

## **Rod Martinez**

**July 12, 2023**

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:00:05] This is Elizabeth Melton. I'm the public engagement director for the Institute for Diversity and Civic Life. Today is July 12, 2023, and I am here with Dr. Rod Martinez. I'm sitting in his living room in Longview, Texas, to interview him for the Gone to Texas: 1965 Migration oral history collection. I have known Dr. Martinez since I was in middle school and have been very good friends with his youngest daughter, Jennifer, since that time. Thank you so much for joining me today.

**Rod Martinez** [00:00:41] It's a pleasure to have you.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:00:43] Would you like to start by just providing an introduction for yourself?

**Rod Martinez** [00:00:49] Present day, or past day?

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:00:51] Today.

**Rod Martinez** [00:00:52] Today. Well, right now I'm a semi-retired radiologist working from home and just trying to enjoy life a little bit more than I did during my career, during my active career. And a lot of transitions. We're in a stage of a lot of transitions. Working less, spending more time traveling and with family, enjoying the grandkids, and deciding how we're going to wind up because this house is too big for the both of us. So all those things are up in the air. It's been a long and fruitful time in Longview and in Odessa. What else?

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:01:52] Well, can you tell me a little bit about your early life? So where were you born, and what was your family like when you were younger?

**Rod Martinez** [00:02:00] I was born in Havana, in Cuba. I've forgotten the name of the hospital, but my mother though - oh, it was Calixto Garcia. She always thought that was important, because it was the best hospital in Havana. My earliest memories are of Catholic school, which happened to be about a block and a half from where we lived in downtown Havana. There were always lots of kids around when I was growing up because I'm the third of seven kids. And we lived in an apartment that was big enough to be - it really wasn't big enough to be our home and my dad's office, but that's what it was. My dad was an orthopedic surgeon in Havana. And he was on the faculty of the medical school teaching orthopedics. So he worked part time at home and part time at the university.

**Rod Martinez** [00:03:04] And our home, I remember our living room doubled as the waiting room for the patients. And so that furniture in there was nice. And the rest of the house was a bunch of small rooms with a kitchen that was probably seven feet by seven feet. And this is just coming into mind, so I'm going to say it. We used to eat in shifts. Mother would cook, and one of us go in at a time, because there wasn't room for two. And she would have a bowl of rice and a cracked fried egg over it, said, "Eat," and you had about five minutes to eat and get out. Time for the next one. My mother was my father's secretary, x-ray tech, just a girl Friday for him.

**Rod Martinez** [00:04:08] He wasn't absent minded, but he was surely a professor, professor mind. We have lots of stories about him. He bought an X-ray machine for, back then, the incredible sum of \$800, which now, you know. And he always sweated when he

had to come up with payments for the monthly payments. And it was a Siemens, and I won't tell you what he said about the company, but he felt like a slave, like anybody who owes money when they have trouble making payments. We spent all of our time outside on a big veranda that was always in the shade. And that's where we basically spent our days when we weren't in school. Our grandparents did not live with us then. But we always had Sunday dinners, Sunday lunches together.

**Rod Martinez** [00:05:32] When my father and mother accumulated enough savings to move to a home out of downtown - we lived basically downtown where you could walk everywhere like people do here - we moved to a suburbs called Alta Havana, which means, "high Havana," where it was a developed neighborhood for - actually, it was sort of a neighborhood for the Army and Navy and Air Force of Cuba and anybody else who could afford to get in. In Cuba, I don't remember there being things like mortgages. The economy and people weren't stable enough to have mortgages. So usually you just came up with the money to build or buy a house in one chunk, and my father and mother eventually did.

**Rod Martinez** [00:06:40] So we moved out there and we were so fortunate to have one car. For a long time we didn't have a car at all because my dad took it to work every day. And he worked long hours. Later on, we did well enough to have a second car. Which was a new invention. Where the steering wheel was in the in the front door. It opened in the front and the back and it was - I've seen it on the Internet. I don't know if it's being made. One day he was driving, and the steering wheel came off in his hands. And we were wanting to get rid of the car, but somebody got rid of it for us, because they totaled it on our sidewalk. Somebody looked down and crushed the car to pieces. Back then, there wasn't anything like car insurance. So it was a loss all around. Nobody got hurt.

**Rod Martinez** [00:07:58] I went to school in the mornings. When we moved out from downtown, we didn't go to the Catholic schools anymore, we went to the public schools, but the public schools were - you still had to have a uniform and a tie. Everything was very well regimented. I went to school there 'til about the fourth grade. It's just like school here, except you were confined. It was downtown, so you were confined to a yard that had high fences and all that stuff. I remember I broke my arm. I fell from two stories in our backyard, in Alta Havana. Onto - my father was a workout freak in his younger days. He did parallel bars and rings and everything. And he set all that up in our back yard. And I fell from the top of the thing that held up the ladder that you climb with your hands and broke my arm. That was near the time we left Cuba. Can we stop for a second?

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:09:23] Yeah [break].

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:09:27] So can you tell me about coming to the U.S. and what the context was for you and your family?

**Rod Martinez** [00:09:34] Well, as most islands that are desirable to other people, Cuba has been kind of a dictator du jour kind of thing. I don't know how to say "year." Dictator du - I might say a bad word if I try to speak French when I don't know what I'm saying. So like the Philippines, and like Cuba, and like other islands that have resources. And in Cuba it was sugar. Spain had it for hundreds of years. People wanted to be free from the oppression of Spain, which, it was oppressive. And so they had their chance in around the turn of the - I think it was around 1900 or a little after, a little before then. I can't remember the reason. We had ships in their harbor, and the Maine blew up. Nobody really knows who or what blew it, but it blew up from the inside out. So I'm thinking there was some

hanky-panky, or it was just an accident with an excuse for us to invade Cuba and to remove the Spaniards' grasp from it. And so we did.

**Rod Martinez** [00:11:05] And then we moved in. I mean, we meaning the United States, moved in. And basically it became a hotbed of sin and corruption and gambling and the Coca-Cola Company. Back then, sugar was king. And sugar paid for everything: schools, the universities, and the medical school. There were no taxes that I remember. I'm sure there were, but I was just a kid. You had to test to get into all schools above elementary, because they had this program where if you did not test into the schools, you went directly into a line of work to be trained for work. And so my parents both tested up with a lot of preparation from their families. My mother became a pharmacist, and at the University of Havana, that was extremely rare. Her sister had been the first one to graduate with a degree.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:12:20] The first woman?

**Rod Martinez** [00:12:21] The first woman to graduate with a degree in - I don't know what it was. It may have been pharmacy also, but it was a high degree, a high order degree in Cuba. And she trained my mother how to do it. But she asked my mother, "Do you want to do this, or do you want to do that the rest of your life?" So my mother, being my mother, she said, "No, I want to do what you're doing." So she trained her little sister, and through a lot of hard work and heartache, she became a pharmacist. And I'm not downplaying my dad. He had to work very hard to study to pass his tests. And then afterwards, you get a slot in the university, and then when you finish that, you test to get a slot in medical school, and you test to get a slot in the residency. And there were a lot of people because there were only so few slots. As you went higher, there were fewer and fewer slots, so the testing became more and more competitive and intensive. My mother helped him study. She learned everything he learned by helping him study.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:13:37] When did they get married, at what part in that process? Was he still in medical school?

**Rod Martinez** [00:13:41] They married when they were in what we call college. It was before his medical school. Like I said, she had brought the charts and the periodic table and all this stuff. She showed them to us, how she helped. And she was his illustrator whenever - she was very talented - she was his illustrator whenever he had to do a project. She would draw the anatomy, and he would explain it and all that.

**Rod Martinez** [00:14:21] Well, things were rocking along with Batista, the dictator, and people against Batista, and I can't remember all their names. Trujillo, whatever, but they were all corrupt. And the U.S. always had their thumb on it. They were trying to control, because now, since they had so many economic interests in Cuba, the pressure was on the government to protect all that. And so I'm sure there was a lot of graft and corruption. People were tired of being oppressed. So Batista came and went. He was dictator for a while, and then he went, lived in Florida for a while, and then he came back, because he wanted to be dictator again, but it didn't work out.

**Rod Martinez** [00:15:17] Well, I'll tell you. The way it didn't work out is that there was a very rich man's son in Santiago in the eastern part of Cuba who actually went to school here. He was a baseball player. His name was Fidel Castro, and he was the unacknowledged step-son of his father, who was a very rich man. And I think that rejection may have been what drove him to do all the things that he did. Anyway, he hit on a hot

button for Cuba that they wanted to be free of this oppression. And it started as a very small revolution up in the mountains. I've forgotten the name of the mountains now. Anyway, they would come down and attack, and then we run them back into the mountains. They made their way to Havana eventually in 1956. July 17, I think is the day, a day that will live in Cuban infamy. So all the people who could get out got out before he got there, including Batista. I think Batista went to either Dominican Republic or Haiti. Not to Puerto Rico. Anyway, he escaped.

**Rod Martinez** [00:16:54] And then Castro took over. Basically, there were a lot of death, a lot of casualties for the people who did not want Castro. And he came in, as all these people do, as a liberator. Then he found out that it wasn't what he thought it was going to be, because there was resistance and economic problems. So he nationalized everything. That meant that nobody would send money to Cuba anymore, so Cuba did not prosper like he thought under his imaginary utopia. And nobody would help him, because he had upset the powers that be outside of Cuba, at least in the United States. And so he had to turn somewhere for economic help, so he turned to Russia. And Russia said, "Yeah, I want to have my missiles pointing at the U.S. from Havana." And that's not what it sounded like first. First he was socialist, and then he became communist. Whenever a dictator takes over like that, there's no rules that they have to follow. They're like kings. They answer to no one. They do whatever they have to do to get what they want to get the people to do.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:18:28] But when this was happening too, you were really young. Were you aware of what was going on a little.

**Rod Martinez** [00:18:33] No. This is all from being told by my family. And I watch the documentaries, and I know enough to weed out the lies from the truth of those documentaries. And they're not all truth, as no documentary is. My father and mother, my father was very happy letting all that happen over there, and him being a professor and having his private practice and all this stuff, because he'd worked so hard to get there. And so he was just - my dad is an honest and decent man. And whenever there were people who were fighting Castro [who] got injured, broken bones by bullets, he took care of them. Well, guess what? When you take care of enemies of Castro, you become an enemy of Castro no matter what your profession is.

**Rod Martinez** [00:19:36] In the hospital my dad worked at, we had a relative. I don't know if it was an aunt or some relative of ours who used to work cleaning the hospital. And she noticed - in the basement is where the committees met. The committees that - the communist committees, the locals. And so they had - the short of it is they had blacklists. And she noticed on the erased board - the chalkboards that you all don't use anymore - that my dad's name was on the list. Just you could barely see it. And he told my mother. My mother said [claps hands], "We have to get out before you disappear." Because people were disappearing all the time. And if you asked too hard, you would disappear too. And so my father - and I didn't know any of this was going on, because I had been brainwashed in school. And I came home one day, and I said, "If you are not loyal to Castro, I'm going to turn all of you in." And it scared the pants off my parents and my older sisters. And I was just responding to the brainwashing, because I was a young kid. You can put so many things that are wrong into a young kid's mind.

**Rod Martinez** [00:21:07] So my mother prepared for leaving, and everybody was trying to leave. This is around 1960-61. We just saw that things were just getting worse and worse. There was a newspaper collection area near our home in the suburbs. I was playing outside with our - she wasn't a nanny so much as a relative who lived with us to help my

mother out. But she got paid, and she lived in the back, so yeah, she was a - I don't know if you'd call her a servant, but it was done by relatives, so you could give them money, and help my parents out. I was out there, and she was watching me . And boom, big explosion. And we found out later that it was one of Castro's bombs that went off. This was around the time that he was not yet in Havana. And some poor kid, some poor delivery kid got killed, because he was there picking up newspapers, and he opened the door and set off a bomb. Anyway, I still remember that. I was standing here, and it was right over there in a shopping center.

**Rod Martinez** [00:22:40] And with all the sum total of all those things, my mother and father said, "We got to get out." There was no getting out. They had stopped giving visas just to leave, but they were still giving visas for vacations and things like that. Where were we going to get the visas? Where were we going to go? You couldn't come to the States. So we were going to take a vacation to Colombia, in South America. And my mother went to the Colombian embassy. The people in embassies are native to the country in which the embassy is in. And so there was a Cuban lady there, and she talked to her. And she said, "I'm sorry, we're not giving out visas anymore."

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:23:40] For vacation even?

**Rod Martinez** [00:23:40] For anything. To Columbia, because they don't want to upset Castro. And so my mother said, "But I have my family." I think we were five kids and my parents trying to get out. And nobody knew my mother was pregnant. My mother does not give up. She tried two or three times with the lady, and she said, "I can't help you." So she planted herself outside the embassy across the street, waited for the lady to leave to go home, walked with her, day after day after day after day, until the lady said - and I think the woman understood her plight. She befriended her. And that embassy worker must have admired my mother for her tenacity. So she finally said, "Come such-and-such a date to the back door or whatever door, and I will give you the papers that you need to get to Colombia." And she did.

**Rod Martinez** [00:24:59] In the meantime, because of the restrictions in Cuba, you could not take any money out. Never mind the money was worthless because they exchanged Cuban dollars for - which were on par with the US dollar before Castro - to the new independent Cuban dollar, which was seven to one relative to that. So it was worthless, nearly worthless. But your money, the old money couldn't be spent. So everybody had to change their good dollars for crappy dollars. But you still couldn't take a significant amount of money or if you took your degrees out, they knew you weren't coming back, your professional degrees. They knew you'd - so we didn't take any of that.

**Rod Martinez** [00:25:48] My mother made coats for us, because we did not have coats in Cuba. Cuba is a tropical island. We didn't have air conditioning, we didn't have heating. It was just a shotgun house. You opened the windows, opened the doors, and that's all the ventilation you get, which was fine. So she made coats for us, and in the lining of the coat, she had put money. All this was done in secret from me and my two younger brothers, because we were stupid. But the girls knew. The older girls knew. For me, it was an adventure. I didn't know what was going on, but I learned later that it was very stressful. Of course, it was a stressful time for everybody. If you get caught, you go to jail or you die. That's not a bad trade for my mom and my dad, too. We got liberty or we got death. It's just like everywhere else.

**Rod Martinez** [00:26:54] All was ready. We couldn't tell a soul we were leaving. And I didn't know -

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:26:59] Even on vacation.

**Rod Martinez** [00:27:00] Yeah. Even on the day that we left, we didn't tell a soul. We just left. Went to the ports. And of course, the ports are just packed with people trying to leave. We go through - I don't know what you call it - customs on the way out, you go through immigration or something. And they wouldn't let my big sister through. And my mother can argue the paint off a wall.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:27:38] Do you know what their reasoning was?

**Rod Martinez** [00:27:39] Well, they wanted to keep her for sex trafficking, I'm sure. Sex trafficking is not a new problem. And my mother said, "We're not leaving without her. None of us is going on that ship without her." I don't know. She went to talk to the guy. I don't know what you told him. I don't know if she bribed him or paid him. But we were all together on the ship. Guess who was on the ship? The lady who gave my mother the Colombian visas. She was out. We didn't have a cabin. So my dad started farming us out to people that he thought he knew. And he kept the girls and just farmed the boys out. And then they started coming on board and taking people off the ship because they can. So everybody was very quiet. You don't argue with these people.

**Rod Martinez** [00:28:47] So the two ships finally left. I don't know if you know this story or not. We boarded the ships at 6 p.m., and the ships left the dock, I think probably around midnight. And then they went - if this is Cuba, and Havana's up there, we went west into the Yucatan Strait. And I forget the name of the hurricane - plowed right through there that night. It was a different time. And I have looked up the name. My sister, we all have looked it up, cause it's all story to us. And we survived. The sister ship, all souls died. Everybody died on the other ship. Everybody. It was completely lost. Got to Carthage, Cartagena, that morning. I think it's in Venezuela. That's where we made port. First thing my parents did was call Havana to talk to his mother and father and tell them, "We are safe," because all those other people died. And in Cuba, they didn't know which ship we were on, because it was crazy.

**Rod Martinez** [00:30:22] We had the best breakfast. Fried eggs and toast. And I remember still, looking out over the water. We were there. And then my parents were talking about what to do, because we didn't have a plan. We just wanted to get out. So we had our Colombian visas, and my parents, with the money they had, bought us airline tickets from Carthage to Bogota. And Bogota is the other mile high city. And by the time we got to Bogota, it was midnight. We were all there with our luggage in the airport, and the place was empty. Most airports are empty at midnight. We're just kind of there. A man walks up to us and says, "Do you have money?" And of course, we're pretty much out of money. "No." Which is a dangerous question to answer, anyway. "Do you have a place to go?" We said, "No." He said, "Come with me." The way I remember it is, they took us to a Catholic church, and we slept on the pews that night.

**Rod Martinez** [00:32:11] And they had a system set up to take people, because everybody was showing up from Cuba. And so they plugged us into their network. And my dad, we had the advantage that my dad was a doctor, so they plugged him into the doctor network. They got us an apartment. They bought us food. I don't know what else they did.

That's all I remember that they did. We ate a lot of potatoes, cause that's their - what is the name of that?

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:32:50] Their staple?

**Rod Martinez** [00:32:54] Their staple food is not rice. Potatoes. For the longest time, I couldn't look at a potato when I got to the States. And you know the gang wars that you hear about? The drug wars? They already existed in Bogota. It wasn't - all this stuff is that the world knows about it now. The only people who were allowed out of that apartment were my parents and me, because I was the oldest boy. And I used to cross a little park to do the shopping, come back. We were there to -

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:33:38] And you would have been ten-ish?

**Rod Martinez** [00:33:41] I was nine.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:33:41] Nine?

**Rod Martinez** [00:33:42] Nine. Because my dad's a doctor, we would all come out about 10:00 in the morning every day and take off our jackets. It was cold. Take off our jackets and do this: put our arms out, let the sun hit our arms, because you need to activate your vitamin D. Now you take D3, but before, you only make D, so you have to go to - maybe D1 or D2. It has to convert to D3 by sunlight. And so that's what we did every day. And we just spent a lot of time in that apartment just waiting.

**Rod Martinez** [00:34:22] And my father could not work as a physician, because he didn't have a license. So they hired him as an orderly for the hospital. But guess what he did? He was a physician. He was known. He was a known quantity in Bogota, because that community of physicians is close knit, and he'd given conferences in Carthage and in - what's the capital of Venezuela? I can't remember. I have photographs from that time and drawings that my mother made for him. This is all before then. This is all before we left Cuba. They gave him a job as an orderly, paid him as an orderly, which didn't pay for anything. But it gave him purpose, and it gave him something to distract himself. And my mother, again, took care of all the paperwork. It took us about three months to get everything in order and get permission to come to the States as political refugees.

**Rod Martinez** [00:35:33] But there's a story in there, amongst many stories I know that I don't remember. One is that you had to have tuberculosis - there was no test for tuberculosis back then, so you had to take a chest X-ray on everybody who was coming to the States, and I still read a lot of those from the border. So all the kids went, my dad and my mom, had our X-rays taken. He says, "Come back. We're going to have the radiologist dictate these or read these." We come back. Where are the X-rays? They've gone missing. Okay? So we pay for the X-rays again. We have them all done again. And we come back, "Oh, they're missing," again. And my mother, she got so mad, because fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. And she'd been fooled twice. So we went back, paid for them again, had them all done, and [they] said, "Come back whenever we read these." "No. We're staying here until you read them and give them express to us. You're not going to do that again to us."

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:36:52] It was just a scam.

**Rod Martinez** [00:36:53] It was a scam. They're selling normal X-rays. Big price for normal X-rays to get into the States. So that happened. The people in Colombia are so generous.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:37:09] Unless you need X-rays?

**Rod Martinez** [00:37:11] Well, that was just one business. There are shady people in business all the time. They found a place they could make a lot of money. And I'm sure they were sold for top dollar. You know, "What age do you need? Seven years, six years, five years? We've got them all." They would come on the weekends and take us to the swimming pool. One time they took us to one of the mountains nearby where they slaughtered a lamb or a goat, and we had the most delicious meal that I can remember. There were just kind. They were just so kind and generous. Time to leave. One of the physicians was a partner in an export company. They exported bananas to the United States. And so they were kind enough to give us the captain's cabin on the ship to Houston.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:38:20] Do you know why your parents wanted specifically to get to the U.S. and not stay in Colombia?

**Rod Martinez** [00:38:29] Because everybody knows this is the best country in the world, and still is. There was never any question as to where we would go. And it was the right thing to do. Look at our family. We have been as successful as we want to be. And that drive for success was ingrained. We were brought up in that atmosphere. So we all have that in us, sometimes to a fault. We have family in Florida. My mother had a sister in Florida. And you almost had to have family to go to the - and I think that's still true today, although all bets are off now.

**Rod Martinez** [00:39:46] So the trip was interesting from Bogota to Buena Ventura, which is a port on the Pacific side of Columbia. So the trip down to the mountains - is it the Andes there? I guess it is the Andes - it was harrowing. It was one lane, waterfalls, two taxicabs, a lot of praying - not by me, because my parents, I guess, did the praying - and a few bottles of coke. That's what I remember. And we got drenched in the waterfalls, and there were eighteen wheelers. Like, "What are you doing here?" So you had to move aside for the trucks to pass. There were no barriers, hardly any pavement, and I'm sure a lot of cars down the ravines. Anyway, it took us about seven or eight hours to come down the mountain from the Bogota level to sea level, and they welcomed us onto the ship.

**Rod Martinez** [00:40:58] We had two rooms, lots of beds, a key to the refrigerator. They have to have a key to the refrigerator on the ship, because otherwise the sailors will clean it out. I didn't know. I was just enjoying it. We were on a ship on the ocean again. I enjoyed being on the ship from Cuba to Colombia. I didn't know that people had died until I was older. Here's up-against-the-wall Spanish culture or Latin culture. The first mate on the ship asked my dad for my sister's hand in marriage. I was nine, and she was thirteen. You got to remember, that was the time of transition from that kind of thinking to our kind of thinking. Of course, my dad said no [laughs]. We got to Houston with - oh, the Panama Canal is a sight to live through. Not to see, but to live through. Because they had these little locomotives pulling the ship along the canal, and then the ship rises and falls with the water level. My dad had bought a Kodak, one of these little oblong, ovoid Kodaks. Anyway, he took picture after picture after picture. It was all black and white, but they bought the camera right before we left Colombia. And that was good, because we have pictures of all that stuff. So can I tell a side story?



**Elizabeth Melton** [00:42:53] Absolutely.

**Rod Martinez** [00:42:55] Everybody woke up one morning, and my younger brother was missing.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:43:01] On the boat?

**Rod Martinez** [00:43:02] On the boat. I have never seen my mother go crazy. So we looked all over the room. We went to the kitchen to see if he sneaked off to eat, because he did. Nothing. And then they sent a sailor down into the cargo area, because cargo areas are not just bananas, they're full of snakes. And so nothing. They couldn't find my brother. My brother sleep walked. And so my mom was just freaking out, understandably. We were all upset. And then we were all crying and boo-hooing and all. And my brother Roberto walks in, in the room where we are, and he says, "What's going on?" And my mother was so angry with him, because she thought he had been hiding. And I don't think he got spanked, but I think he got close to it. And so we come to find out that he was so small, that he had rolled under one of the big dressers, one of the big armoires.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:44:18] In the room?

**Rod Martinez** [00:44:19] He was in the back against the wall, because the ship rocked him. And he's a sound sleeper and a sleep walker, so he didn't hear anything. And then he woke up, and, "What's all the ruckus?" Anyway, he survived that. We all did. Got to Houston. Seems that we always had port in the mornings, which I guess is a good thing. And then we said, "Well, we need to go to Miami." So the money we had was Greyhound tickets. So all seven of us, Greyhound, sandwiches, all the way to Miami. And there we went to my aunt's house, Sylvia, bless her heart, and we lived with her. I mean, imagine adding seven people to your household of three.

**Rod Martinez** [00:45:14] We lived with her for about a month, and we were plugged into the political refugee system, which was a well-oiled machine by that time in Florida. And guess what the government did for my father? They said, "We know you don't have your papers, but we know who you are and what you are. And so you can work at the VA." He worked at the VA for six months. During that time, he says -

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:45:55] And that was in Miami?

**Rod Martinez** [00:45:55] And Coral Gables. We were at Miami. The hospital was an old resort hotel that had been turned into a VA hospital. And he took care of orthopedic problems for the VA, patients, and he liked it. The English was hard for him, although all Cubans learn English in school. But it's book learning and actual languages, not the same thing, especially when you're older. And so he studied. Back then, and even now, you have to pass the exams for the state that you want to practice in, and he chose California, New York, Ohio, and Arizona. He hadn't chosen Texas. But anyway, he passed all those very hard tests. It's called the ECFMG [Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates], or was called the ECFMG. And I don't remember what that - the something foreign medical graduates. Something. So he had a friend in Tucson who has an OB, Cuban OB, and he said "Come on out here," so we did. And we drove a '56 black, red, and white four door Chevy. Big Chevy, the cars were huge back then. And they had a big back dash. And there were, I remember, seven of us in this car.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:47:44] And just two bench seats?

**Rod Martinez** [00:47:47] No, the seats were full. I'm sorry, yeah, they were bench seats. And so there were three of us -.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:47:53] Probably no seatbelts.

**Rod Martinez** [00:47:54] Yeah, no seatbelts. Three of us in the front, and then four of us in the back. And then when it wasn't sunshiny, we'd sleep on that back part, under the back windshield, and we slept on the floor. The floors were huge. Cars were big back then. And we made our way across the US. Back then it was Highway 80. Was it Highway 80? I think so. Highway 80 to Tucson. And we couldn't afford anything, because we'd spent all our money on the trip. So we got us a house, that was, I promise you, it was adobe. It had no substance to it that I could see. There were two rooms, and it had two king beds in it, and a swamp cooler, and all five of us kids slept on one bed, on a king-sized bed. And if you fell off, it was your fault. And people did fall off. It's funny how you don't get hurt very much when you fall, and you're sleeping. You should get hurt more, but you don't.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:49:09] Particularly as a kid, I guess, you just bounce back.

**Rod Martinez** [00:49:14] Oh, I forgot. My mother was - did my mother give birth in Miami? She might have.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:49:25] So she was heavily pregnant in Colombia.

**Rod Martinez** [00:49:28] She was getting that way. But yeah, my father tells the story, told the story, he said, "Look, I know you're nauseous, and you want to vomit," at the Cuban port. He said, "If you vomit, they will quarantine us all, and we will not get out." So she did not vomit. So anyway, I think she had Linda Florida or Linda in Tucson. I just can't remember anymore. I do know that we had a crib in their bedroom in Tucson, so it was probably Linda in Tucson. And then Renaldo, the youngest son, was born either Tucson or Odessa. Anyway, he made the grand sum of \$600 a month working for the VA. And it was good for him. It was good, cause he could do what he was trained for, what he loved to do. And my mother just basically did everything else. I remember - and we're kids. We don't know that we're Cuban kids. We're just kids. We played. We had a little pool in the backyard. We played ball.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:50:51] And once, I don't know if it was me or my brother, we hit a baseball into the plate glass window at the back of the house, and my mother just looked at it and started bawling, because we didn't have the \$35 it took to repair it. And I remember back then, it was a lot of prejudice. So the neighbors who hated us lent my mother the money to fix the window. She swallowed her pride and went over there and asked them for it, if they could help. Swallowing your pride is very hard, especially when you have any pride. And those are just stories I remember. We went back to see that house when we were visiting with my brother, and my brother bought a retirement home in Tucson, which he has sold since, because it didn't work out. And we went and visited that house, and it looks like somebody's garage. It's a teeny tiny house.

**Rod Martinez** [00:52:07] My grandparents - we were able to bring up my father's parents to the US, because they didn't care about old people. There was a three-bedroom house, one bedroom for all the kids, and we had bunk beds, and people slept on the floor and everything. And we had a transistor radio, and we'd listen to the Beatles, and we could sing every song that they had. We didn't know what the words meant, but we could sing it.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:52:37] So y'all were still speaking Spanish, I'm assuming, at home.

**Rod Martinez** [00:52:43] Yeah.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:52:43] Were you going to school at that time already?

**Rod Martinez** [00:52:44] I went to school in Miami, and they put me in the fourth grade again, because they said, "Well, you have to learn English, and so we figure it's going to be okay if you repeat the fourth grade, because it's different here." And it is different. A lot of reading about a rabbit. And I would read so fast that I did not understand what I had read, because I read fast, finished first in the class. And she asked me, "Okay, well what did the story say?" in English, and I'd go, "I don't know. I read it. You told me to read it." So I knew that I had to slow down my reading to understand what I was reading, and that was Miami.

**Rod Martinez** [00:53:28] My parents had the front bedroom with a crib in it. We were in the middle bedroom. It was all bunks, bunk beds. And then my grandparents took the girls' bedroom, so they had to move in with us. And so we lived, what, nine people in a three bedroom house with a small living room and a small kitchen and a small dining room. And there was no such thing as sunscreen back then, anyway, real sunscreen. So we all were very suntanned. My first snow was Mount Lemmon in Tucson, and we drove up just to see the snow, and we did. Got in the car and came back. But we all got the ski bug, the skiing bug then. We started with those little trash can covers that are plastic, they're made for sliding down. We were wild. I remember hitting a fence pretty hard. But we didn't get hurt.

**Rod Martinez** [00:54:50] But we went there three or four times a year just to look at the snow and - it is a toboggan? I don't know what that thing is called. Yeah. When we got older, we started skiing. Not there, but in other places, some of us. So we were there two years, and my dad wanted to be in private practice again. And so he took the - all the other places had disadvantages, and Ohio was too cold. New York was too cold. California was too expensive, even at that time, for us. So he took his Texas tests and passed them.

**Rod Martinez** [00:55:32] And so we moved into Odessa. We moved to Odessa, and when we drove into Odessa, they were not yet controlling the carbon black plants. And so there was a black cloud of black carbon over. Where the wind blew, that's where the carbon went, and everything was black. The leaves were black, the ground was black, and everything. And it was a high school student who did a research project on it, went out there and dug up stuff. And after that they had to close down the carbon plant. Imagine that. Politicians couldn't do it, but a high school kid did it.

**Elizabeth Melton** [00:56:15] As a young kid driving into this black-covered town, what did you think?

**Rod Martinez** [00:56:22] This is hell. And it was hot and dry. And it's like, well, Tucson was hot and dry, but it was relatively clean. Tucson is a place where old airplanes go to die. Every day at 2:00, you would hear an explosion. Why? They were blowing up an airplane so people couldn't take them. You see pictures of it from the satellite systems, hundreds of airplanes lined up, B-52s and everything. Anyway, that's a side story.

**Rod Martinez** [00:56:52] So we came to Texas. We were always enrolled in school right away. For Cubans, school is the answer to success. My wife said, "Stay out of religion and

politics," so I will. It's not so much that way anymore here. But in a perfect world, school is the key to success for everyone. For everyone, because it doesn't matter who you are, it's what you do. So we got enrolled in school in Odessa. Started driving when I was thirteen, because I was made to do all the chores that my father couldn't and my mother wouldn't, because I spoke English much better than they did. And so I started my driving permit at thirteen, got my license at fourteen, and promptly had an accident [laughs], and didn't have accidents after that. The mechanics hated me, because I was a curious kid and there were no rules then that you couldn't be back there and get maimed by a machine. Now it's no fun anymore. It's like, "You can't go back there." Okay.

**Rod Martinez** [00:58:39] I went to school, did good. Did well in school. We all did well in school, because we had to. And plus, school was fun. My mother said I would come and cry to my mom. I says, "I don't know what to do." And my mom said, "Listen, it's simple. Do exactly what your teacher says." And I did. I started doing that. I started making A's, went and made A's the whole time. She taught me how to draw. My dad was the stern doctor, "Come with me. Come with me, and I'll show you how to be a doctor," guy. And my mother was the, "Let me teach you how to draw. Let me teach you how to do 3D on a piece of paper. Let me do this." She was the artist of the family.

**Rod Martinez** [00:59:37] My dad, he became the absentminded professor. My mother was the one in charge of everything in the house, and I stuck next to her and I learned how to deal with electricity, putting in plugs, changing bulbs, putting in light switches without killing yourself. And I learned a lot from her. And that's my [---] now, stopping a leak. But now it's like, "Okay, should I risk breaking this thing or getting somebody to help me fix?" I have the fixing spirit in me. Of course I want to fix everything, right? That's what guys are.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:00:24] Did you make a lot of friends in school? Or were y'all active with other people in Odessa?

**Rod Martinez** [01:00:31] We were active as a family. We were active with other Cuban and other Latin couples and their families. And there weren't that many. There were a few. And most of them were doctors. I did not make friends very well, because it was - I don't know if it was prejudice or just me being a wallflower. I don't really want to tell you those stories. Let me just say that there was some hostility that broke through. Don't know why. I didn't bother anybody. Maybe it's because I didn't bother anybody. Because I had a core group of friends who were honor roll, we all were very tightly knit, but there was only five or six of us there. My best friend in high school, David Schaefer, just retired from UT in Tyler, and I worked there for almost ten years. Not with him, but in the same hospital.

**Rod Martinez** [01:01:46] It's very hard for me to make friends. But when I do make a friend, it's - I think that's true of most people. It's hard to be involved in other people's lives unless you're really, really close, because you are happy in their happiness, you're sad in their sadness. You always worry about them when they're in problems. And now this age group its medical problems. We're in a church group now where all we pray about are family problems and health problems.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:02:43] Did you always think you would be a doctor? Did you always want that?

**Rod Martinez** [01:02:49] My dad did.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:02:50] Yeah [laughs], somebody did.

**Rod Martinez** [01:02:52] My dad said, "All you guys are going to be doctors." And it was like, "Okay." When I rebelled as a teenager, I said, "I love physics. I want to be an astronaut." I loved my physics professor, Dr. Poole, because he could tell me where a projectile would go if you knew the speed and the angle and where it would land. Every time, except unless the wind pushed it. And it was like, "Really?" And all things physics are that way except for when you get down to quantum physics. Because I think I like predictability. Who doesn't? I guess some people don't.

[01:03:42] I eventually - I don't know what the words is - realized that if I wanted that, if I wanted the flexibility in life that my parents had by leaving a country, coming to a new country, and immediately being in demand, then it would be a doctor, because that was my background. I said, "I need to have a profession that applies in the whole world, whether or not I'm licensed, because people are the same all over the world." And so that thinking drew me more and more into medicine. But I liked it. My dad had always, whenever I wanted to go, he would take me [to] make rounds with him, and you won't believe the things I did in the OR because I was his son.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:04:41] As a young person?

**Rod Martinez** [01:04:42] As a thirteen and fourteen-year-old, fifteen-year-old. I cut legs off. I have sutured, I have put casts on. I have reduced fractures. I have pumped blood into a dying man. And all the other doctors let me be there. And it was eye-opening, but I wasn't scared. I don't understand why people are upset with blood.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:05:22] I'm not a body person.

**Rod Martinez** [01:05:23] So I'm sort of training my grandkids to be insensitive to those kind of things, and I've got two of the four [laughs]. I got Lucy who will look at this [---] and go, "Oh!" And then Libby, who is six and used to look at it, and she hates it. And then the other two are like, "No, don't show me." It's like, "There's nothing here that's scary." And I don't know if that's - it's got to be some kind of genetic, and it's got to be some kind of environmental thing, because - I don't know. Marcia, of course, she doesn't have it, and we talk about it. Jennifer will say, "I can take that," but Eamon can't take that.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:06:18] Yeah, I always remember that nothing was really off limits at your dinner table when it comes to health and bodies, and that was very different from my family's experience. Doctor families.

**Rod Martinez** [01:06:35] Yeah. No, I don't think all doctors do it.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:06:37] Yeah, sure.

**Rod Martinez** [01:06:37] No. And so one of the favorite things we've done at all our family dinners was if a new word popped into the conversation, we'd say, "Oh, hold the presses. We got a new word here. Where did it come from? What does it mean? Let's split it up into the Spanish and the English and the Latin, wherever it came from." And now Amanda's that way. Jennifer, not so much. But surprisingly Eamon is.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:07:07] It does make a lot of sense to me, too, Jennifer's fascination with drawing anatomy and those different trends and things.

**Rod Martinez** [01:07:19] But I'm going down rabbit trails, so bring me back.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:07:25] Well, I'm just thinking, particularly, so once y'all were in Odessa, and it seems like your path was laid out for you, or at least the expectation for you to become a doctor. But what was it like just adjusting to Texas. It seems like when you first get to Miami, there was at least family there. And there were always some small pockets Cubans or Latin families. Was there anything - in Texas, we always think Texans are so different, but maybe we're not.

**Rod Martinez** [01:08:07] Texans were wonderful, especially in Odessa. It's like the land of, actually, the independent thinker. Not a whole lot of trendy things going on in Odessa because of that. It's been an advantage and a detriment to the city. Midland and Odessa are about twelve miles apart. Midland is the executive city, Odessa is a blue collar city. And so a lot of the people they were blue collar, and a lot of people there had prejudices that were not so much existing to a greater extent, but expressed more by blue collar people. When I first started there, the high schools were not integrated. There was, south of the tracks - and literally, this was south of the tracks - there was Hector High School, where the Blacks and the Mexicans went.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:09:19] How were you classified?

**Rod Martinez** [01:09:20] I was classified as the doctor's son. I think I at Permian. At Bonham, my junior high. At Permian, I don't remember seeing any other Spanish kids.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:09:38] But you weren't Mexican, so you were White?

**Rod Martinez** [01:09:41] No, but I'm Martinez.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:09:43] Yeah.

**Rod Martinez** [01:09:45] So I've always been Spanish, but I've always thought that I ride a different rail than, "Oh, yeah, you're Mexican." "No, I'm not Mexican, I'm Cuban, and I'm a straight A student." Then you build up this armor of, "You can challenge me on whatever you want to, but this is me. Yes, I happen to be not from this country, but look at what -" And I understand now, "Look what God has allowed me to do." Back then I used to say, "Look what I've done." And teachers are good in that they don't discriminate with color or race. They discriminate with slouches and workers. And if you work hard at their class, they will love you. I think you know that. You've probably seen it now on both sides.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:10:50] Yes. As both teacher and as student.

**Rod Martinez** [01:10:53] And my mother was right. Just do what the teacher says. And they weren't perfect people. I never got a lick, but I knew a lot of kids who did. And unfortunately, one of my professors, one of my teachers enjoyed giving licks, but I never got one.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:11:20] So when you started the process of applying to college, did you have a range of places that you looked at?

**Rod Martinez** [01:11:30] Well, my dad has always said, "It doesn't matter where you go, it's who you are. It's what you do when you get there." I was young, and I got married right out of high school. And I was going to say, "young and dumb," which, yeah, I was young

and dumb. I know that that decision was not the best for my life. But I got a lovely daughter out of it. Okay, I'm in Odessa, I'm married, I have free tuition at Odessa College because of what I did in high school. And so I went there, and I did, instead of two years - that's where I had the least support was my counselor. And I can't remember his name, but poor guy.

**Rod Martinez** [01:12:37] He was my medical career counselor. "What are you going to do after this?" kind of thing. And he needed to go back to school and learn how to talk to people. So I told him that I was planning on taking MCAT [Medical College Admission Test] out of Odessa College, and he goes, "What?" And I go, "Well, I can get all my credits here if I stay an extra year, three years instead of two, I can get ninety-nine hours. I need 104, and I can get to 104 hours. Take MCAT and go to school, go to medical school." He says, "Pah, you'll never do that. You will never be able to do that." I said, "Really? Okay." So I did [laughs]. And I saw him many years later when I'd come back to Odessa as a doctor. And it was not a friendly interaction. I didn't say anything. It was him. Because I did not like him, and I expressed my feelings to one of my professors, and of course, he heard about it. And then [Name] told me, "You could have said this and this and this and this." I just took it. But he's still a bitter man, and I'm not. It must have been hard for him.

**Rod Martinez** [01:14:08] So you were asking me, applying to schools. Well back then, affirmative action was just in its baby steps. And being the person I am, in my applications for medical school, they asked me, "Would you like your race to be a factor in your admission?" Something or other. I wrote there, I didn't say no, across the sheet I said, "Absolutely not." I don't want to get in because of my name or my color or my country of origin. I want to get in because I'm good. Or you think I'm not good, don't let me in. That may have made them accept me [laughs]. I don't know. But then all my brothers, two younger brothers, went to the same medical school. I don't know if they had liked me. I guess they did. And then my third brother didn't want to be a doctor, so he became a very, very successful dentist. So yeah, we all became doctors.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:15:27] So where did you go to medical school?

**Rod Martinez** [01:15:30] Southwestern in Dallas.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:15:32] And so that was your first move towards more central Texas, I guess, from Odessa. Was that a big change at all?

**Rod Martinez** [01:15:42] Well, the change was more in my family situation than anything else, because wherever we'd go, we'd go as a family. I had a daughter then. We moved to Dallas together. I was accepted right away at Galveston, but Galveston was hurricanes and floods and things. And I'm thinking, "Oh, Southwestern, will you take me?" And they said, "No, but we'll put you on a waiting list." And so we'd already gone down and looked for apartments in Galveston and all that. And then a month before school starts, UT Southwestern called. So, "Okay, we're going to Dallas." So we spent eight years in Dallas, four in medical school, and then four in residency. I went to residency at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas. Baylor in Dallas. Then we move back to Odessa. I worked there for eight or nine years. And then honestly, we felt the Lord's calling to move out of Odessa. First it was going to be Dallas again, and then it was Longview. Where's Longview?

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:17:05] So when did you meet Marsha, your wife? Was that during your residency?

**Rod Martinez** [01:17:11] Residency, yes.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:17:12] In Dallas.

**Rod Martinez** [01:17:16] My first marriage fell apart, mostly my fault. I lived as a bachelor for a while. I lived at the hospital for a while. You see that in movies, but it really happens in real life. And then I was alone for a while. And then I ran into Marsha because I had a headache, and she - back then, people used to give Aspirins for headache. That tells you how long ago it was. I was dating somebody else in between. I was dating somebody else. And I said, "Well, I'm not going to ask her out now. I would have to finish that relationship before I started this relationship." And so she was mystified and fascinated by me because I don't know what I did. But I did talk to her a lot, and she opened up to me a lot. I think that was the basis of our relationship, we could talk about pretty much anything at any time.

**Rod Martinez** [01:18:32] Our first date was a four-hour, five-hour coffee at - they're on business now. They're on I-75 there in Dallas across from Methodist Hospital. The name has gone. She'd remember. She's my portable memory device. We were so busy, both of us, me with residency and seeing my daughter on my time off, and her with her nursing, that the only time we had in the morning was Sunday morning. The only time we had was Sunday morning together. So I started going to church with her, cause I really wasn't into all that.

**Rod Martinez** [01:19:29] I was raised Catholic, but I was nothing for many years, which was one of the main reasons why I had no compass, no moral compass anyway. She went to Northwest Bible Church in Dallas, which was - I'd never seen a church like that in my life. And the pastor, when he was talking about Jesus, he was talking to me. He would lock eyes with me, and I was in the back. He would lock eyes with me, it's like, "Oh, okay. You mean I don't have to do this? It's my choice?" Catholicism is different. I don't know if you're familiar with Catholicism. Catholicism is a "have to," and Protestantism is your choice. People love to have the choice of this and that. How far do you want me to get into this?

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:20:32] I mean, it's part of your narrative, and I think that's -

**Rod Martinez** [01:20:38] Okay. Well, she happened to live in an apartment complex where there were gobs of seminary students that went to DTS, Dallas Theological Seminary. And so whenever they'd have group things, they were there, and they must have realized that I was not a Christian. We talked and those guys actively pursued dialog. And I had a lot of questions, and I still do. I had a lot of questions. Then I got on an airplane to check a residency out in Albuquerque, and the guy next to me was a pastor. And so I counted the number of times that the Gospel was presented to me before I said, "Yes, I want to do this," and it was about sixteen times.

**Rod Martinez** [01:21:38] And I'm still a very stubborn person. For some Christians, life is a line. For mine, mine is a roller coaster with loops and twists and turns. Christianity as my seatbelt. Jesus is my seatbelt. For me, it wasn't like, "Yesterday I was not a Christian, today I'm a Christian, and my whole life is different." It wasn't like that. It's been living a work in progress, and Marsha says it's never over until you die. And even then you'll be developing in heaven, which I do believe in. It's a funny thing, I used to be an atheist, Catholic, atheist, agnostic, nothing, Christian. And all the things that people ridicule and still ridicule, I understand and firmly believe them. And it's like, "Okay, that's fine." All these things are our choices. God loves us. In compulsion, there is no love. Love is a realm of



free will. Otherwise we'd just be robots. My life has been one humbling mistake after another. I can't wait for Jesus to come back. A lot of people don't feel that way, I look forward to the trumpets that precede the rapture. And I'm a pretrib rapture believer. That's what the Bible pretty much says. And anybody hearing this tape, you can do that, too. What else would you like me to spew?

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:24:10] Well, so we have progressed through your timeline and stuff. So how did you come to Longview and what was that like? Just because for those of us who are familiar with Texas, we know there's a lot of different personalities within the state, and east Texas, I think, is a little different.

**Rod Martinez** [01:24:30] Well surprisingly, Midland and Odessa are like Tyler and Longview. And the move from Odessa, the blue-collar town, to Longview, the blue-collar town, where Tyler and Midland are the white-collar towns.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:24:43] A little bit, yeah.

**Rod Martinez** [01:24:44] Yeah. So I don't have any time for those people. I don't know a stranger, and my wife used to get so embarrassed about it. God gave me a - I'll tell you about Longview - but God gave me the ability to just talk to anybody about anything within five minutes. And it's a blessing and a curse, because you say, "Oh, what door did I open here?" Because people are hurting. They just want to talk to somebody who listens, and I'm a good listener. It's hard to say when the feelings - when the indications started that we needed to leave Odessa. But it was not anything economic. Odessa was fine. Our lives would have been a lot more stable had we stayed in Odessa.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:25:45] Because of the family unit?

**Rod Martinez** [01:25:47] Yeah, family. But we, both of us, felt like it was time to go, and we felt it was the Lord calling us. We had friends in Dallas, and I told my friends in Dallas - they had told me, "If ever you want to move to Dallas, we can find a job for you here at this hospital." So I called and said, "Hey, we're thinking about leaving." So they hooked me up with a Methodist group in Dallas, and I had contract in hand. And then Dr. Irwin called me and said, "I heard you're looking for a job." I said, "Well, I'm not looking for a job, but okay, what do you have?" He says, "I live in Longview, just lost my partner to drugs, alcohol and stuff." And so I said, "Well, let me see if we can get a flight to come out and look at it." Because I'm the kind of person, if I had signed the contract with Methodist, if I had given them the contract, "Oh, I'm sorry. I just signed with Methodist." Dallas was daunting because it was so big, and we had kids. I still wanted to go where we thought the Lord wanted us to go. So He pulled us out of Odessa with Dallas, and then He gave us Longview. And Odessa and Longview are very similar towns. Oil and gas, sort of independent people, good churches, a good job, although I made less money here than I did in Odessa for a while, and then it picked up. We worked very hard. That was before you could look at stuff on the internet. We're still sorting out why God has us here. Don't have the answer.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:27:58] So Jennifer could meet me [laughs].

**Rod Martinez** [01:28:01] All the things that happened were orchestrated behind the scenes or pre-known behind the scenes by God. This today was orchestrated by the Lord. I don't question anymore why we're at a particular place at a particular time. You just go, "Okay Lord, why did you make this happen or allow this to happen in this way." And then

you take that opportunity to do what you think he wants you to do with it." And it's like a whole different way of thinking. But when you don't follow that all the time, you can get in trouble. And I'm very stubborn, and I learned to break rules from my mom. And you think, "Well, how can that be?"

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:29:00] That tenacity?

**Rod Martinez** [01:29:01] My mother was a very constructive rule breaker. When she had to, she broke the rules, and she didn't think twice. And I do the same thing. I follow the rules 99.9% of the time, but when I don't it's because I need to not follow the rules. But that's my point of view. It's not necessarily the truth.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:29:28] So today, now, what do you see as your identity? Do you still -

**Rod Martinez** [01:29:37] I'm still the outsider. I have never felt included. I think a lot of that is my fault. Starting as an outsider. My family thinks that that jostling around, the way we were jostled around Central America and then North America had a deep effect on my character, my personality, where I am always looking for the fire escapes. Literally, I look for fire escapes. And if I can help it, I won't go above a seventh floor in a hotel, because that's where the ladders reach. I'm always looking for, anticipating the problem, which I guess it makes me valuable when there's a problem. But most of the time, there's no problems. But I live in that heightened awareness state, and it's exhausting. And I don't know how to relax. Do you?

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:31:09] I'm working on it. Different contexts of being stressed and a fixture and hyper aware of different things. You know my dad was very much also a fixer in his own way, and it didn't come from the same kind of background that you have. I think there's that drive to seek to -

**Rod Martinez** [01:31:33] Well you want order, and you want peace, and you want - basically you're yearning for heaven. But I hear that heaven is a very loud place.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:31:45] [laughs] Those trumpets, again?

**Rod Martinez** [01:31:48] No, the praising, singing. Yeah, I understand that I feel like an outsider, even when I'm amongst other Latinos who feel like they're incorporated, they were born here, and I always have the - and people who know me don't even know that I'm born not here. And they're surprised when I tell them, "Yeah, I'm Cuban." But I do feel that being alone and being lonely are two different things. But I feel both of those, even in the midst of my family. My family is big. I love the house to be full. But it's a real burden on Marsha, so we're looking to downsize.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:32:47] Did you feel like having your surname, Martinez, did that ever - what was that experience? Do you feel like it marked you as different?

**Rod Martinez** [01:33:02] Absolutely.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:33:04] Or that other confusion again of Mexican versus Cuban and assumptions people would make?

**Rod Martinez** [01:33:09] Yeah, and people talk to me, and they say, "What is your name?" "Oh, it's Radames." "Wow. What's your last name?" "Martinez." "Oh." And I used to look more Cuban when I was younger, now I just look like an old man.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:33:28] Radames is a strong name.

**Rod Martinez** [01:33:30] It's a strong name. It unfortunately means "son of the sun God." Egyptian. It's an Egyptian name. And it's like, "Okay, fine." But I would rather have had Peter or Paul or something, John or Thomas. Something that didn't - names are important. Names are important. And so my father did it because he wanted me to have his name. And I did not do that. Of course, I don't have any sons. But we did not do that to our children by naming her Radamesa. We picked names that the culture was happy with, and we thought they would like. It's your - is moniker the right word? It's your handle. So people call me Rod, and then they get all confused. "I thought your name is Rod."

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:34:35] Or Rodney or something shorter.

**Rod Martinez** [01:34:36] Rodney. They think Rodney, I go, "No, not Rodney." I know Rodney's that are nice people. Martinez is not any more and more - this is a funny thing about a person who comes from a different country a long time ago, when there weren't that many of you here, and everybody thinks, "Oh, you're from Cuba. What is that like?" And now everybody is from someplace, which is fine, but I'm just another one now. I'm not that guy, I'm one of millions of people.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:35:16] Well, do you think too, particularly in the medical field with so many doctors being -

**Rod Martinez** [01:35:22] Foreign?

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:35:23] Yeah, just coming from maybe second generation or immigrant families.

**Rod Martinez** [01:35:30] Well, it seems that the first and second generations, a lot of the doctors that I know that are foreign are first generation or second generation. Not so much a third generation, because they become more like the people here. And this is a great place to be, great country to live in, but it's not - I think there has to be some - it's like a poet or a songwriter. If you're not hurting, you can't write really good poetry a really good song, because people identify with your hurt. If there's not difficulty in your upbringing or in your childhood or in your young adulthood, then you don't understand, first of all, what it is to be here. If you haven't lived anywhere else, you don't know the advantages of living here, even in this crazy time that we're having. Because at least here, we have a, "You can't do that to me because of the Constitution." Over there, there is no Constitution. Thank God for the Constitution and the wisdom of those guys who had a document that has lasted longer than any other document, effectively running a country that they couldn't even foresee what it would be like. You can't forget the past, otherwise you will repeat it, and people are forgetting the past everywhere.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:37:24] And that's a good transition as we move towards the end of this interview. If we think about this interview or this discussion as something that will last for generations, something that people a hundred years from now can be thinking, what would you want to leave, or what would you want to say to those people about your time?

Or just thinking about your grandkids, what are the things that you feel like you've learned that you'd like to leave?

**Rod Martinez** [01:38:02] They're going to have computers inside their heads, so protect your identity, know who you are, know what you stand for, and don't compromise what you believe for pleasure or privilege or advantage. Don't compromise, because you'll always regret it. It's not good to be loved by everybody, because that means you're doing something wrong, not something right. And I have to say this, because the Bible doesn't change, so know the Bible. Know the Protestant Bible. We make the mistake of thinking that old wisdom doesn't apply in current times. This is the time when it does apply, but people are ignoring it. People are forgetting it.

**Rod Martinez** [01:39:16] I used to be one of those people. I used to dislike Catholicism because it made me accountable, I felt, for every little thing I did. And then you had to go and confess your sins to a human being who absolved you by praying, by doing this and doing that. And then you sin again, and you'd have to do the whole thing over again. But God's solution for you is not that, it's accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior and going forward from there, after you confess your sins and repent. And that is life changing. Maybe not in a moment, but it changes your life eventually. Sorry, I tried to stay away from it, but you wouldn't let me.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:40:22] No, it's okay. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we wrap up today? I feel like we could talk for another whole two hours and hear different stories.

**Rod Martinez** [01:40:39] No, I wouldn't make you do it. So my life has been full of blessings, and some of them recognized, and most of them unrecognized and unacknowledged. But you can't judge your satisfaction on getting what you want. You should judge your satisfaction on having what you have, even if it's not exactly what you want. Is it sufficient for your needs? Everything I have is more than sufficient for my needs. It's a blessing from God, and it's not about what you have, it's what you believe.

**Elizabeth Melton** [01:41:35] Thank you so much.

**Rod Martinez** [01:41:37] Sure. You're welcome.