

Transcript for Oral History Interview

Conducted for University of Maryland Course HIST428M—Spring 2015

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Interviewer's (Student's) name: Mary A. Lynch

Interviewee's name: Silvia Nuñez Fowler

Interviewee's Country of Origin: Honduras

Interviewee's Current Residence: Salem, Virginia, U.S.A.

Date of Interview: March 18, 2015

Place of Interview: Salem, Virginia, U.S.A.

LYNCH: This is Alyson Lynch, its Wednesday, the 18th of March 2015 and I'm sitting in Salem, Virginia with Silvia Fowler. Okay, now we can begin.

LYNCH: So, we're going to start with your earliest memories from Tegucigalpa, do you have fond memories of Tegucigalpa?

FOWLER: Yes, I do. It's a beautiful city. I was born there, and I went to...all my schooling was done in Tegucigalpa. My primary, my high school and college.

LYNCH: Oh okay, so you went to college in Honduras.

FOWLER: Mhm, I did.

LYNCH: So, do you have traditions that you remember from that time period, when you were still young, from your family?

FOWLER: Yes, I had to live in the capital because my grandmother lived there. And when I was in school, I had to live with her. My father was an engineer for the United Fruit Company so that he had to travel a lot. And all my family lived in another part of

Honduras, in San Pedro and La Lima, different towns. Um, I remember fondly going to school. We wore uniforms and we had, uh, the schools in Honduras when I was growing up they were very poor. We, some of us, we didn't have desks; we had to sit on benches and we had to write on our laps in our books. It was so wonderful to have a lot of school utensils because I was sort of privileged because my dad was middle class. But a lot of the people, students who were with me were very poor, so. But I remember, that it was wonderful being in school. We learned a lot. (pause) I even remember learning all the capitals of the United States.

LYNCH: Really, in Honduras?

FOWLER: In Honduras, uh, huh, when I was in fifth grade, yes.

LYNCH: Wow, that's crazy. Um do you have... So can you explain a little more about your father's job as an engineer with the United Fruit Company?

FOWLER: Yes, he was an, um, electrical engineer and he had to, um, go to different towns to, um, build electrical plants. He travelled a lot; he studied in... he went to the University of Nebraska on a scholarship. All of his brothers were engineers—architecture and agricultural engineers.

LYNCH: So how did you decide to come to the United States?

FOWLER: When I finished the primary school, we went to Tela, which is another department of Honduras, and my father put me in an American school. And that's how I learned how to speak English—not very well, but that's when I went to American school till I was in eighth grade. Then I went to, uh, um, back to the capital to go to the high school.

LYNCH: Wait; so just to clarify, this, the American school was in Honduras?

FOWLER: All the employees of the United Fruit Company, they had, um, it was sort of like a military base. The employees could send their children to American schools because there were a lot of Americans living and working in the United Fruit Company. And my dad wanted me to learn how to speak English and that's why he put me there. And it was, at the beginning, it was really, really, awful because I didn't know...I thought the children in my class were all talking about me because I didn't know how to speak. I was, cried a lot, because I didn't know any English, I had to learn. And so I learned really fast, I mean I really learned fast. And I really loved I really loved learning how to speak English. At that time, no, hardly anyone knew how to speak English, except my dad did. But nobody in my family.

LYNCH: Did they teach you American history through that American school? So you had an understanding of the United States before you came.

FOWLER: Oh yes, I did. The teacher that I had, she was from Mississippi, and she used to lend me American magazines. I loved to read American magazines. It was really...I remember very well, she was a wonderful woman.

LYNCH: Did you think everyone had that accent? The Mississippi accent? (laughs)

FOWLER: Well no, I didn't know any better, I didn't know any accents, so it was nothing to me.

LYNCH: Hm, that's interesting.

FOWLER: But all the other children were, uh, Americans. I remember, that, uh, I remember there was a boy, that, he was from Virginia, and asked me, he was telling me about, it was when Eisenhower was running for president, and he said that his family, his

father was going to vote for Eisenhower, I remember that. But he was from Virginia, I remember him, I think his name was, his last name was Harrison, I still remember that.

LYNCH: So, did you have like a specific perception of the United States?

FOWLER: Yes, I thought, it was like heaven to me, it was like coming to paradise because everything was so different. And um, she used to um, she told us stories about living in the United States. And she used to, um, I remember her making snowmen out of marshmallows, I remember that, and I didn't even know what marshmallows were 'cus we didn't have that.

LYNCH: Did she bring marshmallows to the classroom?

FOWLER: She brought, yes she did, I don't know, I guess she got them from the United States, because I remember specifically that she would make marshmallows just to show us.

LYNCH: Did the American school have a lot more amenities, because you were talking about in the Honduras school you were at were writing in your lap? So when you got to the American school was it totally different?

FOWLER: Oh, yeah, of course. It was like, it was, um (pause) you had to be in a room with maybe 3 grades because most of the children were Americans from American families that worked in the United Fruit Company. But oh yes, we had a lot of things. I used to love to look at the, uh, the social studies books, because they had a lot of pictures. I used to love to copy the drawings

LYNCH: So you'd copy the drawings from the schoolbooks?

FOWLER: Mhmm, I remember the Indians and the Pilgrims. It was so; it was so interesting to me. So, but, I learned English very fast and I, I think it was in, see I had

already finished my primary grades, which was through fifth grade, then you go to middle school. But when I went to the American school, I had already finished fifth grade, and I had to, they put me in like in fourth grade because I didn't know any... But I used to translate everything from Spanish to English, and one year I won the spelling bee for the whole school.

LYNCH: Oh really? Against the American students?

FOWLER: Against the American students.

LYNCH: That's awesome (laughs). Um, so did you know then, I mean you were really young then, so did you know then that you wanted to come to the United States?

FOWLER: I think so, when I finished the uh middle school, then my dad sent me to the capital, back, and I went to a boarding school, and we had an, uh, man teacher that was from the Islands. And I remember him speaking with a British accent, and we learned a lot of English from him. And there was only 19 students in our high school, in my class. And it was an all-girls school; it was, um, uh, a boarding school. So I didn't go, I only would go home on weekends.

LYNCH: So, you said that early on you were you among the students that were more poor, lower class.

FOWLER: Uh yeah, when I went to a Honduranian¹ school, a public school.

LYNCH: So by the time you got to boarding school did a lot of the girls have the same kind of experiences as you did?

FOWLER: Mmm, I don't know, uh, some of them did, we had a couple of girls that were Indians, pure blooded Indians. But I do, I know, most of the girls were middle class, there

¹ Fowler repeatedly refers to people from Honduras as "Honduranian," rather than the well known term "Honduran"

were only 19 in my class, 19 girls. But um, it was, uh, I don't, I don't remember them being, maybe two or three had been, came from a poor family, but most of them were middle class.

LYNCH: So then, you get out of high school, what, so, the year that you come to the United States, you've already gone through college?

FOWLER: Yes, it was only a two-year college because that's what you could do at Honduras.

LYNCH: So how old were you then?

FOWLER: Uh, 19.

LYNCH: 19, so, that was, I can't remember what year you said that was.

FOWLER: Uh, I came to the United States in 19...I graduated in 1954. And then, when I came to the United States, see I used to work at an airline, when I graduated from school, I went to work for Pan American airways, because I spoke English, and um, they were looking for people that spoke English, and that's why I got a job with, um, Pan American airways. And then I used to come to Miami, then, you know, to training, and I used to fly a lot. Because I was, like, a hostess I used to go to Panama, and Montego Bay, and all and, Cuba, but then when I went back to Honduras and I always wanted to come to the United States. So when I came, in 1959 was when I came to New Orleans. I sold everything that I had.

LYNCH: Mhmm.

FOWLER: And my family, my mother was very sad because I was leaving Honduras. But everybody knew that's what I wanted to do. I always wanted to come to the United

States because I had already experienced, the, you know, the American ways, working for an American company.

LYNCH: So, how did you choose New Orleans?

FOWLER: I had some, my stepmother had relatives living in New Orleans, and I knew about, you know I knew them. That was the only place that I could come. It was closer, to come from San Pedro to New Orleans. So that's when I came, and that's when I met your grandfather.

LYNCH: Okay, in New Orleans?

FOWLER: Mhmm.

LYNCH: Were you close with your stepmother's family when you were there? Or was that just kind of...

FOWLER: I stayed with them for a while, and then I got a job, I got a job with um, with an airline. Since I was familiar with airlines, so I got a job with an airline. And I moved to uh, another boarding house, it was all girls, boarding house, that's where I lived and that's when I met Tony, your grandfather.

LYNCH: And what was he doing?

FOWLER: He was in the Navy, he was a crewman for a jet, and that's how I met him on a blind date.

LYNCH: On a blind date!?! (laughs)

FOWLER: And I didn't want to go. The girls that I lived with, they were party girls. But I wasn't, I wasn't a party...I was a very quiet person, and um, they insisted that I go with them, because they wanted to go to the party, they needed people to go. And that's when I met your grandfather.

LYNCH: Okay, at the party? That's fun. Was he from Maryland?

FOWLER: Yes, he was born in Anacostia, in Washington, DC. And when I, I didn't, he, after I met him, he came back. And I didn't even know his last name, but he used to call me on the telephone and the next time he came, he asked me to marry him.

LYNCH: 'Cus It was only a year!

FOWLER: I know!

LYNCH: From when you got to New Orleans, till when, right?

FOWLER: Yeah! Yes!

LYNCH: Wow, okay.

FOWLER: And I had um, after that, after I lived with the girls, I moved into my own efficiency apartment. And um, (pause) it was, um, my apartment had a little balcony (laughs) and this man was, um, there was like a peeping Tom, and it scared me to death, and I said, I'm going to marry...because I didn't want to live by myself!

LYNCH: (laughs) You didn't want to live by yourself?

FOWLER: So I married, I said yes I'll marry him. And I didn't even know his name, his last name!

LYNCH: Oh my goodness.

FOWLER: But we went for a walk, and um, he told me about Washington, and you know, his family, that he was a Catholic. And so, we went for a walk. And there was a church in New Orleans, a Catholic church, so when he crossed himself, I said this, I'll marry him.

(Both laugh)

FOWLER: And then I, I came by train, after we got married in New Orleans, by a justice of the peace, so when, he came back to, Maryland, to, I mean to the Washington area.

And I came here, I came to Maryland in the train. I took a train.

LYNCH: That's a long train ride!

FOWLER: Uh-huh, very long! That's long time ago, but I remember we got an apartment in Washington, DC.

LYNCH: Oh, okay. So that's a completely different environment! From D.C.... from New Orleans to D.C.

FOWLER: Oh yes, completely. Yes it was. It was... I thought it was a beautiful town, a beautiful city. The first thing I wanted to do, was um, I was, I admired President Lincoln, so I knew that he had a monument, so I told Tony to take me to see the monuments, and he did. That was the first one we went to, the Lincoln Memorial, then we went to the Capital and...I don't remember... ah, then we went to the White House to see all the monuments.

LYNCH: Was it what you expected? Because you had like an understanding of, uh, the United States, and...

FOWLER: Yeah, I thought, it was wonderful. I thought what a wonderful, wonderful country. I always thought, and I still do.

LYNCH: Did you have, because you told me earlier about how New Orleans was still segregated at that time?

FOWLER: Oh it was, yes.

LYNCH: So was DC like that, did you...were you aware of the differences in that respect?

FOWLER: No I don't, uh, Tony's family was in Southern Maryland, you know, so they were very, I think there was a lot of prejudice in his family.² In fact, his mother did not accept me at the beginning, because you know she thought I lived in a, I came from a hut. You know how Americans have that idea about about, um, immigrants, living in, not having any education. And um, she was very; she didn't wanna, she didn't even want to talk to me when I first came.

LYNCH: But you guys were already married.

FOWLER: Yes.

LYNCH: So it was too late. (laughs)

FOWLER: But to her, it wasn't because we didn't get married in the church until later was what, um, so she didn't think that we were actually married, because they were such a strict Catholic family.

LYNCH: But you were pretty religious even...?

FOWLER: Yes I was, I am. But um, I remember in New Orleans, when my Dad that came we had to sit in the back of the bus, I remember that but we didn't realize why. We thought that it was just, people, you know, because my dad being... That he was, uh, he was, um, he was like, um, really dark because he worked in the sun so much. I'm the only one actually who has clear, I'm sort of light, and my eyes were light too. My dad, he was, you know, a typical Honduranian, with dark skin, dark eyes, dark hair. So we didn't understand why we had to sit in the back of the bus. But, in, the only... I would say I didn't, the thing about Honduras, even when you're, you can be black or white or any

² Fowler is referring to "Southern Maryland" with a tone that denotes the region's history of racial prejudice and conservative values, this is common in much of Maryland.

color, and you are still Honduranian. And I didn't understand why the United States was such, so different with classes, and in race. I didn't understand that because in Honduras, if you're from Honduras you are Honduranian, no matter what race you are. So it was really surprising to me.

LYNCH: Did that change your views of the United States at all?

FOWLER: No, I, I don't think so I don't...I didn't understand it. But I still, I thought everybody wanted to come to the United States that I know, that I knew.

LYNCH: Do you think someone, I'm not sure which other family members you have that are in the United States, but do you think they had different experiences, because you said you had lighter skin, and you had blue eyes, do you think they had different experiences because they had darker skin?

FOWLER: I would say my sister did. My sister um, when she came here, my dad sent her to live with me. In fact I had already, your father, Tony, was already born when she came. And um...she also met a man that she married, and he was in the Navy, and he was from Chicago, so...but I don't think, I really don't think, I don't think she did. Because in Chicago, there's a lot of Latin people. And like I didn't really know anybody really in Maryland, when we moved to Maryland, I didn't know a lot of people that were Spanish or from Latin America. I really didn't. I didn't know anybody that spoke Spanish.

LYNCH: Did you end up meeting, well, first of all when did you start working? Because I know you worked in the school system. I'm not sure what school. But that was for a long time.

FOWLER: Yes.

LYNCH: So did you end up meeting people who spoke Spanish through that at all?

FOWLER: Well, not...when I first started working, I started working in Forestville, Maryland, I started working, I started as a volunteer, because all my kids, all the children, Lisa, Lia, Sissy, and Tony went to this school in Maryland. So I started as a volunteer, and we didn't have any Spanish children at all in Maryland, in Forestville, Maryland, we didn't have any that I know of. Then when, um, after that school closed, that was in 1970. '70 yes, I think '70, because in '72 I moved, we went to live in Chicago, I lived there for a year. When I came back, when the segregation was open. That's when the children, the uh black children started coming to the Maryland schools. I remember that and I remember that the schools had to hire the same number of white teachers as the number of black teachers. I remember that.

LYNCH: Really? That's not really the case now.

FOWLER: No, it is not, but it was when I was working in Forestville, that's what it was. And when I came back, in '72, I only stayed one year in Chicago, and when I came back is when the school system had changed. Now when, I moved to, after I came to, um, to work in the last school that I worked for 27 years, that school, we didn't have a lot of black children either, until, we had more black children then, we didn't have hardly any Spanish children. But my last two years at, um, Overlook Elementary, which is in Temple Hills, Maryland, that's when we started getting children from illegal immigrants.

LYNCH: Oh, in...

FOWLER: In Overlook Elementary, in Clinton, in Temple Hills, Maryland.

LYNCH: So you saw the demographics change drastically over that period.

FOWLER: Oh yes, exactly, exactly. The last two years I would say, no probably (pause) the last two years, because I left three years ago, from Overlook, that would be 1912...

LYNCH: Two thousand twelve

FOWLER: 2012, that's when we started getting children from Latin America. And I was blessed that I could help them because I spoke Spanish. So we had, a lot of, I had a lot to do with the parents that were registering at Overlook because I could speak Spanish and they felt comfortable with me. But you could tell that the black children did not like this. Because Overlook was mostly black students, there were not, we had very few white kids, most of them were, and we had about three white teachers, and most of them were black teachers.

LYNCH: So, this is elementary school?

FOWLER: An elementary school, yes.

LYNCH: Okay, so the parents, I know you have your own views about undocumented immigrants or whatever. Did you have troubles, like was it hard for you to interact with them?

FOWLER: No, not at all because I understood. Um, I understand how. When I used to go on vacation to Honduras, I know how desperate people were to come, they wanted to come so bad, they'd beg me to give them residency or a place so they could come. But of course I couldn't because I had... my children were small and I couldn't, I didn't have a, I wasn't working then. But no, I would say, I felt really bad for them. Because, like, they couldn't prove—like the mothers they wanted to get free lunch and stuff like that but they couldn't prove, because even if they were paying they were paying under the table, they were paid in cash, so they could not prove...because in order to get free lunches, you have to have some kind of income. It was really sad for me, I just don't know how to

explain it, but it was very sad for me that they wanted to come here so bad that they didn't care about anything else but coming here. It's still like that, I would say.

LYNCH: Because you had such a long experience with the naturalization process. Do you feel like they just don't have the resources, like why do you think they couldn't go through the process that you did?

FOWLER: Because, some of the, most of the people, the parents that I knew were not educated. Some of them didn't even know how to write. Because I had to fill out all the forms for them, when they came. They didn't have any immunization records. They didn't have education. At least when I came here, I was educated and I didn't have any problems. But there was no way that they could even, they had to learn first, and some of them didn't wanna learn English. You know, the children, luckily the children learn English very well and fast. You know, children are, can learn a language really easily when you're young. And I think that was my blessing, that I started learning when I was in fifth grade.

LYNCH: So did you feel like, um, your children didn't need to know Spanish just because there was no one around who spoke Spanish?

FOWLER: No, no, it was my fault, and I always blame myself for that. But it wasn't important then like it is now. Because I couldn't speak Spanish with hardly anybody except my family, my sister, that lived in Chicago. And uh, I didn't know anybody around where I lived, when my kids were small, I couldn't, and I was just so busy trying to survive, really, it was very difficult, because you know being um, their father was an alcoholic. So I had to really struggle. So it was really, it was really, really very hard for me. And I still blame myself because I should have. Now when your Aunt Lia and Lisa

were born, my dad sent me a maid from Honduras, and she spoke only Spanish. So, I don't know, she spoke to the kids in Spanish, but I don't know, I think they could understand her, and Sissy especially, because she actually raised her because I had to go to work. But I feel really bad that I didn't teach them! I really do! But at that time it wasn't necessary, it was more of a survive, I really, than it was...

LYNCH: So at that time you were basically a single mother with the four of them, so that was, what? In the '70s? Around then?

FOWLER: No, it was later than that, it was maybe in the '80s? Maybe, (pauses) they were all um, he was still with us, but he was very difficult because he was drinking so much, that he didn't actually hold a job.

LYNCH: Because my mom told me a little bit about the, um, print, the pressman's strike.

FOWLER: Yes, that was when he, when the Post went on strike in Washington, uh, he was a pressman at the *Washington Post* and they, he was, they sort of blackballed all the pressmen, and they couldn't get a job, and that's when his drinking started really bad.³

LYNCH: So that was never resolved, from my understanding.

FOWLER: No, it wasn't. Never, he was never able to work as a pressman.

LYNCH: Was he involved in the striking? Like, was he interested in the movement?

FOWLER: Oh yes, yes he was. He was a union, union person. Which I didn't know anything about unions. Because when the unions came to Honduras, they destroyed United Fruit Company, and they destroyed the country, and that's why United Fruit Company um, failed and left Honduras.

³ Silvia's husband, Anthony Fowler, participated in the 1975 pressmen's strike at the Washington Post that lasted two years and ended with the defeat of the pressmen's union.

LYNCH: And was your father still working at that time?

FOWLER: Yes, he was. Oh, no, no, no, no. He was, uh, he went to work for another fruit company, Standard Fruit, which is in another town. But they, I think he left when the unions came, he went to another country, another company. But, I thought that, I do not believe in the unions because they did, they did... to me, I could see it with the teacher's union, some of the teachers that were actually terrible teachers, they could not be fired because they belonged to the union and the union protected them. Especially, I remember at Overlook we had a terrible teacher, she was so bad, and she could not be fired because of the union.

LYNCH: Why was she terrible? Just not a...

FOWLER: She didn't teach anything. She was lazy and she didn't, the parents complained. Eventually, she left, but she left on her own good, not because she was fired or anything like that. She just left.

LYNCH: So, you were saying when you got back the schools were getting desegregated. By the time Tony, the young Tony, your son, gets to high school there—I don't have a really good understanding. They went to schools that weren't near them. They were bussed to schools?

FOWLER: Yes, well no. Tony went to, when Tony went to high school, he had to pass a test to go to Eleanor Roosevelt, in Maryland, and he had to take a bus. But Lisa, Lia and Sis, they went a school where, well everybody had to take a bus then. Wherever you lived. But I don't know... no they used to walk to school when they were in elementary school. We lived in a neighborhood so they had to walk but we did have children that were bused from Capital Heights to Forestville, and most of them were black children.

LYNCH: Did you see that, the bussing, did you see when that stopped? Because you were in the school system that entire time.

FOWLER: Yes.

LYNCH: So, did you see the transition? A lot of people say that, um, desegregation didn't work? Or that the schools have remained segregated now. So, did you see where, because you said that Overlook was still majority black. Do you have thoughts on that?

FOWLER: I (pauses) I didn't understand why they had to bring children from their neighborhoods, when they could easily just go to their school just because they wanted to have more black children in the schools. I didn't understand that because, like the parents couldn't come to meetings, they could not come to the conferences because they didn't have transportation. They could not ride the bus. And it was difficult for, I would say, for the children and the parents. Because they had to make new friends. I don't think it worked, really. It didn't work, I don't think it worked at all.

LYNCH: Did you feel like the kids, now, in the past 10 years or whatever, you know recently, did you feel like they were getting the education that they needed to get at the school that you worked?

FOWLER: No, I do not. I did not. I think that (long pause and sigh). Specifically, I think the teachers were teaching to the test. They didn't, I mean, some of the teachers, the children didn't even know where they lived, I mean 5th graders, they had no idea who the President was, they didn't know their town, where they lived, they didn't know anything. It was really...Fifth graders! I would ask them, just to, I don't know, I would get so upset because they weren't teaching, just like they do now. They don't teaching them, they teach them to the test, which is, like they would bribe them at the time of the tests, they

had give them snacks and give them mints. I didn't believe in that. I believed that the children had to study because they want to study. And it was the teachers' fault; it was the Department of Education.

LYNCH: Did they feel pressured to get scores...?

FOWLER: Yes, they did, they did, they did. I still, even now that I talk to Erin, who is working in an elementary school, right here, [Lynch: My cousin] she tells she doesn't want to be there anymore because the children just aren't learning anything.⁴ I could tell the difference in the um, American education. I thought the American education was great when I lived in Honduras when I was growing up. But then, when I came here, I couldn't believe the things that I knew—more than the principal of my school. I knew so much more. I knew how to spell in English. I just could not believe that they, even the teachers didn't know things that I knew.

LYNCH: And you feel like that was from your education in the American school with the United Fruit Company?

FOWLER: Yes. Mhm. Not the United Fruit Company.

LYNCH: Just that they were workers.

FOWLER: Yeah.

LYNCH: The workers were American, right? So they had a school. So, do you feel that that's a new phenomenon, teaching to the test?

FOWLER: Yes, I think that it is. I think that...I don't believe that the children should be taught just to the test. Even the teachers, they aren't allowed to say that, but they believe in that. You know, they're so, um...we had some wonderful teachers. We had a teacher

⁴ Erin is Silvia's granddaughter

from El Salvador who taught kindergarten and she taught according to what she had learned. She went to, in Honduras they're called a Normal school, which is only for teachers. And she taught, there were three kindergarten teachers, and her children always learned how to read. By the time they went to first grade the children would learn, I mean they were all black children. And the other two teachers they would not teach like she would teach so you could tell the difference. You know, when they went to first grade the parents...the black mothers would ask for this teacher, please put my children because they wanted them to learn how to read. I don't know. I really think that there is something lacking in the education in the United States, it really is bad.

LYNCH: It's amazing that you witnessed that in the elementary school because a lot of people think that's a phenomenon in high school, when they get older, but just from when they're so young.

FOWLER: Yes.

LYNCH: That is interesting. So, I also wanted to ask you about the naturalization process, because that took about 25 years, right? My dad said 25 years, I don't know (laughs).

FOWLER: What do you mean? Becoming a citizen? No, not really. It was, it was, supposed to be easier, when you marry an American. But it wasn't. I had to wait, I had to study, I had to pass a test, which I don't think any, a lot of Americans don't know. Because I had proof of that, that they didn't know what I knew about the United States government. It took a lot of studying and... I really wanted to be an American citizen, and luckily, I married your grandfather, Tony. But I even knew more than he did. But he knew a lot of history so that helped a lot; he loved history so I learned a lot from him.

And from a radio station in Washington, DC, I learned a lot because they used to have a lot of questions.

LYNCH: What was the station?

FOWLER: Um, I think it was WMAL. I remember it was Chris Bore and Bill, it was two guys—when I went to take my test, I said to examiner, “How come you didn’t ask me how tall the buildings in Washington, DC are?” (Lynch laughs) and he says, “You must listen to WMAL!” I do! And he was laughing, he said, he told me, and we talked even though I had already passed the test, and we talked a lot about it and he was making fun of me, because I thought that WMAL had taught me all the things that I needed...

LYNCH: They asked how tall the buildings were? They were like trivia questions?

FOWLER: Uh-huh. They ask a lot of questions, no, they ask about like the three branches and who was the governor, the president, George Washington, and all that stuff.

LYNCH: So it was mostly history and the structure of the government.

FOWLER: Yes, they did, I um (pauses) it wasn't... I was very nervous when I took the test, but I had studied so much. And nowadays, it is really difficult to take the test. But you have to pay a lot of money. I have a, one of my neighbors when I lived in Maryland, in Temple Hill, they were from Costa Rica, he told me you have to pay \$800 now to pass the test. Plus you have to study too, you have to take the test.

LYNCH: So it wasn't that expensive?

FOWLER: No, I didn’t have to pay anything.

LYNCH: Did you have to pay for forms?

FOWLER: I don't remember, I don't really remember. It was in 1985—I think, no it was before then... I can't remember. But I know it was the year that President Reagan was inaugurated because I voted for him.

LYNCH: That was the question I was going to ask, that was your first voting experience?

FOWLER: Yes.

LYNCH: What year is that? 1980...

FOWLER: I think it was in the 80s.

LYNCH: So, were you involved with politics then? Because you had been in the United States for...

FOWLER: Yes, I was an, um, I was an election judge, like your father, Tony. I was a Republican judge.

LYNCH: So they, you'd go to the voting places?

FOWLER: Yeah, when the elections came, I had to be there you know, during the election. They had to have Democrats and Republicans. And there weren't too many Republicans where I lived, so I probably...but your grandfather's, Tony's family were all Republicans, except your Aunt Celeste, she was a Democrat.

LYNCH: Did you feel like you learned a lot about politics from them?

FOWLER: Yeah, of course, I did, especially your grandfather, because he was very conservative.

LYNCH: That's interesting that he was very conservative but he was involved with the union.

FOWLER: Yes, I didn't understand that, of course, I don't understand, I don't know really. I don't know, I really didn't know a lot about that, about politics. Really. When I

came here to the United States, I really didn't, because politics in Latin America are different than the United States.

LYNCH: What do you think are the biggest differences? Between...

FOWLER: The corruption in Latin America is terrible.

LYNCH: Does it seem like everyone is aware of it?

FOWLER: Oh, yes.

LYNCH: It's kind of, in every aspect of society? [Fowler: yes, yes.] Because we don't hear much about it, and when we hear about corruption it gets...

FOWLER: ...in the newspapers, yes. No, in Honduras it is absolutely awful. Even when I was growing up, when I lived in Honduras, there were two parties. Even now, when I was going to school, when I lived in Tegucigalpa, I stayed with a, in the home of a deputy—its called deputies were like the states, like the representatives here. In Honduras they're called deputies and I lived with him and his wife. And I would see, they would have the, you know how the United States sends the aid to, like cheese and butter and flour? She would have all that in her house, and they were very wealthy people. So you see the corruption is horrible, especially in Honduras, the one that I know. Not knowing a lot of the politics till later, you know, later in life is when I learned a lot. I took my stance, like you say, my thoughts, more conservative than anything else but apparently that was influenced by marrying Tony.

LYNCH: Do you feel like Catholicism played a part in that as well, your conservative values?

FOWLER: I would say so (pauses) I would say so (pauses) But to each his own.

LYNCH: (laughs) Exactly! Do you have anything else that you'd like to say?

FOWLER: I would say that Americans, they do not appreciate living in the United States. To me, it is the best country in the world. I mean it's so many opportunities for everybody who comes here. And I feel bad for, like, right now, with the children that are coming, that have been in the news...about the illegal aliens, I think that especially in Honduras, there is such a horrible, horrible life right now for young kids because they want them to join the gangs, you know the maras? And I think that's the reason why the parents want to bring the children here. And there's no jobs, all it is now is drugs, and crime is horrible. And there's just no way, and they just see the light, they think that coming to the United States is going to... But it's not going to help like they're coming right now because the United States is...I mean they cannot be doing what they're doing right now. There has to be a better way. I just feel so bad for these children that want to come, and they have no other way. The mothers...I know a lot of people from Honduras that have come here. In fact here in Salem, I went to a restaurant, it's a Mexican restaurant and I see a lot of young men from Honduras that come here, and they're working, they're illegal, and they don't want to go back to Honduras because they're gonna be killed if they go back.

LYNCH: So they're here, this is southern Virginia! How did they end up... do they describe how they ended up here?

FOWLER: Oh yeah. They come...they come...some of them, like it is easier to come from they go to Mexico, and then from Mexico to California or they come, they come from Texas or they come from New Orleans, and they just, any way they can. I have a couple of young guys that I see, that they came from a state where my grandmother was

born, in a state in Honduras and he has... I don't even know how he made it here. He says he doesn't even know how he made it here. He's so happy to be here.

LYNCH: Just Southern Virginia just seems like a random place for them to end up.

FOWLER: Yeah, I know. When I was at school, at Overlook, I know most of the people that came to Overlook, the children were from El Salvador, I didn't have anybody from Honduras. But when I, the first year that I came here, from Maryland to Virginia, I didn't hear hardly anybody speaking Spanish. But now that I've been here almost three years, I can see the difference, because when I go to the supermarket I see a lot of Spanish people. And, but then mostly, like my church, we have the migrant workers. We collect, um, we collect summer clothing for them, and if they need any household goods, we collect that. But they are migrant workers. But there's no, I think in Ethan's school; there might be a couple of Spanish kids.⁵

LYNCH: A lot less than there were at Overlook?

FOWLER: Oh yes, yes there's hardly any. But also, there's a lot of black students here, in Salem. In fact, when he plays basketball, there's only one black child and him, of course, he's biracial. But there has to a solution, somehow, I don't know, with the immigration problem. The thing that I really don't agree is that all the men that come from Latin America, they hate the United States, but they still want to come here and work.

LYNCH: They say they hate it?

FOWLER: Yeah, they don't like the Americans.

LYNCH: But they need the money.

⁵ Ethan is Fowler's grandson.

FOWLER: They need the money.

LYNCH: Ok, well thank you so much.

FOWLER: Well, I hope I helped you a little bit.

LYNCH: Yes, I thought it was great! Let's turn this off. This concludes the interview.