

Coral Way Elementary School Bilingual Program
Gladys Margarita Diaz and Juana Gladys Diaz, March 15, 2008
35 minutes 58 seconds
Interviewed by Richard Ruiz
Recorded by Bess DeFarber in Historical Museum of South Florida
For University of Arizona, Louise Greenfield
Special Collections and Archives
Tucson, Arizona
Transcribed by Jardee Transcription, Tucson, Arizona

Ruiz: This is another interview for the Coral Way Project. It's March 15, 2008. It's about a quarter to three in the afternoon. We're in one of the interview rooms at the Southern Florida Historical Society. Why don't you go ahead and say your name into the microphone.

Gladys Margarita: Gladys Margarita Diaz.

Juana Gladys: Juana Gladys Diaz.

Ruiz: Okay, that's great. And you won't have to lean, because the microphones are really good. My name is Richard Ruiz. I'm with the University of Arizona. Also in the room is Bess DeFarber who is also with the University of Arizona, and also a Coral Way graduate. Maybe you can tell me when you were at Coral Way as a student.

Gladys Margarita: I got there in November of 1962, and I was there through 1964. Then I moved to Hialeah, and I was out of Coral Way, at Emi Milum [phonetic] Elementary for two years. And then I came back for fifth and sixth grade at Coral Way, which would put me there '66-'67-'68.

Ruiz: Now, you were talking to me before off the recording about your own family background. You came here from Cuba....

Gladys Margarita: In March of 1962 we arrived in Miami. We were relocated by the Catholic Church. We were adopted by a family and a church out in Mountain View,

California, and we moved there. We were given a house and an automobile, and my father, who was an electrical engineer in Cuba, was interviewed for a position at Pacific Gas and Electric. At that time, the Cuban missile crisis was in progress, and he was told that he was a potential security risk, so that he wound up working in a box factory.

I was put in summer school to learn English at Monte Loma Elementary, and that's where I learned English—I learned how to speak that summer. My next door neighbors were eight children. We lived in a very family neighborhood, and I used to play with the neighborhood kids. And eventually I picked up English, just playing around and so on. So then in November of that year....

Earlier that year my aunt and my grandparents came from Cuba in August of '62. So like in November, right after the Cuban missile crisis, we decided to join them here in Miami. And my father's phrase was, "If we're going to be poor, we might as well be poor together."

So we moved back here, and we lived on 13th Avenue and 13th Street, about five blocks from Coral Way Elementary, and my father took me to register me. When I got interviewed, I was put with the English native speaker group. And my cousin, who had arrived from Cuba in August, was put with the Spanish-speaking group. So that was like a major crisis for us, because we were very close, almost like brother and sister. And so my homeroom teacher was Miss Borden.

That was around the time that the whole space program was starting to become really popular, and so we had to write essays about things, and one of my essays was about Gordon Cooper and his orbits around the earth, which I thought were really cool. And I designed an outfit for a woman astronaut, and my teacher thought that that was

really cool, and so she notified the newspaper, and the newspaper wrote an article about me, basically because they were amazed that a Cuban kid could spell “orbit” and “capsule,” and that we were actually interested at such a young age in the space program. So anyway, that was kind of my first adventure with notoriety.

We stayed there first grade, second grade, and then we moved out. I remember my teachers were Mrs. Benitez....

Juana Gladys: You didn’t bring the paper from the news?

Gladys Margarita: Yes, it’s right here.

Juana Gladys: No, no, the other one—the one that [unclear].

Gladys Margarita: Yes. See, I brought it, it’s here—the translation, yes. And so we had half a day—the way it worked was that we would have half the day in English and half the day in Spanish. The issue was that the English-speaking kids, you would speak only in Spanish. So I would learn math in Spanish, or math in English. I would learn geography in English or geography in Spanish. So you learned the words for the different continents and the different cities in both languages. The non-Hispanic kids, the Anglo kids, became extremely fluent in Spanish, and very *hablablanous* [phonetic] as you would say, which is “banana stained,” which means that they really kind of were very easy with the culture and so on.

We had art class, we had music class. In music class we learned Spanish songs. And so my aunt, who’s here, was a music teacher.

Juana Gladys: Yes.

Gladys Margarita: How many times a day did you....

Juana Gladys: Well, the administration had this idea. They put one half of the day for English, and half a day for Spanish. The English teacher and Spanish teacher worked out a session of three hours. And then we switched. The Spanish teacher and English teacher switched the kids. For example, the kids that were learning with the Spanish teacher went to the English teacher; and the kids that were in the English class [unclear] Spanish class. That was the system. But between that, was an hour, daily, for the teachers to meet and plan together. The American teacher and the Spanish teacher, they used to plan together, and they needed an hour to [unclear] to write the objectives and things like that. And then they had one hour, that hour that the teachers needed, for half an hour, for physical education, and half an hour for music or art. And when I started, I didn't have my teacher's certificate for teaching at a regular [unclear]. So the principal made me an assistant teacher, a [unclear]. And I started to teach music in Spanish in the Spanish classes, and music in the English. Because it was a bicultural program, and it's very successful—still is.

Ruiz: What years were you there?

Juana Gladys: I started in '67, '68, and '70. I was working there as a [unclear] because at the same time I have to study at the University of Miami, the credits I needed to become a regular teacher. And then it's something that is related to Coral Way Elementary, but it's not really Coral Way Elementary. [unclear] It was a special program that the board of education created with the federal government. And it was a special program to write a bilingual curriculum in Spanish and English. And they put [unclear]. They were seeking for teachers speaking English and Spanish [unclear] more or less. I know with the heavy accent I have. But, you know. And then they picked me

from the board of education and other teachers, Cuban teachers and American teachers, to write those activities.

Gladys Margarita: They were workbooks.

Juana Gladys: And we wrote those activities, and we wrote books for first grade, second grade, [unclear]. I was in the [unclear] of writing activities in Spanish for English students, for [unclear]. And then they switched, and I had to write English activities for Spanish kids.

Ruiz: And this was held at the University of Miami?

Gladys Margarita: No.

Juana Gladys: And it was related to Southside Elementary, because those materials were given to Southside Elementary to use with the kids.

Gladys Margarita: Which is another bilingual school.

Juana Gladys: The program was very good. Very well permitted.

Gladys Margarita: To answer your question, you asked if this was through the University of Miami—it was not. It was Dade County Public Schools got a federal grant. It was administered, the head of the project was a guy called Ralph Robinete, R-O-B-I-N-E-T-E, and he was her boss. And he recruited a number of teachers to write these workbooks. This was executed in the Dade County Public Schools Building, and she worked on that for many years, I remember.

Juana Gladys: No, not many years, because I had to leave [unclear]. My husband had a stroke and he was very sick. And then I tried to work close to my home, to be close to him. And I left the program and asked for a regular class [unclear] in another bilingual school, that is Southside Elementary.

Gladys Margarita: So those people are probably around, who worked on those workbooks and so on.

Ruiz: The workbooks were the ones that eventually became those Miami Linguistic Readers that we were talking about, that we have been talking about with Sanchez, I think. Right. This is very important to us, because we have not heard too much about that kind of thing yet, so that's great.

When you came to Coral Way, why did they put you in the English group?

Gladys Margarita: Because I spoke perfect English.

Ruiz: How did they know that? I mean, did they have you come and audition, or did they have you speak to them?

Gladys Margarita: I think they tested us. She knows more.

Juana Gladys: May I say something? You were already [unclear], you don't remember, you were in Cuba. You were taking English in daycare. [unclear] in English. [unclear].

Gladys Margarita: In Cuba, before we came, we had been in like a childcare program that gave us vowels and pronunciation in both English and Spanish. So by the time I hit Mountain View, I already had my vowels and my consonant sounds in, so I had the phonics basics. So when I wound up in the first grade, the teacher called my mom and said, "Your child is a prodigy, she's speaking perfect English," and my mom's like, "Relax, she's normal. She just had all this stuff way back about a year ago, and she probably remembers the sounds and the combination of sounds." And it wasn't very difficult to make the transition between the consonant sounds in Spanish, and how they sounded, and the English. So when I arrived at Coral Way, by that time I had been in Mountain View for about maybe five or six months, and I'd been practicing English with

only English-speaking young people. And I spoke Spanish at home with my parents. So when I got there, I think what they do is, they test you. I think they tested us, and I remember that they asked me a bunch of questions, and a bunch of “How do you say this and that?” read aloud, that kind of thing. And I was already reading and I was already writing in English, so then they’re like, “Oh, native speaker.” And so that was like a big hooah because here’s a Cuban kid and she’s perfectly bilingual, and she’s only been here like four months. Oh, my God! But we were lucky in that we had had the basic phonics infrastructure of language, which is the basics of language, **any** language, in Cuba. So we had arrived with those very basic skills. So that was that.

I’m going to go through your questionnaire here ...

Ruiz: Go ahead.

Gladys Margarita: ... because I want to help you finish this out.

The language that was spoken in our home always and to this date is Spanish, and it never changed. I remember distinctly that there was like a law in my house that no conversation could occur at the dinner table in English, because my grandmother lived with us, and she didn’t understand [English], so speaking in front of her in English was rude and secretive and not okay.

My teachers in the program were in first grade I had Miss. Borden, who’s the woman who called the *Miami News* for the newspaper article. Miss Hendrick was [second] grade, and then we had Mrs. Benitez in fifth grade. We had Mrs. Josefina Sanchez, who still lives here on Brickle. And I had Imaculada El Baile [phonetic] in third grade.

Juana Gladys: [unclear] pass away [unclear].

Gladys Margarita: Three or four days ago, she just passed away. Magda Lecour [phonetic] was one of our teachers.

Juana Gladys: [unclear]

Gladys Margarita: And then we had Miss Sotolongo in sixth grade, and she lives near my house in Coral Gables, so I know she's around. And Miss Mikes. She was my [unclear] teacher. The three teachers were team teachers, we were in the pod, and there were like 90 kids in one room. And there were no windows, which was a nightmare. Design-wise, that's really bad news. So we had Miss Mikes, Miss Sotolongo, and Miss Sanchez.

My student friends were everybody from Mickey Miñagori [phonetic], Mercy Miñagori, Mercy Palomo, my cousin Frank Montero. Becky Porto was my best, best friend. We had like a bunch of other friends and I can't remember their names. I think if I see the names, I'll remember them.

Ruiz: Were these mainly friends in the English group or the Spanish group—or did you even notice?

Gladys Margarita: I didn't notice, actually. Becky and I spoke in English, and we were in fifth grade together. Mrs. Benitez, I remember distinctly, she was very good with Spanish and literature and language arts—that was like a big deal with her, and I'll talk more about that in a minute when I get down to the program itself.

Others who attended the program: I just mentioned a bunch of names. Have you found any of these people? Like Mickey Miñagori and those guys?

Ruiz: I think we've found a few of them, but we're still looking for some.

Gladys Margarita: If you give me some people that you haven't contacted, maybe I can help you. And I was assigned to the English group, and I already mentioned that just because of the way I could speak and write and read—mostly my reading skills. And then that was the test, kind of like can you read aloud and can you pronounce things correctly.

The ratio of Spanish and English was about 50-50 in the classrooms. As my *tia* was saying, the subjects were all exchangeable. In other words, you did **all** the subjects in both languages, which was really cool, because then what you learned is how to pronounce the names of things in both languages, and you could literally—it's like a dial you switch.

The curriculum materials were always in both languages, and they were published both locally through the Robinete program, but that was afterwards—but I remember that they were national books in English and Spanish, and also from Spain and from Latin America.

Juana Gladys: Yes.

Gladys Margarita: In the morning we would have like—the classes were basically, like you would start the day in the class that you were assigned to. So my day was English, and then I would switch to Spanish, and then vice versa. So if you were in the home room of Spanish, you did Spanish in the morning, and then you would switch to English. My parents were always very, very involved, first of all because my mother's a teacher, and she was also part-timing at Coral Way, and she was there during the period that I was there. Daddy was in Spain and didn't come until '65, right?

Juana Gladys: [unclear]

Gladys Margarita: Later.

Juana Gladys: Later. [unclear] Spain [unclear].

Gladys Margarita: Yes. So she didn't arrive until about '65, '66, when we had already been at Coral Way for a couple of years. We were the first class. Remember, we're talking fall of '62. The program had just been allowed, and there was this whole supply of Cuban teachers that had just arrived from Cuba, that were ready, willing, and able to put it into place.

We used to have a lot of fun, we played a lot. I don't remember open houses or information meetings. My parents must have gone to them.

Juana Gladys: Yes. That was in November, always, open house.

Gladys Margarita: The open house was fun. Mr. Logan was the principal. He was really cool. Mrs. Werner was the reigning goddess of great power in the office. I remember that they were really nice. Mr. Logan was very, very sweet—very serious, you were scared of him, you were gonna go to the principal's office!

Juana Gladys: He was a gentleman.

Gladys Margarita: A real gentleman. And then everybody kind of knew each other, because we all lived near there, and everybody who came from Cuba, who were teachers, like my mom and her little gang—she had like a posse of other teachers—and they were all going to school at the University of Miami, and they were all recertifying themselves in the United States, so that everybody—it was like a clump of people. And they interchanged a lot of information, they studied together, and I remember distinctly doing [i.e., proofreading] term papers that my mother would write. And I remember I was like in fifth or sixth grade, and I was the grammar person. So you can imagine, ten, eleven

years old, I'm the phone person to call the phone company, I'm the one that orders the phone or talks about the bill. My father taught me how to write checks, so that I knew how to write a check in English. And he would say, "Here, you do it, because you speak better English than I do." And so the child becomes the translator for everybody, which is a pretty adult job. And I remember when my mom had like a term paper due, and she and her friends were working on this big project, and they needed to type it out, and so they hired me as the typist. And so I would basically stay up with her to type up her term papers in English. They would write them, but then if I found like grammar issues and stuff, or vocabulary things, I would correct them. It's a very interesting flow, like the child correcting the parent, which is kind of funny.

Juana Gladys: [unclear]

Gladys Margarita: Yes. So then what was my impression and my participation in the program then? I had a lot of fun, it was a blast, and I thought it was really, really cool to be able to kind of do everything. There was always the different families did things a little bit differently, like I wasn't allowed to join Brownies or Girl Scouts. I could not sleep away or go to camp. That was like *verboden*. And sleepovers were not an option in Cuban families.

Juana Gladys: And you're the oldest.

Gladys Margarita: And I'm the oldest female.

Juana Gladys: [unclear]

Gladys Margarita: And I was very happy to participate. And now I'm gonna talk about how Coral Way helped me in my development as a student and as a person. First of all, it laid in the foundation for like a completely bilingual life. Now, I am married to a nice

gringo guy from New Hampshire. I went to school in Upstate New York, I went to Cornell University. I got my master's degree. I have a bachelor of architecture, which is a five-year degree, and then I got a master's for two more years. That master's degree is the terminal degree in my field, so I am qualified to be a professor. I was visiting faculty for about three years, where I would go on campus and I would lecture, and then I would bring the students to Miami. And the reason is that the students on campus at Cornell were kids from the Northeastern area, which were maybe not as empowered as a kid from Miami. And if you have one word that this program creates, is empowerment: empowerment for the Latino kid, who's able to confront and realize his language and be fluent in his language and not be ashamed of being Hispanic, as well as being completely fluent in English, and being completely dominant in that language, and being able to communicate with the rest of the culture. The reverse flow is that my friends who were Anglo, that were **at** Coral Way, were completely fluent in the Cuban culture, or the Hispanic culture, and are able to work in any kind of field here in Miami, that requires bilingualism.

I think that being that kind of a person enabled me to be very sure of myself for the rest of my life. When I got to Cornell I lived at the International Living Center. My best friends were from Colombia and Venezuela and Argentina, and my Spanish got really, really good. Because I spoke Spanish at the university with Spanish speakers from other countries, my vocabulary expanded, I learned **many**, many more ways to say bad things. And then as a result, I wound up being much more dexterous in commercial and sort of business Spanish. I wound up then eventually working in New York. I worked on Wall Street for about eight years. There were two things: I got my securities license in

1985, which is the National Association of Securities Dealers Series VII license. I was probably one of the first Hispanic women that took that exam in the mid-eighties. I went to work for a company called Bear-Stearns and Company. Bear-Stearns is one of the largest trading firms in the world. They didn't have anyone to cover the Latin America desk, and so I was assigned to the international department for **only one reason**—I could speak Spanish fluently, and I was an Ivy League graduate, and I had my securities license. Those three. If I had not had the basics of Coral Way Elementary, my love of language and my love of literature in Spanish, I wouldn't have been able to hit that mark. And I had the privilege, I was assigned to work with Spaniards, and it was fantastic, and I got to travel, and I got to have a lot of fun. And that was, to me....

Juana Gladys: And she loves to read.

Gladys Margarita: Yes.

Juana Gladys: Always reading.

Gladys Margarita: So in essence what it does, is it makes your life instead of 180, it makes your life 360—three hundred sixty degrees of life. It enables you to participate in other people's lives in ways that you otherwise wouldn't be able to. And it enables me to participate with people who are from other countries that otherwise [I] wouldn't have that. And my purpose for creating my summer program for Cornell was to give the Latino kids that were **not** from Miami, that were maybe from the West Coast, from California, Arizona, and New Mexico, New York, to get them to see that you could be completely bilingual, you don't have to lose your identity as a Hispanic, but to be completely bilingual in English is to be very, very empowered. And being a bilingual person gives you that opportunity, that special edge in business that a lot of **nonbilingual**

people don't have. And the way that our culture is moving into the global citizen, this hemisphere is completely Hispanic—the southern half and the northern half. So one would think that being a bilingual person is a marketing tool, if nothing else, from an employment perspective. And so that's kind of my take on the whole thing.

I think that answers all the questions basically here as a person. I think that I got a lot out of all of my teachers. Mrs. Benitez was very adamant about making sure that not only did we understand Cuban culture, but we got social studies in every single Latin American culture, and to really appreciate the history of Ecuador, the history of Colombia, the history of Venezuela—just so that it's a pan-Hispanic viewpoint, as opposed to just this sort of “I am Cuban and that's all I am.” And so that was kind of cool.

Yes, I can read and write in my second language now. I'm currently working on the web. Most of my buddies are Hispanic.

Did I attend after-school activities? Whenever I could.

What language did I speak to my friends out of school? Both English and Spanish. We'd talk about boys in Spanish, and we'd talk about girls.... It's funny, Becky and I used to—we were like major “Star Trek” fans. She was in love with Mr. Spock and I was in love with James. T. Kirk. And we would talk about the episodes and this and that. But whenever you wanted to make fun of somebody, you'd do that in Spanish. Okay?

So basically what I enjoyed most is my ability to tell jokes in both languages, because I think that makes my life much more fun.

Juana Gladys: [unclear] *cosito*.

Gladys Margarita: And my cousin too.

Juana Gladys: He remembers.

Ruiz: Do you remember anything that you **didn't** like?

Gladys Margarita: Let's see, what didn't I like? I used to get put outside when I would talk too much. Miss Mikes put me outside in the winter one time, because I was a blabbermouth. I used to get like "A's" and then **"cannot stop talking. Able to talk—at all times."**

Juana Gladys: You know, I would like to tell you about [unclear].

Gladys Margarita: Sure, you can.

Juana Gladys: I think he would enjoy it.

Gladys Margarita: Yeah, of course he would.

Ruiz: This is Frank who?

Gladys Margarita: My cousin. He lives in Pebble Beach now, again?

Juana Gladys: No, he lives at Princeton University.

Ruiz: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Gladys Margarita: I have twin sisters, but they're five years younger than me. And I signed the online survey, so you guys.... The sequence of time is, we were in Little Havana for first through third grade, then we moved to Hialeah for fourth, and then I went back to Little Havana for fifth and sixth grade. At the end of sixth grade, we moved to Coral Gables and we bought our first house. My mother still lives there. And so I went to private school after that.

Ruiz: But none of your brothers and sisters....

Gladys Margarita: My kid sisters never got the opportunity to go to Coral Way, because by the time that they were old enough to go to school, we were already moved in a neighborhood that they wouldn't have been qualified to go to that school. They went to Coral Gables Elementary.

Ruiz: Well, that's a pretty comprehensive look at your life. If there's anything else that you can think of, this project is probably going to be going on, probably formally for another year, but beyond that, I think we'll always be interested in adding to it and so on. It's going to be a digital—at least the library part is going to be digital, so we can always add to it. And I will always be interested in more information that people have. So if you have any more, if you think of anything, you can get in contact with us. This place is very interested in artifacts of any sort, because unfortunately, in spite of the fact that Coral Way is **the** most famous bilingual school in the country, because it was the first public [bilingual] school—there is nothing at the museum. There is nothing here on Coral Way—not one.... Actually, there is no file on Coral Way.

Gladys Margarita: It's a national example!

Ruiz: It's a national example, it's actually known internationally in bilingual ed. But in spite of the fact that this museum has files on the public schools in Miami and Southern Florida, there's nothing on Coral Way. So we want to add as much as we can to the file here.

Gladys Margarita: I have to say one thing that I've learned over the years, and because I was teaching for a while, academia, at university level: What we had is, we had good word clearing. Everyone learned how to use the dictionary, clearing words. That means that we clarified definitions very thoroughly. We looked at the root of the definition of a

word. The misunderstood word is probably one of the biggest obstacles to children learning—and I've learned this through my students in terms of nomenclature for my profession, that people get tangled up in words. And they forget what they read because they forget after a certain point. During that era, I remember distinctly that we were reading and we had a Spanish-English dictionary with us at all times. I think that reintegrating the use of the dictionary, and really actually training kids how to **use** the dictionary completely, will help a great deal to deal with all this sort of “am I bilingual, am I not?” because it gives you a complete grasp of just plain good ol' language. And I think that that's one of the major things.

The second thing is, that the student has to go at his own pace. He cannot skip a gradient. He has to slowly get good at certain things, and then he can move on to the next. What happens often is that children get pushed into the next gradient, without really mastering the level that they're at. And that's a very important thing, **especially** in bilingual education, because a student has to be able to read both in English **and** Spanish very well.

And the third issue that I think is important is practical application. The person has to get **mass** on what he's doing. The music and the art, when we were studying social studies, we always did like a graphic depiction; we had plays that we did where we had role playing; we had costumes for each of the countries that we were studying. And I think that making those cultures real to the students, so that they have reality on what their culture is, like if you're from Guatemala or you're from Ecuador or you're from Colombia, what is the history of your culture? So that the kid isn't embarrassed to be Hispanic, it's something to be proud of. I mean, I come from a country that there are

churches built in the 15th century and the 14th century. That's a long time ago. That's long before Miami happened. So it's something that you can be proud of. And I think that those are the kind of things that the students learned, we learned—not just the language, but the culture, and to value that history.

So those are the three barriers to study: The lack of mass, which is lack of physical understanding of something. Then the second one is the skipped gradient, going beyond your point of comfort. And the third and most important one is the misunderstood word, because that can kill you—and especially in a bilingual program.

Juana Gladys: [unclear] classes [unclear] physical education, because you had to listen to the P.E. teacher trying to teach the words to the kids in both languages: basketball and baseball and things like that. “How you say in Spanish?” (laughs) They enjoyed [unclear].

Ruiz: Thank you very much, this has been very valuable. Thank you.

Gladys Margarita: Good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]