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ORAL HISTORY LAB (OHL)

University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez

Oral History Interview with S.A. May 2, 2024

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with a narrator who chose to be referred to by their initials (S.A.). The interview was conducted by Lorenzo on May 2nd, 2024. This interview is part of coursework done by students at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

(00:00-00:24) Lorenzo: Hello, my name is Lorenzo (redacted). On this occasion I will be conducting an interview for the course of English 3238, offered at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez campus. This course is linked to a research project organized by the Oral History Lab and the General Library of said campus. What is your full name and your age?

(00:25-00:29) S.A.: My name is (redacted) and my age is 60 years.

(00:30-00:35) Lorenzo: And where were you born and raised?

(00:36-00:46) S.A: I was born and raised in San Germán, between San Germano and the jurisdiction of Lajas.

(00:47-00:49) Lorenzo: And where do you currently live?

(00:50-00:51) S.A.: I live in San Germán.

(00:52-00:55) Lorenzo: And what are you doing in your life right now?

(00:56-01:00) S.A.: At this moment, I'm not working.



(01:01-01:11) Lorenzo: Okay. How was your childhood? Was it difficult? Was it easy? Describe a little bit of your life.

(01:12-02:44) S.A.: My childhood was pleasant. I had many very good experiences. My family dedicated themselves to educating me properly. I received a good education from my family. My grandparents were very kind people. I was raised while my parents worked. I had many experiences. We traveled the towns of Puerto Rico. I got to know a lot. I traveled outside of Puerto Rico as well. I lived on my maternal grandparents' farm and they were very hard-working people from the 60s and 70s. They worked their farm. They had animals, they planted crops, everything was cooked at home and sometimes I thought I was poor when I compared my life with the lives of my schoolmates, however, these people did not have what I had. I had a home. He had a family. I saw them working hard all the time, which was my example. Furthermore, in that wooden house, although it did not have all the comforts that a concrete house could have in those times. I also learned to work and, in addition, I enjoyed the privileges of being an only daughter and I even had a swimming pool, I remember, in those days.

(02:45-02:51) Lorenzo: And of those life lessons you received as a child, which was the most important to you?

(02:52-03:44) S.A.: Well, I think the most important thing was to overcome poverty. It was difficult, indeed, at times not to have the necessary resources to be able to fulfill the dreams that maybe one had as a child, more yet, when one looks back at that life that one was living, because one says, wow, frankly I did have everything, because I had the support of a family. Although I was the only daughter and at times one felt sad. School, work, work at home, work on the farm, were an incentive to that life that one thought one had of poverty.

(03:45-03:50) Lorenzo: And your school environment was good, was it difficult?

(03:51-04:31) S.A.: Excellent. I always stayed in public school. At some point they wanted me to be transferred to a private school, but I chose to stay in the public school. That was for middle school, from elementary school to middle school. And the reality is, I think if it had changed, it



Universidad de Puerto Rico recinto de Mayagüez
Oral History Lab
Biblioteca General



would never have been the same. My public school teachers were excellent, dedicated people, who really taught and had a commitment beyond their economic interests.

(04:32-04:35) Lorenzo: And what was your first job?

(04:36-05:10) S.A.: My first job was in sales. I graduated from the University of Mayagüez, the University Center of Mayaguez, in the area of biology, however, always by choice I liked sole proprietorship very much. And my father helped me set up a sales business on consignment and for several years, I devoted myself to that.

(05:11-05:12) Lorenzo: And how did this business go?

(05:13-05:35) S.A.: Well, it was so good for me that we set up a store. After the sales on consignment, we decided to work in the area of uniforms. And we set up a place, sorry, in the town of San Germán and it went very well, we did very well. We can't complain.

(05:36-05:38) Lorenzo: And what happened to that business after several years?

(05:39-06:43) S.A.: Well in my interest to continue studying, reasons I really couldn't say what my interest in closing was, because the business really had its benefits, however, more in the personal area, because I felt something was missing. And that was something I understood to be finishing my studies. And we decided to settle the business and I went back to college for what is known at the university as academic benefit and improve the academic score. There I entered the program of finishing the courses of microbiology and it was an experience, already being in adulthood, returning to university was a very pleasant experience. It was like having the wisdom necessary for one to develop in that field.

(06:44-06:48) Lorenzo: And after you returned to university, did you go back to work?

(06:49-07:13) S.A.: Yes, once I finished those courses that were in the area of industrial microbiology, I returned to the work environment. I started working in the industry as a biologist and as quality, quality control staff.



Universidad de Puerto Rico recinto de Mayagüez
Oral History Lab
Biblioteca General



(07:14-07:26) Lorenzo: And in that work environment, did you have problems with positions or material that directly affected your work environment?

(07:27-09:50) S.A.: Well, the job was relatively, I knew it, because I had already done it in my practices in the industrial area, however, as in all the jobs, very unfortunately, what they call in the companies to carry out the expertise, because there comes a time when you already perform the tasks in a way, as I would say, with the sash in the eyes placed, because you already know your work, you know what you have to do, you do it with excellence, because that is what the industry requires, more yet, because it often brings some kind of mud in the environment, because other people who are in the industry probably, really, do not see it as one sees it. The responsibility that one has with that quality control in the industry must be very important, because these medical products go for the service of people and their health. If one makes any mistake in that work, it could bring, indeed, a fine not only for the industry, loss of work, losses of life. And a personal situation begins where there is a restructuring and the person who comes to be in charge of the department does not have sufficient knowledge of the environmental area. There begins, indeed, a rather tough situation in which the employees, since we try to do an excellent job, more yet we are asked, right, additional situations that were not within the description of the job and we were few who did the work and the situation becomes a bit unstable. In the interests that the situation, indeed, did not reach or escalate to larger situations, well I decide, right, to terminate my contract and at that time leave the company for which I was working.

(09:51-09:55) Lorenzo: In that work environment, were there people who didn't want you to leave?

(09:56-10:39) S.A.: Yes, there were people who very kindly offered me, really, try to mediate the situation and intervene so that I, therefore, did not lose my job and I understand at this moment of my life that was out of emotional control that I did not decide to stay, because most likely, indeed, we would have been able to resolve the situation, because there were people interested in me continuing to carry out my work.



(10:40-10:45) Lorenzo: If you had stayed in that job, would you have made a positive change for that company?

(10:46-11:08) S.A.: Definitely, I had already made several positive changes in the area and I think I could have been a little more successful in my work and helped the company in the necessary aspects of environmental quality.

(11:09-11:21) Lorenzo: Very well. After leaving that job, did you have social problems, whether at home or with other organizations or other jobs?

(11:22-11:59) S.A.: Well, after finishing that job, on a personal level, then, I got married. And three months after I got married, then, I'm hired by another company and that company took me to work outside Puerto Rico, specifically in the area of Europe, for about a year. One, an extraordinary experience too, very extraordinary.

(12:00-12:07) Lorenzo: And during your time in Europe, did you have other problems in the workplace or was it better than your past experience?

(12:07-13:19) S.A.: No, in the field of work, thank God, there were no incidents of any kind, only that at a given time, and an anecdote, is that we worked three shifts, right, and were totally rotative, however, therefore, we also had our free days and at a certain time, because of an apparent allergy, I left a message to my supervisor and very unfortunately, well my supervisor filled me a report that I had to sign it, because he claimed that I was absent without, without any excuse, when two or three days after signing the report, he called me and said, I'm sorry, its that I had not listened to the message, but besides that, thanks to God, the whole work environment was excellent. We met people from various countries and all very professional. The company was quite successful in, in its purpose in that area.

(13:20-13:29) Lorenzo: Well forgive me for returning to your work environment before Europe, but did you encounter a lot of ethical problems in the past company?

(13:30-14:32) S.A.: Well, ethical problems that I can call as such, I don't know if I could call them ethical issues, but the reality is that many times in companies, indeed, there are people who



unfortunately, therefore, do not follow the rules or want to go beyond the rules, or they want to be less than the rules and they make mistakes. Many times they go unnoticed, but at other times, they do not go so unnoticed and if they are, then, it can bring, say, situations of loss of work, loss of material, problems with suppliers, issues with the people to whom you are doing the job. I could not directly mention any ethical problem as such beyond, indeed, the problems that a production line can produce.

(14:33-14:42) Lorenzo: Okay. And after that job and after being in Europe, do you return to Puerto Rico? Why?

(14:43-15:27) S.A.: Well, I went back to Puerto Rico, because. I returned to Puerto Rico because my work and contract in Europe had, therefore, ended. That, that, that purpose for which the company, which in English is known as startup, had already finished. We had acquired sufficient knowledge to transfer that work that we were doing in Europe to Puerto Rico. And after that, then, we began to produce in the pharmacy of San Germán.

(15:28-15:32) Lorenzo: Were both, were both positions of your work the same?

(15:33-16:14) S.A.: No. In the first job in the industry, I worked in the area of environmental quality. In this second job, I was working in the production area. Since it was not specifically my work, because my work was microbiology and the laboratory, it was, indeed, not so easy to adapt to the area of production, but the work was done, because in fact, in that room in which we worked, right, there was also quality control of the process that was being carried out.

(16:15-16:27) Lorenzo: Okay. And after returning to Puerto Rico and working in this industry here in San Germán, did you encounter other problems or was it more bearable because of your career?

(16:28-17:10) S.A.: Well, the problems started to be of a different kind. They had nothing to do with work. I, I liked my job. We were a very united working group. We had been together in Europe and we were doing very well, however, since there is already begins to be a somewhat difficult family situation that, which did not escalate, but brought some personal consequences in the emotional ambit.



Universidad de Puerto Rico recinto de Mayagüez
Oral History Lab
Biblioteca General



(17:11-17:25) Lorenzo: And after that, before proceeding with more details of your life, did you encounter people who used their positions in companies to earn favor?

(17:26-18:39) S.A.: I would dare to say that probably yes. I don't have the security, right, because no, I can't give faith that I was there when that happened, however, because you know that in the industry a lot of people use, indeed, that way to gain access to other positions, especially when you do your job excellently, more yet, you see other people who do not do it, but pass you over what you are doing. I mean, for example, there was an open position to be an area supervisor and you were doing your job, you wanted that job, because you knew you could do it, but other people, because they were close friends or what we call in Puerto Rico the “palas” or the “panismo”, because unfortunately that was what influenced the most or had the most weight at the time of hiring for other positions.

(18:40-18:47) Lorenzo: So, did you openly speak to anyone in the company against these actions?

(18:48-19:24) S.A.: No, I never had to touch that topic, because the reality is that at the time I thought that they were administrative decisions that did not compete, right, the floor employees. The fact that the supervisor or the boss decides to take one person over another, there is no way that a floor employee can argue a decision like that, because we do not belong to the administrative area.

(19:25-19:33) Lorenzo: Okay, And after those two phases of work, have you returned to the workplace or not?

(19:34-20:13) S.A.: Yes, I returned. After about six years, I returned to the industry. I returned to industry in another department that had nothing to do with what I had studied. In some instances it could appear, but not. I went back to work in the area of what is called incoming, which is where the items or materials are received to carry out production in the company.

(20:14-20:19) Lorenzo: Was there any trouble with that new job or was it more manageable?



Universidad de Puerto Rico recinto de Mayagüez
Oral History Lab
Biblioteca General



(20:19-21:06) S.A.: That work was excellent. I was in charge of...as...be the mediator between a supervisor and other employees. A supervisor and the people in charge of purchasing the materials, the suppliers, but there was not so much problem, because we were a small group. Everyone was doing very well. And at least in the workplace, no kind of work. I'm sorry, corporate or staff problems.

(21:06-21:10) Lorenzo: Okay. And how many years were you in that job?

(21:10-21:13) S.A.: I spent about seven months there.

(21:13-21:18) Lorenzo: Ah, seven months, all right. And after that, when you left that last job, you didn't...

(21:19-21:22) S.A.: So far my job has been, indeed, the home.

(21:23-21:45) Lorenzo: Okay. After those working environments, which some were unstable, others were good, have you encountered any problems of social justice or any problems with other people who believe they are above people only by their power, whether monetary or political?

(21:46-24:04) S.A.: Every day. I think, and there I can mention that from childhood, right, from the '60s to this moment where one sees how the social environment has become in the area where we live, or in Puerto Rico. You see how people who have economic power or a social position or a position that appears to be in power try to abuse or pretend that all people make, right, an effort to render obeisance, as I call it. I've experienced, really, what can be gender abuse. I see how there can be abuse in the workplace, how there may be abuse in the social environment, where, unfortunately, women are not given the respect they deserve in an environment that is working with more men, right. Today women have changed a lot of their role and defend and demonstrate their power through how she studies, how she prepares herself, the way she cares about her environment, sorry, the manner in which she takes care of her family, and does various tasks. But, for example, when I am driving on the street I also realize how this social abuse that we have is noticeable when one does not properly use the traffic rules. One can go through a traffic



light, speeding, not giving way to pedestrians and it shows. Everywhere, at least in my years of life, I have noticed that yes, yes, there is much, much abuse of power.

(24:05-24:22) Lorenzo: Okay. And with some companies, for example, after the earthquakes that struck Puerto Rico recently, did you have any problems with any company, be it FEMA or some local government system?

(24:23-26:30) S.A.: Well, they are doing their job and I understand that they have their rules, however, after having been the home affected by not only the earthquakes, but the hurricane as well, there were some situations in which help was requested for the owners of the home, which in this case, is my mother and very unfortunately they did at one point assign her money, however, in my opinion, it was never enough to cover the expenses that had arisen as a result of this situation that caused us hurricanes and earthquakes. The only thing is that since we already had a fairly stable economic system and we had worked on it for many years, that compensated for the lack of interest, perhaps from the agencies to help not only us, but many people who stayed, right, without their houses being restructured, that they could get a good job again, because in the area of food and other things I do know that there was aid and not so much perhaps from the government, but there was aid, however, with the area of the part of the homes, because it is also noticeable now that we are perhaps building many systems that were practically left in the air, parks, roads and other government structures that at least now, well, I have seen that they have been doing quite a good job in relation to restructuring what we have, that is, the infrastructure of Puerto Rico.

(26:32-26:43) Lorenzo: So, any other comment you'd like to add to things you see on a daily basis, whether with organizations or generally in the news or something?

(26:44-29:09) S.A.: Well, for me it would be quite satisfactory, I would say, if more help was given to restructure the educational system in Puerto Rico. There are three neuralgic points in Puerto Rico, education, health and protection, however, my thinking is that education is the focal point of a town. If you don't restructure your educational environment so that that educational environment can fully develop, you're going to have people who maybe, how can I explain? Let's



Universidad de Puerto Rico recinto de Mayagüez
Oral History Lab
Biblioteca General



see, children need to be educated, young people need to be educated, we need professionals who can help us in this, in this environment in which we live. Puerto Rico is unfortunately becoming a country of elderly people. We need young people to prepare to work and be able to help economically with the care, health and protection of our elderly people, because really a people that is not educated and a people that does not work, unfortunately, is not going to be a people that is going to be able to develop and that it will be able to be an economically and socially independent town. Politicians, beyond wanting to gain a position, are going to have, true, to have introspections on how we can really restructure Puerto Rico and make us feel happy, be happy again, have faith again, have optimism again that In Puerto Rico you can live. We need programs, in addition to educational, sports, and social programs. I have seen that many mayors are doing good sports programs where they keep the youth happy and motivated, because we have to get the youth out of the social problems in which they find themselves.

(29:09-29:17) Lorenzo: Yes, I agree with you that education is also very important. I would say that even adults should be educated sometimes.

(29:18-29:49) S.A.: Adults should be able to be re-educated, right, and many adults who perhaps did not have the opportunity to fulfill their educational dreams could also have the opportunity, especially at the university, there should be programs where adults can feel in an environment dynamic and pleasant that we can return to finish our studies. That would be a very excellent idea for the university to develop.

(29:49-29:49) Lorenzo: Sure.

(29:49-29:50) S.A.: That's right.

(29:50-30:03) Lorenzo: Sure, thank you very much. This concludes the interview. I will be contacting you if I have any questions about a message you want to convey or anything like that.

(30:04-30:10) S.A.: Well, thanks to you. It has been a pleasure to be able to help you and I am at your disposal for what you need.

(30:11-30:14) Lorenzo: Of course, thank you very much.