and take us downtown to drop us off for the day and walk around with... they gave us, I don't know, a dollar or something and I still remember walking into a [inaudible] and sitting at the counter with a couple others kids getting something to eat, and we found out that the English that we have been taken in school was totally useless. We couldn't understand what they were saying because, I mean, I could understand my English teacher in Cuba, I got used to his accent but, you know, people that were serving they had a totally different accent. There were using all kinds of different things but fortunately, they had pictures, if you recall, so we kind of pointed what he was that we wanted, and it was just one of those things, it was a disappointment for us that all of this [inaudible] we thought that we knew who spoke English, and we found out we really didn't.

SV: Did father Burns speak Spanish?

MB: Yes, yes. He spoke Spanish and to this day he still speak Spanish. Father Burn, the orders of the Old Blades are missionaries, and Father Burn unbeknown to us at that time. He had just completed a seminary and he was to go to some mission in Congo or Latin America, I forgot now where. I asked him and he tells me, and I keep forgetting. So he gets a call from the bishop says: "No you're not, you're going to take care of this 18 kids." And so we joked briefly probably he came on the Lucy and the mission would have been a lot easier. Of course he says no but it's and to us, he was you know, being fifteen, sixteen, seventeen having the twenty some year old that was, is a huge difference. You know when you're in the situation and years later when we met as adults, we went out to dinner and the waiter comes over you're wanting cocktails and we say: "Yeah, I'll have this." and then Father says: "I have a gin and tonic." "So what? Do you drink?" When he was there it was just so I'm natural for us to just see him just like any adult instead of this authoritarian figure, quite a change.

SV: So tell me what was life like, you said 18?

MB: 18 of us.

SV: You're a senior at that point?

MB: We were extremely fortunate. My cousin and I, we were extremely fortunate in that, we must have mentioned somewhere, somehow to somebody that we had been in school in Cuba for about 12 years. So, they immediately, said you're a senior. Some other kids that were our same age, they just went back to being

freshman, which was very disappointing for them because obviously they were much older they had to start all over again. So for them it was it was much harder. You know, everything but starting again very disappointing for them. For us, it was very fortunate. So, my cousin and I were there just for a year. We graduated from high school; we were 17 at that time and once you are 17 or graduate, you're out of the other program. We were still SV ourselves, but then we came here to Washington, D.C. as a matter of fact, where a cousin of my cousin and her husband lived here; they were also very young. Not much older than us. But the four of us were sharing a one-bedroom apartment to reach out of here on nineteenth or something, where we went to work. We thought that with a high school degree, that's all we needed. We didn't have a mom and dad tell us what to do, and so, you know, we, you know, yeah, we... you know, you can buy a car, you can do this and there are. Some of the jobs that we ended up having were not what we expected. So ultimately we decided let's go to school. Let's go back to college.

SV: Before we jump into college. I need to ask you one question about life in high school. You had mentioned one of your friends was a football player. I just want to get a sense, if you remember, what was like for you, being Cuban, in Delaware in high school. Is there a difficult transition? Being with a 19 other Cuban must've been easy. But understand American culture, how...

MB: That part of it was very difficult; trying to fit in was difficult. The rules of the house was that we had to speak English. Of course, that only lasted as long as father Burns was in the room. The minute he left... but we... but there were rules. There were study hours. There were, so he was of the free for all. So we learned very early on that there were rules to follow, which made it a lot like being back home in that sense. I remember that we had Saturday Night Live... Saturday night dances in high school and we would go to the dance. And all of us would go together. So...so if you can imagine, a woman in Delaware, you have a group of eighteen anything walking together, you're asking for trouble. I mean, it whether you're asking for trouble or not people assume that you're asking for trouble. So, there were a lot of instances will people will come up and said: "You want to fight?" "No, we didn't want to fight why do we want to fight? We just were going to the movies." So it was it was one of those things of so it took us a while to kind of figure out that maybe we need to break up in smaller group. So we're just calling too much attention to ourselves. And it, you know, it was kind of a learn as soon as you go. It was good times because there was not a lot of... I'll tell you another story. But there wasn't a lot of real anti-refugee, anti-immigration feelings and obviously you always encounter some negative feelings, but for the most part, there was no, because it was in those days back when you know, there was a you know huge group of people coming in and it was just a handful of kids, but and going..., going to this dance on Saturday nights, we would walk into the gym of the school or we would always go to the back left side of the gym. That's where, I don't know why, but that was kind of our hang out station. And the D.J. was playing music of the day, and we had every once in

a while and see would come on the ladies choice. So, that's when the girls would pick one of the boys to dance with. So because we were a novelty, the girls would come over and wanted to dance with us, but that created all sorts of problems because those girls had boyfriends and pretty soon, you know, somebody would come up and tell us: "Oh, we're waiting for you outside when you leave," and we said: "Why?" So we said, you know, "Don't leave me. You got to go outside with me." "So what did you do?" "No. nothing. You know, this guy just came up and said that he'll meet me outside." So, I don't know how many times this happened, but we would be outside waiting and waiting. Nothing happened. I mean, for the whole year we were there. Every, every Saturday night there was some challenge issued but never anything materialized. Something else that I remember, maybe I'm talking too long, but within the school itself, we had to wear a tie, all the boys. This was a boys' school. We had to wear a tie, was very formal. There were not just [inaudible] but there were just the stuff was just [inaudible] our teachers the Old Blades. We got along with pretty much with everybody in the school. When we went back for our [inaudible] high school reunion and to Wilmington, Delaware, a group of us; those of us who graduated in that year '63. We were having dinner with the rest of the class of '63, and three or four guys walked up to us, of course we were seated together again for sure we were not mingling, but fortunately because this friend that he played football. He was the only Cuban in the football team as you can imagine. But he did make a lot of friends from the American kids. So he was our insider. He kind of taught us a lot about the American way of life. So, we were sitting together and some of his friends come over and one of them says: "I want to..." he gets our attention and he said: "I want to apologize for any misbehavior that we had backing those days about you guys being in the school, being refugees or whatever. I really want to apologize for that." And we looked at each other like I didn't I don't remember ever having had any kind of the negative impact, but to this particular individual, obviously they talked among themselves or they said something negative about us, but it was so big of him and the rest of this group to come to us and say that, you know, it was very meaningful.

SV: 30 years later.

MB: 30 years later.

SV: Wow. So did he know anything about football, your friend?

MB: I think it was just his size. You know, you know I think they told him: "You stand here." He was a tackle. "You stand here and don't let that boy go anywhere."

SV: So that... You graduated from high school and then you went to work for... in Delaware?

MB: No. We came here to Washington, D.C.

SV: Oh, to Washington.

MB: We came to Washington, D.C. and we changed jobs several times. Trying to find better positions. So I finally ended up in what was called back then the Proof Department of the bank. I think is a union trust, but doesn't exist anymore I think, [inaudible] That was my day job, and then my cousin was working. I don't recall what he was doing. But we both had a part time job at McDonald's, close to the University of Maryland on Highest Ville. And SV then, we had moved to Maryland from being in town here. And so that was... the bank was a soft job. It was, you know, too bad and we were gathering. we were gathering money. We were putting money together to be able to go to school, but working at McDonald's was another great teaching experience, for me, in terms of work ethics to franchise owners back in those days they were both Marines and boy! You know, this is this is your duty. This is what you do and don't deviate. So I... it was for both of us for my cousin I used to have that tremendous experience. It ship... shaped the way, you know, we behave and expect others to behave because of that early training. All they wanted us to do is to fry hamburgers and cooked French fries, but there was a lot more that benefited us from those of the way that they interacted with all their employees and so.

SV: And so you're about 17, 18?

MB: I was 17. No 18 then SV the time we decided to go back to college. And my cousin stayed here and SV then, he had an aunt and his mom and dad and sister were planning to come out. My parents were still not able to come out, and I don't know how it happened, but I looked for colleges and universities that gave scholarships to Cuban refugees, and I ended up being accepted to the University of Albuquerque, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. So I got on the train in Union Station here one day and went to Chicago and changed to the Al Capitan and 24 or 48 hours later whatever was in Albuquerque, New Mexico and boy that looked totally different.

SV: Yes, oh yes.

MB: From anything that I have ever known before I was an awakening. And I course, I, you know, the reason that I ended up going to Albuquerque, New Mexico was because that's were met my wife. So that was the... that's the reason I went there, [inaudible].

SV: But your cousin was already here and his family was coming out.

MB: Right.

SV: And so, this is in 1964?

Mb: 1964, right.

SV: 1964, 1965. I'm guess you're ended up in Albuquerque, August of '64.

MB: Right.

SV: And you already knew you were going to school for engineering? Or just for scholarship? [CROSSTALK]

MB: I really did want to go into engineering. Mechanical engineering that's what I wanted to go. So, I was taking a lot of math courses and physics. A few engineering courses and then after being there for 4 years, we had... SV then my wife and I had married and we had Jeff. Jeff was with us. So it was the three of us and I found out that I could, if I wanted to finish as a... my mechanical engineering that I had to spend another year. I've always been... I was missing about eight credits of engineering, but I could graduate as a mathematician. I have enough class credits. So, I said, "I'm in mathematician" because I needed to get a job with a family and so I graduated in working part time and going to school so, it took me four and a half years to graduate. So I graduated at the end of the fall semester of '68 and went to my interview through the University of New Mexico with Exxon. It was still [inaudible] at that time they offer me a job in Houston, Texas. So, we packed up and went to Houston, Texas and that started another facet of my life. Our life because then SV then there was the three of us, and soon we had two other kids to complete the family so, there were five of us and we began our nomadic, a nomadic life. We moved from place to place with Exxon.

SV: So we're going to wrap up shortly but I can I want to ask you a little bit about when you're in college, or during school [inaudible] family? Were you... did you share your children... I mean, obviously you talked about your experience in Maticumbe in the camp but did you share other any other Cuban traditions or holidays with them? I guess what I'm asking; did you keep any of the Cuban identity with you? Where you involved in Cuban politics at all, a Cuban American politics?

MB: Yes, yes, yes. Yeah you know, obviously I'm a Cuban first and that's just you know but I always feel that way with a very proud American at the same time. And I did marry an American and I did, in those early days, it was much much more important that I learned to speak English and speak it well and write for the job. I mean, it was for my family to speak Spanish. So, at home, the language was English, and it wasn't until later when kids were growing up that was when you know we need to bring Spanish back into [inaudible] and we did it but you know it's still, when... whenever we got together with my family, my Cuban family, it was all Spanish. So Jackie, my wife, who speaks perfect Spanish, she always said... she always... she learned Spanish because she wanted to know what my mother was saying about her, because she was always you know my

mom would point out her and so on. She was like what she saying ? No more of it. So she learned Spanish mostly she says to find out what my mother said about her, and then she found out of the my mother loved her and everything was goes, oh you know, I was... but she's a good great Spanish speaker. And our kids in those early days, they communicated with my parents very well. So, of course that you know, if you don't use it, you lose it. So, but they say it comes back to them whenever they are in an environment where Spanish's spoken. They get a lot of it back but it was again, it wasn't so much or not that we were losing... that I was losing my Cuban identity because that never happened, and you know, my wife makes some amazing Cuban food, and my kids love Cuban food. You know, celebrating, getting your family together for Christmas is big for us so that was the same. So, yeah not you know we... I have never lost that Cuban identity and I never will, but I've the same time I learned what Thanksgiving was all about and your Holidays that came eating turkey. I had no idea that you can eat turkey. But you know...

SV: I'm just very quick. When did your parents come?

MB: So my parents were able to leave... Let me see if I get this right. They were able to come out in '65-'66, but they couldn't come to this country. They ended up going to Honduras. In Honduras, one of my older cousins that had left earlier, had going to Honduras and set up a lumber business. And my dad with his background ended up there for a couple three years until finally they decided that they wanted to be here in the States with... SV then my sister and her family and my brother and his family had been able to come out of Cuba. My brother was in Puerto Rico. My sister was here in Virginia. So my mom and dad decided to come out. I mean, come to the States. SV that time I was married with a family and we lived in Houston. And they stayed with us for at least six or eight months, but he was... They were very isolated even though there was a lot of Spanish speaking in Houston. It was not that we were out of the suburbs. You know, it was... they were very isolated. So, they decided to come here into Arlington, where there were a lot of more family, my sister and her husband's families were here. So, they decided that this was a better fit pretty much.

SV: Well, kind of wrapping up and talk a little bit about your Cuban and American identity, is there something you wish would have helped you become more Cuban or more American? You know as you're transitioning and coming out of high school to getting married and getting the family. Is there something that would have been easier for you either way?

MB: Oh I'm sure that there probably was, but in looking back, you know, my good fortune and the help that I got from what... like, but we came here. But first of all, you know, having a group of total strangers take us into in Florida and keep us there until they found some place for us to be. An amazing place, an amazing experience. Finishing high school. Giving me an education. Coming here to Washington, D.C. and going to some employment office, God knows where it is;

I have no idea, but they were very helpful in suggesting where to go and how to approach it. All that help you know, a little bit here, a little bit there, was the support that is behind every one of our move from one society to another. It's kind of in the background, and we don't talk too much about it, but it is it's what makes it possible, is what enables it to happen. So, I'm sure that you know somebody possibly could have done more but I can't cannot imagine that being the case. I'm extremely grateful for what every one of them ends. It was their job perhaps they saw it that way, but the impact that they had on so many people's lives or just cannot put a price on. It's amazing.

SV: One final question on what would you... what advice or let me see how I can ask this. What would you want the public to know about whether be the Pedro Pan experience or being refugee exile or migration experience? What would you want the public to know? What would you advice or what is something that really, really important to you that you're want to tell the public?

MB: Oh well, I think, probably what I'll tell now is probably tainted SV a lot of what's happening in today's world versus 50 some years ago perhaps, but I think that the... for the immigrant to know that things are going to be different and that you have to adapt to those things that are different and don't expect people to bend the rules just because this is not the way it was done back in your country. Go with that, you know. Keep that in mind. That doesn't mean that, you know, you're going to roll over and, you know, give in. You don't have to lose your identity. You'd better not lose your identity. But be aware that things are not going to be like back home and you have to adapt. On the other side, for those that are receiving or seeing different looking people, the best thing that you can do is to help them assimilate. This is the one strength that this country has versus many others that refugees are refugees for a very short period of time and then they become citizens and they become parents and they'll have children and they, you know, their background is in pictures and documents but not, you know, they've moved on. So... and accept that there are going to be some differences and they were possible allow for them to take place because you are important as long as neither side says this is the way it is and there is no other alternative. There is always that need to compromise on both sides. So and that's I don't know you know whether that is a helpful answer to what you're saying. But to me, it's an understanding from both sides that you've got to... you've got to reach that happy medium.

SV: Okay well, before I forgot actually I wanted to ask you one last question about ... you showed us a picture of the jacket. Just for the record, could you just tell us a little bit about the jacket?

MB: Sure.

SV: And then was like [inaudible] you know become something that we can talk about in the future.

MB: So this jacket is the only... it's the last item. The only item that I have left from what I brought from Cuba as a young boy. It is a jacket that my mother and my sister put together as I was getting ready to leave Cuba to go to the frigid north. You know, it was the minute you left Cuba, you were out. [CROSSTALK] And it... because of the lack of materials already back in those days, it was '61-'62, the jacket is... You know, one thing that I should've mentioned is a my mother was a wonderful seamstress. She made a lot of her own dresses, shirts. So, she was always doing wonderful things and you can see the details that this jacket has, and she did all of this. But the material is pieces of cleaning rags that she was able to put together. It was the only kind of material that was available. And then my sister knitted the cuffs and the color on this jacket, and it's hanging. I was getting away to throw it away and my wife says you know you cannot throw it away. So, she put it into a box with a glass front and it is hanging in our place in Colorado and she wrote a plaque. She made a plaque that has a quote from I'll get this right John [??] forgot which... [Inaudible].

SV: Gospel of St. John.

MB: Gospel of St. John, I forgot the chapter and verse. But it is something like "Love casted out old fear". So, that... the implying or letting me know, that even though I was going into the all known that I had this jacket from my mom and my sister with me. So, that my wife was very clever in selecting that quote.

SV: Do you remember them making that... remember them?

MB: I remember them working on it. But I remember them giving it to me. You know and so here you make sure you take this, you're going to need it. But it was, it was in my... obviously this was one of the items that I was allowed to take out. I wasn't wearing it when I left. It was in my suitcase. But I did wear it in Wilmington, Delaware. That's for sure! I found out very quickly that there were no palm trees in Wilmington, Delaware.

BY: It's just two quick questions. What does it mean to be American?

MB: For me? It has many different kinds of been [inaudible]. I think that one of the major things about that America has to offer is the plurality that it houses within its was in within its borders and the and the sense of a... strong sense of rule of law. That you know, America has a lot of people that are thieves sand murders and embezzlers. The big, big difference is that when they are caught, they are dealt with. There is a system that takes them to jail and if they are proven guilty, they're, I mean, I, sorry, they're taken to court and if they're guilty they go to jail. There is a consequence. Not very many places around this world offer that accountability. So, that's just one aspect of it that I think it's for me and for my family is huge. It's that you what this country offers certainly from the refugee standpoint there are very, very few other countries that could even come close. I

don't think. Many other even do but there are few they could. But what this country offers, it's amazing. At the same time you do have a responsibility. Its not just kind of you come here and we're going to going to feed you, shelter you and we're going to take care of you. No, there are some... you're going to have to be on your own, you have to pay taxes, you're going to have to follow those rules and you have to abide SV them and I think that the expectation that again this is going back to what I mentioned earlier that those of us that come to this country that need to realize that we are now in a different environment than we were back home. So, we need to know what those rules and those new sets are and abide SV them and be aware that applies to everybody. It's not some versus others. That to me is, you know, is one small slice of being an American, but that is what sets us apart from a large part of this world.

BY: One final question. What do you most proud of?

MB: Oh my goodness. Ask me when, you know almost everyday. I'm proud of something. I am without hesitation though I have to tell you that I'm most proud of all my family. It is truly amazing. The three kids that we have. They married amazing people. Like my wife Jackie says, she would have been very proud to have given birth to them. The six of them, the three kids and their spouses get along beautifully. They go vacations SV themselves and we have been given the gift of having 11 grandkids from those three couples and everyone of those grandkids it's just an amazing individual. So, I look back on my family and I'm extremely proud of my history, my heritage. Extremely proud of what they accomplished. I didn't mention, but you know, both my parents were born in Spain from separate families in many different parts of Spain and the two families migrated to Cuba in early 1900's. So they have their own history of migrating to a new country. And I have been fortunate enough to meet some of my Spanish families, and they are... If you find in Bezos, we are all probably related. Somehow they're not of the very many non-related Bezos. So, I you know, in a short in my family. It's really what and at the end of the day, you know, that's ... they're the ones are going to remember me, good or bad or you know but everybody else, would say: "Yeah, maybe I do remember him," but you know but they will. They're the important ones.

SV: Oh well thank you very much for this. It's been wonderful speaking with you.

MB: I hope it was what you expected.

SV: So I hope you enjoyed it.

MB: I did. I did. I enjoyed it very much.

SV: Well thank you very much. Thank you for your time.

MB: All right, we're offline. Awesome.

[END OF AUDIO]