

RUTGERS THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANCISCO G. ROCA

FOR THE

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and

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

OTTER.AI

Christian Roca: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Christian Roca, and today I will interview my grandfather, Francisco G. Roca, who will be sharing information about his life experiences. Today is Saturday, November 13, 2021, and we are conducting this interview from Jamesburg, New Jersey, a small suburban town in South Middlesex County, New Jersey. In the beginning of the interview, we will explore my grandfather's early life history. After a short break, we will discuss his experiences in the Vietnam War and how it turned his life around. Finally, the dialogue concludes with his post-Vietnam account and the impact it had on his future life. With that in mind, let us begin. Francisco Roca, please introduce yourself.

Francisco Roca: Hi, my name is Francisco Roca. I'm the grandfather of Christian. I'm here to answer some of his questions that he has. Please keep in mind that some of these questions go back so many years ago, like sixty, sixty-two years ago, so I'm going to be providing the answers to the best of my recollection. Thank you.

CR: Well, I will now ask you a series of questions beginning with your early life and educational experience. My first question to you is, in what country were you born, and where were you raised?

FR: I was born in Ecuador, and I was raised there all the way up to the age of fifteen. I came here when I was fifteen years old.

CR: You were raised in Guayaquil, Ecuador?

FR: Yes, I was born in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Guayaquil is the main city of Ecuador. It is a cosmopolitan city surrounded by a river and also a small mountain. It has parks and different attractions.

CR: It has parks and different attractions?

FR: [Yes].

[RECORDING PAUSED]

CR: What are some of the major parks and attractions in Guayaquil, Ecuador? Give me some examples.

FR: Well, one major park in Guayaquil, Ecuador is the Historic Park. This park has wildlife and urban architect ...

CR: Architecture?

FR: Architecture, yes. I have been there and visited the zoo and the park. The zoo has animals that are both small and large. There is another park called El Parque Bolívar. It is also known as the park of the iguanas. Why? Because there are many iguanas in that area, in the park. They can be touched, and they also can be fed. They're very friendly.

CR: My next question to you is, what memories do you have of your early childhood and family life in Guayaquil, Ecuador?

FR: Well, basically, I remember going to school, old friends, some of them, and also being able to attend classes and meet the teachers and develop my education all the way up to middle school.

CR: What do you remember about your elementary or middle school education in Guayaquil?

FR: Well, the classrooms were very similar to the ones here. Of course, the ones here were much bigger. My favorite subject was bookkeeping and geography.

CR: Was there anything that you liked about geography or bookkeeping that you can remember?

FR: Well, bookkeeping was the foundation for me. When I came here, I picked up on bookkeeping here also, and I was able to obtain more understanding of bookkeeping and accounting, which follows after bookkeeping.

CR: Do you remember if there were any standardized tests in the schools that you attended? In the U.S., there are standardized tests in elementary, middle and high schools. Do you remember if there were standardized tests in Ecuador?

FR: Well, basically, they were similar to the ones they have here, multiple choices, and also writing descriptions of the paragraph that [was] being addressed, and talk about composition, and develop the stories. So, basically, there were multiple choices.

CR: Interesting. Did you learn English while you were in Ecuador?

FR: Just basic writing and reading.

CR: Basic reading and writing?

FR: Yes. No speech, just basic writing and reading.

CR: Did you ever learn any English vocabulary terms while in Ecuador?

FR: Yes, yes, because we had to do writing, and also with the reading, that we were learning.

CR: What are the first English terms that you remember learning?

FR: Goodbye, hello, and salutations.

CR: Basically, greetings and salutations, right?

FR: Exactly.

CR: Yes. I have learned basic Spanish in this country, and those are some of the words that I first learned. I am not fluent in Spanish, but I know a good amount after learning about those terms.

FR: Very good. Very nice.

CR: I am also interested in knowing about why you decided to migrate from Ecuador to the U.S. When did your parents decide they wanted to migrate from Ecuador to the U.S., and why?

FR: Well, it was back in 1962. That's more than fifty years ago, and the idea was to come here and explore new opportunities and all the things that we heard that this country had to offer.

CR: Was there anything in this country that really made your parents or your family just want to come here?

FR: Well, from what I remember, it basically was education. They wanted to provide us, the children, a better education, which they knew it was much better here.

CR: Than in Ecuador?

FR: Exactly.

CR: What do you remember about the process of obtaining approval to come to the U.S.?

FR: Well, first of all, you had to apply for a visa, and the visa entails that you have to complete an application and also have a sponsor. In our case, our sponsor was my uncle, my mother's brother. Then, after that, once you get the approval for the visa, you have to get a medical examination to make sure everything is okay with your health and that you don't have any viruses. Then, you have to get a passport and after that, of course, get your plane tickets.

CR: After you obtained permission, how long did you wait before coming to the U.S.?

FR: About two months, that was the waiting time.

CR: Oh, really?

FR: Yes.

CR: What did you do during that period?

FR: The two months? We were getting ready with the paper documentation and trying to make sure everything was in order and just be prepared to come. We came in the month of March, so we knew it was cold here. So, we [had] to get the winter clothing in the meantime.

CR: How did it feel going from the heat in Ecuador, which is along the Equator, to the cold in New Jersey? How did it feel?

FR: It was a big impact because we never had that kind of weather during the time that we lived in Ecuador. It was a big change. When we came here in March, I remember that it was thirty-five degrees when we arrived. We were coming, I think, from seventy-five degrees or eighty in Ecuador. [laughter] That was a big change, but we got used to it eventually.

CR: Yes, in Ecuador, it is summer year round, correct? It is like summer year round.

FR: Exactly. Well, they have winter and summer, except that in the wintertime down there, it's hot. In the summertime, it's a little chilly, a little cool.

CR: That is right. Yes, and it must be colder in the mountains. Have you ever visited the Andes Mountains, by any chance, in Ecuador?

FR: No, no.

CR: When you lived in Ecuador, did you experience any major earthquakes?

FR: Only minor earthquakes.

CR: Where in America did your family migrate to?

FR: We migrated to the City of New York, New York City.

CR: You did?

FR: Yes.

CR: Oh, wow. Do you know, by any chance, what part of New York?

FR: Bronx, New York.

CR: The Bronx, New York, wow.

FR: Yes.

CR: How did you feel about using public transportation when you first came to the Bronx? Was it similar or different to the public transportation in Guayaquil?

FR: I felt like it was different. It was modern. The transportation was nice and comfortable, and the buses were bigger and very organized.

CR: The buses were bigger in the city, you said? More modernized?

FR: The buses were bigger and modernized.

CR: How did they collect the money in American transportation compared to Ecuadorian?

FR: In Ecuador, in Guayaquil, when you got on the bus, you have to pay somebody, and somebody will collect the money and give you the change if he has to. Here, you have to put the money in the machine, and it will be automatically collected. If you didn't have change, the bus driver will handle that for you here. So, that was nice.

CR: Yes, it is very different. Thanks for sharing that.

FR: You're welcome.

CR: When you first arrived in the Bronx, what was the community like?

FR: Back then, it was Italian and American people. There were not that many Latinos or Spanish-speaking people. In the area where we arrived, it was almost all American people.

CR: How did you feel about that?

FR: It felt strange because we knew that we had to learn the language if we needed to communicate, even with people in the neighborhood.

CR: Yes, I can imagine. I would feel the same way. [laughter] How did you feel about leaving Guayaquil and moving to a new country? How did you feel about the whole process of it?

FR: I felt good because I knew I would be able to experience a new education and see how life was in the United States eventually, so I felt good.

CR: You felt good about it?

FR: Yes.

CR: Did your family feel the same way?

FR: Yes, they did.

CR: You said that they first arrived in the Bronx. Do you know why they chose that place, by any chance?

FR: Well, we didn't choose it. It was just the place that my father, who had been here two years before we did, he had secured an apartment in the Bronx, New York. He was waiting for us in the apartment in the Bronx, New York because he already had gotten the apartment for us to come.

CR: Oh, he already got an apartment?

FR: Yes.

CR: I know you talked a little bit about this, your family's experience finding housing in the Bronx. Is there anything else you would like to share?

FR: No, we didn't have any experience, like I said before, because my father already had done the homework. He had already gotten the apartment, and he was ready to be able to provide us with the housing that we needed.

CR: My next question to you is, did you maintain your Ecuadorian culture in America, in your household in particular?

FR: Well, basically, we couldn't speak any other language but just Spanish. That's what we knew to communicate among ourselves, until we started to learn English little by little. I would say after six months maybe, some words came to our head, and we started practicing some of the words in English that we had learned in school.

CR: By any chance, did your teachers provide you support in helping you learn the English language? What support did they provide you?

FR: Well, basically, back then--we're talking about 1962--there was not bilingual education in the United States or even in New York. We were forced to join the class in English, and the only support that we had was the dictionary. [laughter] We had to get a dictionary. To the teacher sometimes, we would say some phrases that she probably might know in Spanish. Basically, we were forced to learn the language.

CR: Yes, I can imagine. I mean, moving to a new country and learning a new language, it must be tough.

FR: Right, because the teacher gave the assignments in English, and they wanted the responses to the homework in English. We had to go home and try to find out the answers and write them in English, so we can provide the homework to the teacher the following day.

CR: You said you spoke Spanish at home. What do you remember about the high school that you attended in the U.S.? I know you attended elementary and middle school in Ecuador, but what was it like attending high school in the U.S.?

FR: Basically, it was a big change because we had to move from one class to the other, when we switch classes, go to different teachers. That was an experience because in Ecuador, we just stay in the same room, and the teacher will come. Here, we had to move to the other rooms, and the teacher would also be different. That was a big change and a big experience.

CR: Now, did you have a favorite subject in high school, like you did in Ecuador?

FR: I kept the same idea of learning bookkeeping and also, of course, English, because my idea was to go into accounting. So, bookkeeping was my favorite subject.

CR: Yes, that is nice to have a favorite subject. Did you notice any improvement in your English-speaking skills by the time you graduated high school?

FR: Yes, because three years had gone by, so I was able to have learned some English.

CR: You were able to learn English?

FR: Yes. Not perfectly but at least some English already by the time I graduated. I had to. Otherwise, I would not have been able to graduate.

CR: [laughter] That is true. Good point, there. What were your plans after graduating high school?

FR: Well, basically, to find a job and start working as soon as possible.

CR: Did you have any goals in mind when you graduated high school? Did you know what you wanted to go into?

FR: Again, I wanted to go into a field that would allow me to practice some of my learning in bookkeeping and accounting, and that was my idea.

CR: Now, did you have a certain college in mind that you wanted to go to?

FR: Yes, I wanted to, but I did not have the opportunity to do that because two months or three months after I graduated, I was drafted by the U.S. Army. I couldn't go to college because of that.

CR: I can imagine what that must be like.

FR: Yes, my plans were interrupted. I couldn't go to college because I received a letter in the mail from the U.S. Army saying that because I graduated from high school, now I was eligible to join the United States Army. I was drafted. I graduated in February, and I was in the Army in May. It was a big change.

CR: A big change, yes. All right, well, we are going to take a short break, and then we will move into part two of this interview. Thank you.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

CR: We will now start part two of this interview. Now, Francisco, I understand that when you were drafted and you were chosen to go to Vietnam, you were a little bit nervous. My first question to you is, when did you go to Vietnam?

FR: I went in 1967.

CR: 1967?

FR: Yes.

CR: Was there anything big going on in America during that period that you think we should know about?

FR: Well, I think that was the high level of the war. So many soldiers were being sent to Vietnam in 1967 and 1968.

CR: Were you paying attention to that?

FR: Yes, we were nervous because that was the peak of the war, when the people were going there. Well, that was something new that you didn't know how it was going to develop.

CR: You said that you were drafted into Vietnam, correct? You were not enlisted?

FR: Correct. Exactly.

CR: Where did you complete your basic training in order to serve in Vietnam?

FR: I completed my basic training in Fort Lee, Virginia and Fort Hood, Texas.

CR: Now tell me, what did you do during your basic training program?

FR: Exercises and basic training to become a soldier.

CR: Where did you complete your advanced training in order to serve in Vietnam?

FR: It was completed in Fort Hood, Texas.

CR: What did you do during your advanced training?

FR: Learn how to fight in combat and how to use weapons.

CR: When you got to Vietnam, what was your major assignment?

FR: Well, we were assigned to a platoon that was responsible for guarding the ammunition deposits. So, I was assigned to work with the soldiers who were guarding the ammunition dump, performing guard duties, and help to protect the trucks that were taking the ammunitions to the other soldiers in the field.

CR: You said you were responsible for guarding the trucks?

FR: Well, all of us--there were about fifty soldiers--that were assigned to protecting each truck that were taking the ammunition to the field.

CR: That must have been a scary experience.

FR: Yes, every night, they deployed about two thousand soldiers, two thousand soldiers every night, to guard the ammunition deposits. From there, we put the ammunition on the trucks, so they would take those ammunitions to the field, to the soldiers who needed the ammunitions.

CR: Thanks for sharing that.

FR: You're welcome.

CR: It is good to know about. My next question to you is, what were your experiences from the time you were sent to the war zone until the time you came home?

FR: Well, basically, the same thing I just described, just working in different areas and handling different assignments until we came home. Working in the jungle, sleeping in the jungle, and protecting yourself from the mosquitoes, all the insects that they had, as you know, in the jungles.

CR: Yes. During your time in Vietnam, did you notice if people were getting sick from the bugs that were there or any other creatures in the jungle?

FR: Well, basically, they were protecting us against the malaria and mosquito bites, and so therefore, they were giving us shots every three months to make sure that we were protected. Also, they gave us a spray that we can use when we were out in the jungle to protect ourselves from mosquitoes, because they will carry illness, and also, like I said before, protect us from the malaria, which was a very, very high-risk illness down there.

CR: Who was responsible for administering the vaccines to you guys?

FR: Well, we had nurses up there. We had medics who were there to work with us and help us. They were assigned by the military.

CR: By the U.S. military, correct?

FR: Correct.

CR: Is there anything else, though, that was significant during your time in Vietnam that you want to share?

FR: No.

CR: From the time that you were drafted until the time you came home?

FR: No.

CR: I mean, how many years were you there in Vietnam?

FR: One year.

CR: One year?

FR: I came back in 1968.

CR: 1968?

FR: Yes.

CR: When you found out about going to Vietnam, how did you feel about leaving your family?

FR: Well, that was a very, very sad moment. I was not sure if I was going to come back or if I will be coming back in one piece because some of the soldiers [would] come back with injuries and their leg was missing or the arm. So, I wasn't sure if I was going to make it.

CR: Did you know anybody specifically that lost their legs or any part of their body?

FR: Basically, we knew about people, but personally, I don't remember a specific friend who probably went through that. If one of the friends went through that, I don't remember.

CR: What was it like being in a war zone? I know you talked a little bit about your experiences in Vietnam, but can you please describe what it was like being in a war zone?

FR: Well, you have to always be prepared. We were all very nervous. When we took a break to take a nap, we had to be careful. We knew that soldiers sometimes were killed just because they put their mind on something else. For example, they put [their] eyes away from [what] they were supposed to be looking at and not noticing that somebody was pointing at them, and they could get killed. So, we had to be always prepared and, of course, very nervous.

CR: I was wondering, where did you sleep during your time in Vietnam? Did you sleep in cabins, or did you sleep on the ground?

FR: We slept on the ground and sometimes under a tent. There would be a tent built, so that we could sleep on the ground and under the tent. If you were on special assignment, then of course, you sleep wherever you could find a place to sleep. [laughter] You could even dig a hole, and in the hole, you can sleep in there.

CR: I know that Agent Orange was a major chemical used during the war. Did you ever see it being used?

FR: Well, all I know is that when we were there, there were snakes and various animals in the jungle. The jungle was always prepared by the people assigned to that in such a way that when we were there at night, all that area would have been disinfected, I would say. Whatever they used to do that could be Agent Orange, it could have been something else, but they always made

sure that they got rid of the animals that could hit us or bite us, so that when we were there at two o'clock, three o'clock in the morning, we were not surprised by any kind of a scary animal, such as a snake or raccoons or anything like that. So, I heard that they used Agent Orange sometimes. We didn't know that, but we learned that that might be affecting some soldiers.

CR: Yes, I know. I have heard in the past, in my history courses, that a lot of people in the '80s came back sick with that. I mean, it is good to know that you actually witnessed it.

FR: [Yes].

CR: Were you one of the few Latinos there, or were there others in Vietnam?

FR: I was one of the few in my platoon. In some other platoons, there were others, but you can count them, maybe ten, maybe twenty. We're talking about a group of twelve hundred soldiers, maybe ten or twenty. In one platoon, maybe another platoon, there would be maybe five or ten. There were others but not as many as the others.

CR: Did you make friends with anyone in your platoon, any long-lasting friends by any chance?

FR: No, not really. When we came back, we all went to our homes and different places, and we did not stay in touch. Well, at least I did not stay in touch with anybody.

CR: What were the most difficult experiences that you had in Vietnam?

FR: Right, moving in the jungle. Sleeping at three o'clock, four o'clock, two o'clock in the morning in the jungle, that was something that I never expected I was going to be doing, and of course, carrying your rifle and all the ammunition that you might need in case you were being attacked.

CR: Now, how often did you experience attacks at night? Were they common?

FR: It was a large, large area, Vietnam. In our area, we had--they call it mortar attacks that were sent to our base, and we had to move out of wherever you were sleeping, at two o'clock in the morning, three o'clock in the morning, move out and go into a ditch that we already had prepared to protect ourselves. That happened maybe once a month, once every two months. We had to run right away and find ourselves protection in the ditch. It could be any time, one o'clock in the morning, two o'clock in the morning, we would be bombarded by the enemy, so we had to be prepared. We knew what to do because we were prepared for all this, just like you see in the movies sometimes, how the people are attacked from far away.

CR: Yes, I have definitely seen stuff like that in the movies, yes. My next question to you is, what were the Vietnamese people like? How would you describe them?

FR: Well, number one, they were nervous because you're being surrounded by all of these soldiers and all of these weapons in their country. Basically, they were nervous and unfriendly, not too friendly, and of course, we kept our distance. We did not make any friends with them.

CR: Did you notice if they were shorter or taller than the American people?

FR: Oh, yes.

CR: I have heard about that before in documentaries and movies. How were they? Were they taller or shorter?

FR: They were shorter. Actually, I was tall next to them. [laughter] They were about--I don't know if should say 4.5, maybe, or maybe five. Back then, I was about five-seven, five-eight, and they were about 4.5. So, I felt very tall around them--not very tall, but I felt tall.

CR: Did you ever notice, by any chance, if they tried to use tunnels?

FR: Well, what they were trying to do is to make little tunnels to come underground to get to our place. That's when we had to be careful when we saw suspicious movement because they would come and try to get under to approach us and use grenades or put bombs to move around us.

CR: During your time in Vietnam, did you ever hear the song, "We've Gotta Get Out of this Place"? [Editor's Note: "We've Gotta Get Out of this Place" is a 1965 rock song that was performed by the band The Animals.]

FR: Oh, yes. Almost every day, maybe three or four times a day. How did you know that? That was a very popular, number one song.

CR: Yes, I have heard that song before.

FR: Yes. It was very popular, very famous, and everybody would sing it. We'd sing along because there was a radio station down there that was installed by the U.S. Army. In that radio station, we'd play that song almost three or four times a day, among other ones that were very popular. That was a very nice and popular song, and it still now--when we listen to that song--sounds good.

CR: Yes.

FR: "We gotta get out of this place, even if this is the last thing we got to do."

CR: Yes, those are the lyrics. [laughter]

FR: Yes.

CR: Were there any other songs that you really enjoyed during your time in Vietnam?

FR: Yes. "Black Is Black." That's another song, "Black Is Black." "The Letter" is very nice, and if you haven't heard it, I'm going to play it for you one day. [laughter] [Editor's Note: "Black

Is Black" is a song that was released in 1966 by the Spanish rock band Los Bravos. "The Letter" was a rock song that was released in 1967 by the Box Tops.]

CR: Okay.

FR: Also, there is a nice song that it would be nice for you to listen [to]. It's called the "Ballad of the Green Berets." That's a very nice song. It was written by [a] sergeant of the U.S. Army, and so it's a very nice song. One day, I'm going to play it for you too. [Editor's Note: "Ballad of the Green Berets" was a ballad style song that was released by Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler and author Robin Moore in 1966.]

CR: Yes, it would be nice to hear that. I am also curious, what are the memories of Vietnam that you still remember today?

FR: Well, anybody will tell you--and I include myself--there are many and I would say unable to list them, and some of them you try not to remember because you're trying to forget about that period because it wasn't a happy, happy, happy period in your life. Many of us would say we're trying to forget those moments.

CR: You are trying to forget those moments.

FR: Yes. I'm trying not to keep that in our mind and remember those things. Especially when I just came back, I didn't want to talk about being in Vietnam for a long time. It's not part of something that you wanted to remember and keep talking about.

CR: Yes, absolutely. Now, I know you have talked a lot about your experiences in the war. As a Vietnam veteran, do you believe it is important for social studies educators to mention or inform their students of the war?

FR: I think it would be a good idea to inform them and make them aware of the Vietnam War and the other conflicts that we have been involved with.

CR: Now, do you believe that schools should create separate courses that focus only on the Vietnam War? What do you think about this?

FR: During a school year, there is not enough time to go over every topic in depth in the American history courses. Therefore, I think it would be a good idea to put some time for the teachers to share information for each of the wars that we have been involved with.

CR: How do you believe that we can raise awareness in school about the war?

FR: Perhaps they can create a course that informs the students on the various aspects of the war.

CR: Well, anyway, thank you for sharing your experiences in Vietnam. We are going to take a short break. We will be back soon.

FR: Well, thank you, and also, I'm so delighted. Being in Vietnam, I never imagined that many, many, many years later, when you count, sixty years later, I will be interviewed about this by my grandson, Christian, who I really enjoy being with every day of my life.

CR: Well, I am delighted to hear that.

FR: Thank you.

CR: I hope you are honored to share your experiences. All right, now a short break.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

CR: We will now begin part three of this interview, where we will explore Francisco's life post-Vietnam. Francisco, my first question to you is, when did you return from Vietnam, and how did you feel?

FR: Well, I had returned from Vietnam in February 1968. I felt very happy and very thankful for surviving and being able to come back in one piece.

CR: Yes, I know because there are a lot of soldiers who, unfortunately, could not come back the way they were. Yes, I am grateful that you did.

FR: Thank you.

CR: How were you and other Vietnam veterans treated when you returned to the States?

FR: We were treated just in a normal way when you come back from overseas, no special welcoming, no parades, nothing like that. From Vietnam, we came back to California. That's the Oakland Army Base that they have down there. When we landed there, we were greeted by the buses that came to pick up about 250 soldiers. There would be two planes, or three planes, arriving every day from Vietnam bringing soldiers back, 150, two hundred. They would pick us up and bring us to the base. In the base, they would take us to a cafeteria, where we would be greeted and saluted. They would give us a dinner that would be steak and mashed potatoes and juice. That was the welcoming party that we had. There were no ceremonies, there were no parades, but that's the way we were treated.

CR: How did you feel about that in comparison to World War II, where they had all these parades?

FR: Well, in my mind, during that moment, all I felt good about is that I was able to come back. I was able to be in the U.S. again and able contact my family because I didn't speak to my family for a year. For a whole year, we never talked. So, that's the way I felt. I never compared ourselves to the WWII [World War II] soldiers. It was later when we started realizing that we did not have a special welcoming, and they still say something about that, that the Vietnam soldiers never had a special welcoming.

CR: I know, that is very important to think about. Did the United States even win the war?

FR: Eventually, they had to withdraw. I think, I don't remember correctly, but I think it was 1975 that they had to withdraw everybody from Vietnam. So, they don't categorize themselves as being a winner. [Editor's Note: March 29, 1973 was the day that the last remaining U.S. troops withdrew from Vietnam.]

CR: Thanks for sharing that.

FR: You're welcome.

CR: Where did you live when you returned to the U.S.?

FR: I lived in Brooklyn, New York.

CR: How did you see that as different from the Bronx? I know that you lived in the Bronx earlier, before you went to war.

FR: That is correct. It was a big, big difference in terms of transportation. In the Bronx, we were about, maybe, I would say, thirty minutes from the city, from New York. In Brooklyn, it was about forty-five [minutes] to one hour. So, it was a big difference right there.

CR: Yes, I know. New York City is so big.

FR: Exactly, yes.

CR: When did you get married, and when were your children born?

FR: Yes, I got married in 1968. My two children, boy and girl, were born in New York City, in the City of New York.

CR: In the City of New York.

FR: Yes. They were born right in the city.

CR: When did you obtain citizenship status in the United States?

FR: In 1975.

CR: In 1975?

FR: Yes.

CR: How was it obtaining citizenship status? Did you have to apply, or did they just give it to you?

FR: That is a good point, Christian, and that was a big disappointment for me because they should have just given it to me when I came back from Vietnam. They should have sent me a letter saying, "Welcome to the United States. We noticed that you are not a citizen, so we would like to offer you the citizenship. Please come and pick up your papers," but we never got that. I had to apply. I had to apply and go through all of the process, which I never, never welcomed that kind of situation. I thought they would just give it to us automatically.

CR: Yes. I would not like that, especially if I served in a war.

FR: Exactly. Just by being in the Army, you should have gotten the citizenship, but no. So, in this case, I felt very bad that I had to apply.

CR: Yes, it must have been stressful. I can imagine.

FR: Exactly. It was upsetting, but I did it. I got it in 1975. Of course, they gave it to me faster because I had my papers that I was in the Army, that I had been in the service and in Vietnam.

CR: Thanks for sharing that.

FR: You're welcome.

CR: How did you feel when you received your Vietnam awards, decorations, medals or certificate for serving in Vietnam? I know that a lot of soldiers received these objects after the war, but how did you feel about that?

FR: Well, I received these medals, and I felt very proud and happy for the recognition. These medals made me feel very proud for being a soldier of the U.S. Army and for serving in Vietnam. The medals I received were the Good Conduct Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, and the Infantry Medal. [Editor's Note: The Combat Infantryman Badge is a U.S. military decoration that is awarded to infantry and special forces in the rank below colonel who have fought in ground combat since December 6, 1941.]

CR: Those were the medals?

FR: Yes.

CR: Do you know the significance of each medal?

FR: Well, Good Conduct [was] for being a good soldier, that you never refused to do what you were supposed to do. The Vietnam Service Medal is for serving overseas, in Vietnam in this case.

CR: What lessons did you take away from serving in Vietnam?

FR: Just learning how to be more reactive, and how to be extra careful, and protecting yourself.

CR: Just protecting yourself basically?

FR: Yes.

CR: I know a lot of soldiers suffered, after the war, from post-traumatic stress disorder. Did you suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder?

FR: Well, I would say that I didn't suffer, let's put it that way, but I did initially feel there was a big difference in my life. Don't forget, Vietnam is about thirteen hours away from here.

CR: By plane?

FR: Thirteen hours in time difference.

CR: Oh, time difference.

FR: Right, time difference, thirteen hours. Right now, for example, it's one o'clock; out there, it will be two o'clock in the morning. So, we live in a different half world, the thirteen hours difference, and by plane, it's about fourteen or fifteen hours.

CR: That is far.

FR: It is far. Basically, your body had to get used to that when you came back from there because you were going to sleep when they were waking up here. Your life had to change that way. After doing that for one year, it makes an impact on your body, on your mind.

CR: Having to readjust to the time zone?

FR: Exactly, yes.

CR: After Vietnam, where did you attend college?

FR: I did attend college in New York City.

CR: You attended college in New York City?

FR: Yes.

CR: In an urban school, correct?

FR: Actually, it was Baruch College. [Editor's Note: Baruch College is a public college in the City University of New York (CUNY) system.]

CR: Baruch?

FR: Yes. It's a big college, and I heard it's the number one business school in New York City.

CR: I did not know that.

FR: Yes, Baruch.

CR: Did you get a job immediately after finishing college?

FR: Well, that was a good point. I was already working when I was going to college. I was already working. The only difference was that when I graduated college, I was promoted because I had more to offer to the company where I was working.

CR: You had more to offer?

FR: Yes, because I had my degree.

CR: Was it a master's degree or a B.A.?

FR: No, a bachelor's degree.

CR: Oh, bachelor's degree.

FR: They call it BBA.

CR: BBA?

FR: Bachelor of Business Administration, yes.

CR: Where did you work?

FR: I worked for an insurance company.

CR: Insurance company?

FR: Yes.

CR: Was it a big insurance company, or was it small?

FR: It was a big insurance company that's still in existence. I would spend, I would say, twenty-six years with that company.

CR: Wow, that is awesome. Twenty-six years is a long time.

FR: Yes.

CR: Do you believe that speaking two languages helped you get better jobs?

FR: Definitely. It's a big plus knowing more than one language. It is very helpful being bilingual.

CR: Just curious, did you ever speak a third language or learn a third language?

FR: No, no, but I know that it's a good idea to have another language. If you have three languages, it's even better.

CR: That is awesome. My next question to you is, when did you decide to move from Brooklyn, in the city, to New Jersey? What New Jersey town did you move to?

FR: Well, basically, we decided to move, in 1989, from Brooklyn to New Jersey, and the town that we were moving to was Jamesburg.

CR: Yes, Jamesburg. That is where we are recording this interview.

FR: Right, exactly.

CR: Do you want to describe what Jamesburg is like?

FR: Well, I would say Jamesburg is a small town, which has a little bit of everything. It has many good people. You can move around without any problems. It has areas that you can go and eat and shop around. We don't have a big mall, but it's a town that has a little bit of everything, bakery, barber shop. So, it's a small town that provides what you need. Then, if you go across, you'll be going from Jamesburg, going across to Monroe, and Monroe has a supermarkets and everything that you need.

CR: Jamesburg is right in the middle of Monroe, actually.

FR: Correct. Jamesburg has a beautiful park, which is nearby, Thompson Park. They call it Thompson Park, which is very nice. [Editor's Note: Thompson Park is the largest park in the Middlesex County Park System. It contains several attractions such as a dog park, petting zoo and various hiking trails.]

CR: Thompson Park has animals there, and they have a giant hill.

FR: Yes, they have a zoo that you can go [to].

CR: Can you see Monroe Township High School from Thompson Park?

FR: Yes. In fact, the park is built on Thompson Park property.

CR: What is Monroe Township High School like? Do you know if Jamesburg students attend this school?

FR: Yes, Monroe Township High School is one of the biggest high schools in Central New Jersey. I did not attend this particular school, but my grandchildren did. It's a large suburban school that both Monroe and Jamesburg High School students attend. It is a relatively new school that opened to the public in 2011. The previous high school building is now the town's middle school.

CR: Just to follow up, I believe that Jamesburg used to have a high school, but now, it is no longer a high school because Jamesburg high school students attend Monroe High School, correct?

FR: Correct.

CR: Thanks for sharing.

FR: You're welcome.

CR: Do you ever hear the Monroe Township High School marching band playing at football games?

FR: Yes. I have [walked] in Thompson Park before and heard the band play many popular songs.

CR: By any chance, have you ever seen the band play at the Jamesburg Memorial Day parade?

FR: Yes, and every Memorial Day, Jamesburg has a separate parade to commemorate this special day. The Monroe High School marching band has played in some of these parades before. A few years ago, my grandson played the song, "Fighting Falcon March" during this parade. [Editor's Note: "Fighting Falcon March" is a concert band piece by Todd Stalter.]

CR: I have seen this parade before. This parade happens along the railroad in Jamesburg. In Jamesburg, there is a railroad right through the center of the town that goes all the way from the Dunkin Donuts to Monroe.

FR: Yes.

CR: The parade goes right along that railroad.

FR: Correct, and it goes on the main street. During the parade, people come out. They just line up around those tracks and look at the parade coming through.

CR: Yes, that is right. Was there a Latino community already when you moved into Jamesburg?

FR: No, I didn't find any Latino community, no.

CR: Have you noticed, however, if there is presently a large Latino community in Jamesburg?

FR: No, the answer is no.

CR: The answer is no?

FR: Yes.

CR: I know that you said that there is not a large Latino community in Jamesburg, but do you have any favorite Latino restaurants in Jamesburg, or do you know of any Hispanic restaurants, by any chance?

FR: Yes. There are a couple of restaurants in the community. One Hispanic restaurant in Jamesburg is the Peruvian restaurant, Don Pepe, and another one is a Dominican restaurant called Sabor Dominicano.

CR: Yes, I have heard about those before. Right now, Don Pepe is located right next to the Dunkin Donuts in Jamesburg, but I believe that they are creating a new location for Don Pepe right next to the town's post office. I am looking forward to seeing what it looks like when it is done.

FR: That's correct. Yes, they say it's coming soon. It could be maybe a few more weeks, but it seems to be like a nice location.

CR: Absolutely. Just out of curiosity, do you have any favorite dishes, Hispanic dishes or Ecuadorian dishes? Do you enjoy paella, for example?

FR: Right, paella, chicken soup.

CR: Chicken soup?

FR: Yes.

CR: What would you say have been the key moments in your life?

FR: Raising my children, being with my grandchildren, seeing how they grow, sharing my life with them, that has been the biggest accomplishment.

CR: Have you ever experienced racism or discrimination because of your background?

FR: No.

CR: What major challenges have you experienced living in New Jersey?

FR: Well, the challenges are being able to raise my family in a quiet and peaceful neighborhood, in a different area, and making sure that they get a good education.

CR: Making sure that they get a good education?

FR: Exactly.

CR: Have you also found public transportation to be difficult? In the city, you have easy access to that, but in New Jersey, I know you have to drive.

FR: Thank you. Thank you. Yes, that was a big challenge because now, I have to use my car every day for everything. Before, we could use the public transportation, but I'm used to that now because I've been here since 1989.

CR: Yes, I know it is amazing how different life is in the suburbs than in the city. What has been most rewarding or meaningful to you about living in New Jersey?

FR: Well, being able, again, to raise my family and share this quiet life.

CR: Share this quiet life?

FR: Yes.

CR: Yes, New Jersey is an excellent place to live.

FR: Yes.

CR: Is there anything else that you would like to share for this interview that we have conducted today?

FR: No, I just want to say that I'm proud of my family, my wife, my children, my grandchildren, and all their accomplishments.

CR: Well, thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me. This information will be extremely valuable as we continue to learn about the Latino community in New Jersey. Thank you for your contributions, and I am very proud to be the grandson of someone who has accomplished so much in his life. Thank you so much.

FR: You're welcome. Thank you so much. I'm very proud, also, of having such a great, great opportunity to be with you, and also, I appreciate the way you conducted yourself.

CR: Thank you.

FR: You're welcome. I'm very proud of you, and also, I'm happy to have a grandson like you.

CR: That is good to hear.

FR: Thank you.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

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