

CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: Judge E. J. Salcines
INTERVIEWER: James M. Denham
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M=James M. Denham (Mike)
E=E. J. Salcines

M: I'm here today with Judge E.J. Salcines at the Second District Court of Appeals in Tampa, Florida, and we're here today to talk about his memories of Lawton Chiles, but also talk about his own upbringing in Tampa, as well as his education at Florida Southern. Good afternoon, Judge Salcines.

E: Thank you very much for the opportunity.

M: Once again, while we're here mainly to talk about Lawton Chiles, I would like to ask you some questions about your own background. What year were you born and where did you live when you were a child?

E: Okay, I am the son of immigrants that came to Tampa from Spain, respectively. They met in Tampa and I was born on the 18th of July 1938, here in Tampa at one of the Spanish Club hospitals known as the Centro Asturiano Hospital, which was part of the numerous mutual aid societies that the Latin community of Tampa had promulgated and devised. In fact, though the hospitals don't exist anymore, two of the great clubs have already celebrated their centennial.

M: Where were your parents born in Spain?

E: My mother was born in the Province of Asturias and my father was born in the neighboring Province of Cantabrian. My father was born in a very popular summer resort called Laredo, for whom Laredo, Texas, and Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, and we have different Laredos because it was an important seaport for the early explorers that explored the New World. In fact, directly across from my father's hometown [lived] the owner of the ship that we all called the Santa Maria that discovered this New World and of which Columbus was the navigator, the very famous cartographer, Juan de la Cosa. Juan de la Cosa was the owner of the ship and he was a great cartographer. In fact, the earliest map that we have of what is now the Americas, especially North America, is the Juan de la Cosa map. My father came from Laredo and my mother came from a very rural area in Asturias called Candamo.

M: Were there any other family members who came with them individually, obviously individual families of your relatives?

E: Well, understand that 99% of the Spaniards left Spain through Transatlantic Shipping. Most of those Spanish Transatlantic Lines brought them from Spain to Cuba, and then from Cuba, they got into smaller vessels and came to Tampa, New Orleans, Philadelphia, and other points. So, my parents, like 99% of the Spaniards that have come to the Americas

came from Spain to Cuba. My father, at the age of 14, was put on a ship by my grandmother and that ship brought him to Cuba where he already had two older brothers who were in the dry goods business.

M: What year was that?

E: This was 1914. He was born in 1900. My grandmother put him on a ship in 1914. He arrived in Cuba. He was living with his two brothers, sleeping in the back of the department store on a cot.

M: In Havana?

E: In the outskirts of Havana. And that's where he learns his trade. He becomes a dry goods salesman and that helps him when he came to this country, some almost four years later. He arrives in Tampa in late 1918, in early 1919 he is already working in a department store in West Tampa, and he is here when my mother arrived from Spain in 1929.

M: Directly from Spain.

E: Yes, but through Cuba, because remember the shipping lanes brought the Spaniards from Spain to Cuba, and then you changed vessels. That's why, if you went to Ellis Island, you had a very small number of Spaniards coming through Ellis Island because the

E: Oh absolutely. On the handlebars. As I recall the bicycle, it was not a fancy Western Auto bicycle, it had no covers in the back wheel or the front wheel and I remember that his handlebars were narrow, almost like racing-type handlebars, just enough for my buttocks to fit right at the top there as a kid. [I] would enjoy that escapade in the bicycle. But those were probably the darkest memories because, again, it was very traditional in that I guess some

Spain had to get itself up by its own bootstraps. I remember the poverty, the hunger that there was. I had never seen people begging for food. I had never seen boys my age with the skinniest legs. It was the summer, so they were wearing short pants, and they looked like toothpicks. So I experienced that. During that summer, we were in a northern city called San Sebastian very close to the French border and there was a big fiesta and I saw Franco, which was the only time I saw him, a very small man in his military uniform. I have witnessed a lot of debate by the Spaniards who have gone back to Spain during the Franco years and so forth and realized how Franco, even though he was a dictator, even though he had done this *coup d'etat*, had brought Spain through some very difficult years. Today we look back, and we must admire how Spain has come through the transition, the very easy transition from a dictatorship, from a totalitarian government to a democratic [society] and the reinstitution of the monarchy.

M: Exactly. Good. So, you graduated from high school –

E: First of all, I was in this Salesian school, St. Joseph School. My father then bought a home in a different part of town and when we moved to that part of town on South Matanzas Avenue, between Azeele and Horatio, where my mother still lives, I then was starting the seventh grade and I started at Wilson Junior High, which is a public school, and that gave me another great exposure. Even though I was raised in a Catholic school and raised in a Catholic home, my father was very close to the Jewish community in Tampa because, before owning his own department store, he had worked for a very prominent Jewish businessman here who had a department store, named Mr. Salomon Simonvitz, and my father had worked for the Simonvitz family for 23 years in West Tampa and it is when they moved from West Tampa to Ybor City my father said 'no, we have an established clientele, I'm going to open up my own department store'. So my father had always exposed me to the Jewish synagogues because he had a lot of friends that he had grown up with since he arrived in Tampa. So I was exposed, yes, to a lot of Catholicism, but then also to the Jewish faith and going to the synagogues. I get to a public school, and I'm exposed to a lot of Protestants. That gave me a very tolerant, actually a world attitude, about religions of the world, and respecting and tolerating different beliefs, different rituals. So I was at Wilson Junior High for three years and then I chose to go a military academy in Gainesville, Georgia, called Riverside Military Academy, and I spent my three years at that military academy. While I was at that military academy, the headmaster, who was a very strong personality by the name of General Sandy Beaver, used to say 'don't go to large universities, don't go to big universities, find small liberal arts colleges because you will get a better education, the classes will be smaller, there will be a better and a healthier relationship with the teacher and the student', and that stuck. So I graduated on the 28th of May 1956 from Riverside Military

E: ODK. We called them circles instead of chapters. I represented Florida Southern Circle at the National Convention that I went to with Dean Reddick, who was a very popular leader in the faculty there at Florida Southern. He and I traveled to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for a national convention.

M: Was Professor Burnett there then? Dick Burnett?

E: Burnett?

M: Richard Burnett.

E: I don't remember Richard Burnett. Anyway, I think they used to call us 'monitors' but we used to get credit. Everybody had to go to Chapel. If you were a freshman, you had to go to Chapel. And Capatano, Salcines, Garcia, and then we also had a number of other Tampa Bananas, the boys from Tampa, who would be giving out cards to those that attended, and you needed to turn in your card, etc. It was a way of controlling that you did attend.

M: Weren't there Cuban students there?

E: Yes, because, you must remember, there was a large recruiting thing since the Spanish-American War had taken a lot of protestant soldiers in the American Occupation Force in Cuba, which lasted a number of years because, between 1898 and the 20th of May 1902, when the American Occupational Forces left and then returned in 1906 again for another couple of years, there were a lot of Methodist soldiers. Consequently, the Methodist Church established in the rural parts of Cuba, a lot of Methodist churches that educated the rural Cuban boy and girl. So then there was a large Methodist presence in Cuba. We used to have teachers that used to go down and recruit. So we had a large presence of Cubans that were studying at Florida Southern College.

M: Now, did they organize themselves in groups, or were they spread out all over.

E: Not necessarily Cuban, but it was called the International Club. And if we looked in some of our annuals, you would find that there was at least one page dedicated to the International Club. We had a lot of Venezuelans, we had a lot of Cubans, we had Puerto Ricans, we had some Dominican Republicans, and we had some from Spain. We had a presence of Spanish speaking students.

M: Were there any of the students, in those years, that you were particularly friendly with that you remember and still know?

E: Oh yes, and I remember, though I have not had any contact with most of them, but there were two that were famous rowers and swimmers. They were the de la Guardia twins. They were twin brothers. The de la Guardia twins were very prominent in sports because they were excellent rowers, and we always had a good rowing team, and we also had a very good swimming team. And of course, Florida Southern's heart of activity was always the pool next to the Student Union as we used to call it. After Castro came into power in January of 1959, I lost all contact with the de la Guardia boys.

M: And they were back home by then?

E: They were not only back home, but they became very prominent in the Castro regime. And about 10 or 12 years ago, they were on television because they were arrested by Castro. One had the rank of Colonel; one had the rank of General. Right at this moment, I can't remember if they executed, was a public execution, one of the de la Guardia twins from Florida Southern. They used to put on programs. We had the Director of the Spanish Department, a lady by the name of Ada Pino Hamerick, and Miss Hamerick used to bring in speakers and visitors. And talking about visitors, I would frequently, through ODK, be an ambassador, you might say, welcoming different visitors that would come. For instance, George Smathers visited our campus. Spessard Holland visited our campus. Sam Gibbons, who was just starting as a very prominent State Government Senator or Representative,

important. You didn't lie. You didn't cheat. You didn't copy. And I had to sit together with maybe another eight justices, cadets, under the tutelage of a West Point graduate, a Captain [Semal?]

Dreadnaughts of Lakeland, and so had Lawton. So when Harry graduated from Law School, he went to work for Lawton Chiles; this was 1963. Then in early 1964, Harry Coe and I

E: Exactly right. You're absolutely right. You're refreshing my memory that it was the same period.

M: Same election. They were both on the same ballot together, or that is he was the Senate and he was the Governor. Yeah.

E: So, with Lawton, it became a grassroots, I'm talking Hillsborough County. I was not involved in the Panhandle or in Miami.

M: But your experiences, though, probably mirror the other counties.

E: Absolutely, and what we would do, when Lawton was going to be available, we found out where large numbers of people would be, for instance, cigar factories. The cigar factories were still very active in Tampa. Lou de la Parte....—

M:

E: I don't really remember Rhea being with us in any of our campaigning. Now she might have been raising the kids, but I don't have a clear recollection that Rhea was with us. It's very possible that Helen de la Parte would have a clearer recollection. She was very close to Lawton, and to Rhea especially, and it could be that she has a clearer recollection. I do know that Lawton loved Latin food, black beans and rice, Cuban sandwiches, Spanish bean soup. Whenever we would have an opportunity, he would say 'let's go get some Cuban food', 'let's go get some Latin food', 'let's go get some black beans and rice'.

M: Were you surprised when you heard he was going to run for the Senate?

E: I don't know that I was surprised. I was more shocked when he said he was going to walk. I said 'are you nuts?! What are you talking about? Florida is a big state!' I had just campaigned; I had four opponents and was the youngest in the race for County Solicitor in 1968. It was a Democratic state at that time, there was no Republican opposition, so I had campaigned very vigorously because I was the last one in and I had to catch up. At the time, I was a Federal Prosecutor; I had been appointed by Robert Kennedy as an Assistant U.S.

very hard campaign and a young lawyer by the name of Paul [Entinori?], defeated Paul Johnson for the State Attorney's position and it was announced that 'I'm gonna fire all of you guys'. So I applied in the U.S. Attorney's office and in September of 1984, I got word that Attorney General Robert Kennedy had just appointed me to the Federal Court. I worked as an assistant U.S. Attorney from September of 1964 to the spring of 1968, and that's when I ran for the local County Prosecutor's office, County Solicitor, and got elected in 1968, took office in 1969, and then got elected State Attorney in 1972 when a constitutional amendment that Chesterfield Smith had been campaigning all over the state called Judicial Reform abolished the County Prosecutors, the County Solicitors, the City Prosecutors and put everything under the State Attorney. So it was a reorganized State Attorney office and I became the first State Attorney in Hillsborough County history under the recreated Article V Judicial Amendment.

M: So that would have given you a tremendous number of responsibilities.

E: Oh absolutely, we'd have to prosecute –

M: New responsibilities for that office.

E: Exactly, and we had to prosecute city ordinances of Plant City. We had to prosecute city ordinances of Tampa, Temple Terrace. We had to prosecute juvenile crime. We had to prosecute adult crime.

M: You must have had a massive office then. You must have had many –

E: It was certainly a much larger office than we had originally started off with. And then we had another phenomenon –

M: And what a big job. You were only how old?

E: When I first got elected, I was elected at 29, so this was four years later; I'm what, 33? Thirty-three. It was a very interesting and very exciting time to set up a newly reorganized State Prosecuting office. We also had an important decision out of the U.S. Supreme Court that had declared unconstitutional the death penalty statute because there was discrimination in the way. The Supreme Court threw it out in a famous Furman Decision. Then when Reubin Askew got elected, one of the things he wanted to pass was a constitutional death penalty statute and I became very active in that.

M: Anti-death penalty.

E: No, on the contrary, pro-death penalty.

M: Okay.

E: So Florida passed one of the very first death penalty statutes and we weren't sure that it was going to meet muster in front of the U.S. Supreme Court. Well, we found out in 1976, when a Tampa case, a case that we had prosecuted here by the name of *Proffitt vs. State* was selected by the U.S. Supreme Court, together with a case out of Georgia called *Greg vs. Georgia*, *Jurek vs. Texas*, and a North Carolina case, I think there were five different statutes, that the U.S. Supreme Court was going to examine on the issue 'Is the Death Penalty a Constitutional Form of Punishment?'. So, my case from Tampa having been

E:

E: I sure don't. I sure don'

E: My opponent was Bill James, who was an Assistant U.S. Attorney working in the office of Robert Merkle, who was the U.S. Attorney and who had targeted me as a target of the Federal Grand Jury investigation. That went on for something like three years and I lost the election. Bill James became the State Attorney. I went into private practice, and two months later, the 36-month-old Federal Grand Jury ends its term with no indictments and no reports.

M: So this investigation went on three years.

E: For three years, a massive investigation. In any case, I always felt the support of Lawton Chiles and always grateful, always took my calls. If ever I needed something, I could always call, certainly, Lawton Chiles, Sam Gibbons, and the office of Dick Stone, who were always very responsive to me. They were tuned in to the community and they would respond to community leaders. Like I say, I can't recall that Lawton would come into town and I not know about it and not see him, even if it was just to stop by and say 'how you doing, you doing okay, your family well?' and so forth.

M: Now, I know this might be troubling for you to talk about, but I don't really know a whole lot about this three-year investigation. It must have been horrible.

E: It was horrendous, it was not just horrible, it was horrendous because –

M: What were the primary causes of it?

E: What?

was so embarrassed that he would be singled out as doing something illegal. He was on a hunting trip and died of a heart attack. I remember when they called me, I think it was a Saturday that they called me to tell me that he had died, and my wife asked 'what is it?' and I said that so-and-so was dead and that he died of a heart attack on a hunting trip and if that happened to me, I wanted her to put on my tombstone 'What Price Service'. So it was a lesson that my best Political Science professors at Florida Southern had never taught me, the ugly side of political office and the abuse of prosecutorial authority, to the point that it became persecutive and not prosecutive. However, as quick as I am to tell you of that very bad experience, very heart-wrenching experience because you look at yourself in the mirror