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Oral history interview with Samuel Pagán López, November 15, 2023

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ORAL HISTORY LAB (OHL)

University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez

Oral History Interview with Samuel Pagán López, November 15, 2023

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview of Samuel Pagán López conducted by Naielys Nuñez Pagán on November 15, 2023. 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.

Naielys Nuñez Pagán

November 21, 2023

Transcription: Oral History

00:00:00,833 --> 00:00:17,200

(N) Well, let's begin with the interview. My name is Naielys Nuñez. I'm going to be interviewing (S) Samuel Pagán López. Today is November 15, 2023. We are in Moca. Specifically in the Las Marías neighborhood.

00:00:18,266 --> 00:00:22,033

(N) Um... Let's start with some questions that are personal and from growing.

00:00:22,433 --> 00:00:54,233

(N) Where were you born?

- Here in this neighborhood, Las Marías (Moca).

(N) When were you born?

- On August 16, 1951

(N) Did you grow up here too?

- My life developed in this neighborhood.

(N) Where do you live right now?

- In the same neighborhood. (Las Marías)

(N) Who lives with you?

- My spouse María M. Jiménez Acevedo

00:00:54,733 --> 00:00:56,800

(N) What do you do or what was your profession?

00:00:57,433 --> 00:02:47,800

- First, I worked in agriculture, in the planting of sugar cane, and then, I did that to help myself to graduate from High School. Once I graduated from High School, I started working in construction. With the Well Construction in Mayagüez. It was divided between, working at the College of Mayagüez (UPRM) and the other part I worked in, let me see if I can remember. Um, doing a Bristol Myers factory in I forgot the neighborhood, it was, I don't remember. I don't remember well. But in the same area, we worked there. Then I worked the rest, I worked three and a half years with that company. We worked there till the work finished. And,

00:02:48,766 --> 00:04:25,866

(N) What did you do next? What else did you work on?

- After the construction finished, I learned a little about everything in construction. And I was dedicated to work, as a carpenter on my own, making panel houses and doing things for myself. Then I go to study. I took a plumbing course in the year 1973. I finished it in 1974, and I was the one with better grades on the course but, for the things of life, I couldn't get my license, I persisted, and then, I kept trying and I got the license of journeyman plumber. And four years later, I got my master plumber's license. I dedicated myself to plumbing work for approximately 38 years, between 38 and 40 years. Until I retired.

00:04:27,966 --> 00:04:28,500

(N) Can you tell us a little about the house you were raised in?

00:04:32,033 --> 00:05:39,933

- Well, it was a house, where lived 11 siblings, dad, and mom. It was a little house, but then my dad made a bigger house. In the beginning, we slept all together, the boys, sometimes we had to sleep with our sisters. Because it was a time of poorness. My dad was dedicated to working in sugar cane. My mom did not work, and well, those were times of poverty, but my dad fought and brought us forward.

00:05:41,233 --> 00:05:45,533

(N) Do you have a good memory from your childhood?

00:05:46,700 --> 00:06:34,966

- Well, in our childhood we spend it, at that time we don't have toys or the celebrations of the Three Kings Day. We spent time playing in the river, playing hide and seek, in the forest, looking for oranges, looking for mamey, looking for fruits, or whatever there was. That was our hobby. Most of the time.

00:06:35,400 --> 00:06:42,266

(N) Who was the person who most influenced you when you were a child? And what did he do?

00:06:46,666 --> 00:07:32,000

- I think that that was, ... My father. My father, always.... was always there....

00:07:37,233 --> 00:07:45,733

(N) I'm going to jump to the next question, let's continue. What did you learn as a teenager? In your youth, what did you learn?

00:07:51,066 --> 00:08:22,100

- I learned to respect older people, to respect the kids, to help the poor. That's what I think was the most that helped me in life.

00:08:27,066 --> 00:08:38,666

(N) You mentioned that you worked on the construction of the buildings in the UPR of Mayagüez,

- Yes

(N) Do you remember which buildings where?

- Yes

00:08:40,066 --> 00:10:13,833

- We worked at the medical, I always called it Medical Center.

(N) Medical Services

- Yes. We worked where the pools (Natatorio) are, in the athletes' dormitories. I don't know if at that time it was for men and women or just for women. I don't remember well. We worked at the construction of one building of engineering. We worked in, the last building that we did was the court, I mean.

(N) Mangual

- Mangual. That was the last one that we did. I think that we did something else, but it doesn't come to my mind right now. Because I'm saying, for that time I just had 22 years. I was young, I started working at 18 years in construction there.

00:10:14,366 --> 00:10:16,800

(N) How many years did you work there?

00:10:18,533 --> 00:11:34,833

- There in the Colegio area, I worked for three and a half years. Until the company closed. Because we made the mistake of looking for a union that would represent us, and the union... We were two months on strike, so they looked for us one more quarter per hour. And we were two months, on strike. In the long run, the owner of the company gave in, and he gave us a quarter. But when we finished the Mangual, he closed the company, and left, and we were left without work. Around 2,000 people worked in that company.

00:11:36,733 --> 00:11:39,466

(N) Do you remember what you had to do there?

00:11:40,633 --> 00:12:40,400

- At that time, I was, I was like, as "Labor", labor worker, I had to do what they told me to do if I had to pull what they called "pico y pala", sometimes they put me as a bricklayer assistant. Or they put me with a Sir that was a carpenter. They put me as their assistant. And that is why when I got out of there, I could learn to do a little bit of everything and that's why when I got out, I could develop to work by myself.

00:12:42,066 --> 00:12:45,566

(N) What was your best experience working there?

00:12:45,566 --> 00:14:09,000

- I enjoyed everything because I... All my colleagues played with me, I was a boy of 18 - 19 years, and I was their entertainment, I say. They enjoyed working with me and I followed along. And I played with them, I always was happy with the group and thanks to God I never had problems. I worked with guys that have been in jail, and they forced them to look for a job and they were there. They were like brothers to me, and they always advised me, and they were from the residents of Kennedy, Del Carmen, and all that area. They were like brothers to me. I never had problems with them. I will never forget that.

00:14:13,166 --> 00:14:22,300

(N) While you were working there you had an accident, can you tell us everything from the beginning? How did it happen?

00:14:23,100 --> 00:24:07,633

- Well, as usual, we go out to work early in the morning, we leave the house at 4 a.m. To be early at work. We arrived, cause the area where we were going to work had been two months without work, the day before, the security inspector verified that the area was able to work in. He verified it, it was an aerial scaffold, nearly, like, 35 feet tall. At the bottom, there were some pipes, by the plumbers. The inspector called them and told them that they had two alternatives, take out the tubes, or install them because we were going to work there. And... Those who worked there could be in danger. That was on a Saturday because the company started to work again on Wednesdays. And because it was late for work, we started Wednesday. We worked Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, and then for Saturday they asked us if we were able to go, and I said, "I can come". I didn't have transportation, "if you go for me and you take me home, I can come". But then the group that were always together said that they did so. The group go from Las Marias (Moca). We started at 7 a.m. And then, I feel.... like... I felt a presentiment, that the scaffolding, was going to fall. And I said to my other partner, that was with me, that we didn't get on. His name is Antonio Valentín, and he lives in Añasco. And there was another guy that started on Wednesday, new at the company. Because some that worked there, after two months without work, leave to work in another place. And then, Toño (Antonio), told me "Don't be a coward if we have been here on the scaffold, this is our work, assemble and remove the scaffolding. And now you are going to be scared?" I said to him, "Toño, this scaffold is going to fall, is going to fall, I feel it". He said, "is not going to fall. Let's go, let's go to work". I said, "Let's go but this scaffold is going to fall". We started to work at 7. We worked until 9 a.m. And we got down to have breakfast and he said, "I told you; this is not going... it was not going to fall". And I said to him, "We have 6 hours left of work, and we are not finished doing what we have to do". We go down to eat, we get up like at 9:20 (a. m.), and when, After we went to eat, the scaffold fell. We go..... nearly.... between 30 to 35 feet.... High..... Did you pause it?

(N) No, it is still running

- That is, the wall where the machine room is, of that building.

(N) Of Mangual

- Of Mangual. There,

- God protect us, I had, ... I had a son of 11 months old. He didn't walk yet. He started walking when he saw me with a cast in my hand.

(N) Just that happened to you?

- The doctor never believed me that I was up there on that scaffold, because my other two partners ended up, well, they were sent to the Medical Center. And he said to me, "Listen if you were up there, you were in the Medical Center too, because if those two wakes up alive

tomorrow, is a miracle from God". And Toño (Antonio) and I are still alive. The other guy, died in a fire, his house burned, with him inside. A young man. I knew it because of Toño, I asked him, and he told me. We visited each other often, and now I owe Toño a visit.

00:24:11,133 --> 00:24:16,333

(N) Do you remember how it was, did you were unconscious?

- Yes, no no

00:24:16,666 --> 00:30:02,733

- When I fell, at least, in my case, my work partners that were there told me that I was falling headlong. I could die. But I saw the wall, and desperate to find something to hold onto, I put my hands, and after that, my body changed position, and when I fell, I lost consciousness. But in the moment that I was falling after the scaffold broke, I am falling, and I never lost consciousness or anything. I knew that we had fallen, that we were, ... that we were going to fall to the ground. How we were going to, we didn't know. When I put my hands on the wall, my body changed position, and then I fell from my back. So, that's when I hit with my hand, with my wrist, I hit the ground, and it broke. And I start to feel my head vibrating. Until I lost consciousness. Then, one of my partners caught me by my armpits, below my armpits and he picked me up and started to yell close to my ear, and I heard him very far away say, "Help me, help me, they are dead, they are dead", And that scream starts to wake me up. I was regaining consciousness. But the scream was near my ear, and I felt it very distant. When I woke up, I asked about Toño and my other partner. He was 20 years. And, well, the boys said, "Look where José (the other partner) is". José fell sitting, he was, well, he was sitting. I said, "he must have broken his dorsal spinal cord or something. He is not going to walk again". The other one, (Toño), hit his head on the wall and it seemed like his eye had popped out. That is why the doctor said that the orthopedist said that if they survived, it was a miracle from God. And he never believed that I was up there. Because he said, "Look", he called me "boy" because I was only 23 or 22 years. He said, "Look boy if you were up there, you would be like them". And I was walking. "You only have a broken wrist, and you could break it walking in your house, you fall, and broke your wrist. And you are fine, you don't have anything". And he took care of me and never believed that I was there. He said, "That was a wood stick that fell on you, or one of them that fell on you". I told him, "Doctor, that scaffold didn't have support". It was a scaffold in the air, it was an invention they made. And they did it in the air and we were up there. Then I talked to Toño and said, "What did I tell you, since we got there, we were walking, and I told you. I told you that I felt that the scaffold was going to fall, and you didn't believe me". And it fell and broke. It broke in the area that we were working, and the other part stayed up there. And, thanks to God, we are alive.

00:30:02,766 --> 00:30:05,766

(N) Who is Samuel right now?

00:30:07,200 --> 00:31:57,666

- Well, Samuel is, a person who has lived, a lot of experiences. God has given me the opportunity to have a beautiful family. A good wife, good grandchildren, good children. He saved me, twice, from dying. First, it was drowning when I was 8 years. And then, from that accident.

00:32:01,966 --> 00:32:06,666

(N) Do you want to say something else, advice, a lesson?

00:32:08,866 --> 00:32:43,966

- Well, I, sometimes I give young people a lot of advice, to get prepared, study, first surrender, and give their lives to God.

00:32:50,733 --> 00:32:59,966

(N) Thank you for talking with me.

- It was a pleasure.

(N) We finished the interview.