

***This oral interview with Richard Ryan about The Holy Family Orphans Home in Marquette by Dr. Diane D. Kordich was placed in the Northern Michigan University Archives 2012:***

**SIDE A:**

***DK: Interview with Rich Ryan on October 14, 2011.***

RR: My name is Richard Ryan and my birthday is April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1949.

DK: This interview is about the Holy Family Orphans Home in Marquette. What years did you attend the Orphans Home?

RR: I was placed there as a ward of the State in 1962 until 1967 when I graduated from high school in Marquette at Bishop Baraga.

DK: How did you get there? How did you...why were you placed there?

RR: I was a run away from a foster home in Detroit and came back to Marquette because I had a relative—an Uncle that lived here. I was truant. They picked me up on the streets of Marquette in October. At that time, I was assigned to Probate Court and the Judge with a Social Worker (who represented Catholic Social Services) was there to assume guardianship over me—at that time.

DK: Your parents died previously to this?

RR: Yes, my mother died first when I was ten years old. Then, I was broken up in the home after that—from our home. My sister was sent to one foster home and I was sent to another but they were both in the Detroit area because that's where my Dad's connections were. He died a couple of years after that.

DK: So, how old were you when you came to the Holy Family Orphanage?

RR: I was thirteen.

DK: What was your day like at the orphanage?

RR: A typical day, of course, during the school year--we were required to go to school. All of the Cubans at the time and myself were enrolled in Bishop Baraga High School, which was four blocks away from the Holy Family Home. Our typical day would be getting up, of course, and having breakfast in the Dining Hall...

DK: What time would you get up?

RR: We would get up at approximately 6:30-7:00 o'clock. We all had to assemble at the same time for breakfast in the Dining Hall because the nuns that took care of us were serving breakfast for us. We had to go through prayers. Then we would take off for school after that, go through a typical morning and then at lunch hour (at that time, Bishop Baraga did not have hot lunch) we would walk back to the Orphanage for lunch. Then a typical day, out by 3:30--some of us had extra curricular activities and some had jobs because the older boys were working. Then we'd come home and assemble at the Orphanage for dinner--again in the dining hall. It was the big dining hall. We all had chores that we had to do. Some of us were on kitchen detail--washing dishes, cleaning up on the tables afterwards, sweeping and mopping helping the nuns out. Then, we had

every evening a mandatory two-hour study hall. Some were conducted by the older Cuban boys, but we all had to go in the Quiet Room and do our studies--keep up on that. Then we had one hour of TV time afterwards—that was a typical evening.

DK: What types of foods did they serve for breakfast, lunch and then dinner?

RR: That was always difficult for the Cubans because, of course, I was the only American boy there. The diet was typical American style for the most part but the Cubans would complain so much about some of it. They would throw out some of the meals. So, the priest decided to hire a part-time cook who ran a restaurant in Munising--a Greek--Jim Gerondis. This Greek really accommodated them. He went out of his way to bring in more cuisine--like beans and rice, pork, pulled pork, thick guava paste they could spread on toast in the morning. They really loved cold milk because that was something that was not available as children growing up in Cuba. They would drink gallons and gallons of cold milk and loved to have peanut butter on toast. They would dunk it in their coffee but there had to be coffee every morning and night for dinner. The priest would allow that even though they were young kids. They were hard-core strong coffee drinkers.

DK: So, what was the typical breakfast like?

RR: The typical breakfast was orange juice, milk, toast, eggs—scrambled eggs; we had quite a menu if we wanted it but like I said the Cubans would just have toast, peanut butter, eggs on the side—that would be it.

DK: And lunch?

RR: Lunch was--again, we were fed very well there. The menu varied a lot--lunch--typical soup and sandwich; yes, mainly soup and sandwich type items. We only had a very short 30-minute lunch hour. We had to walk three blocks from the high school back to the Orphanage and back to school on time--so it was really fast and quick. The dinner hour was quite significant because they would put on quite a feed. This is when I started to learn Spanish because everyone spoke in Spanish unless I spoke to him or her. If I didn't get the lingo down quickly--they wouldn't pass me the milk or butter. You had to fight—not really fight--but get on it right away and take your share.

DK: Otherwise, it was gone!

RR: The nuns would monitor it, especially Sister Superior. She was quite a firecracker.

DK: Her name was what?

RR: Sister McCormick. She was from the old country. So, actually the Orphanage was broken down into--there was a novitiate on the second floor/third floor—we use to call it “nuns in training”. All these young girls were novices and they were training to be nuns. The Sisters of St. Paul Chartes would run the convent. Sister Mc McCormick was Sister Superior of that but she also was put in charge of taking care of us during the day and the laundry. All that stuff was done. The laundry was done. We had laundry days; where we had to put it in bags, send it down the chute from the Orphanage--lived on the top floor--it would go down to the laundry room. The nuns would do laundry. They folded our clothes. They would bring them back up and spread them on a long table with our names. Everything had to be labeled with our initials. We were taken care of quite well. The

image of an orphanage sounds kind of bad when you hear about it but we were taken care of very well, very well.

DK: What happened on Saturday and Sunday?

RR: Again, that varied... a lot of outdoor recreational stuff. The priest, Father LeLivre tried to get us out a lot. For example, during the wintertime, it was fun because some of the Cubans would arrive in January. They would come from tropical areas and be shocked but they adapted to it. We would do things like tobogganing and skiing. I did a lot of ice-skating because I was born and raised in the Junior Hockey program here in Marquette before I moved away. A lot of the Cubans did not like skating. Some would not participate in the cold at all because they hated it. A lot of times on weekends, we would go on retreats. Marygrove is still a center for Catholic retreats. We had mandatory Marygrove weekends--that would probably be maybe--one, two or three a year at the most--but we would have to go. Also a lot of service organizations at that time, The Knights of Columbus were really big.

DK: What would they do?

RR: They would take us out at these recreational times. The members would invite four or five of us over for Sunday evening dinner--holiday dinners--Christmas dinners. Other people in the community would sign up on the list to be hosts for a weekend or an overnighter or a dinner and take four or five of us. It was really nice in that respect and the Chamber of Commerce would take people.

DK: And I assumed on Sunday you went to church?

RR: Definitely, that was a mandatory thing. We would go to the Orphanage Chapel. Our Orphanage had its own chapel--beautiful chapel. Some of us were required to serve mass. I always was the number one guy--"the go to guy" because--the visiting priests would come in and serve the mass--conduct the mass for the nuns and they wanted a competent altar boy who could speak English. I use to tell stories about--how the Cuban boys would, quote, "act dumb". "Don't understand, don't understand". They wouldn't follow the procedures during the course of the mass to get out of it. Many times, I had to get up for the 6AM mass because the visiting priest was coming in. Sunday morning, I would be serving the mass. Other times, when I wasn't on altar duty, we would just go to the Cathedral, which was across from the high school.

DK: Did you ever go to the movies? Or the Delft? Or the Nordic?

RR: At the time, we had both, the Delft and the Nordic access. We had free passes all the time. The city or some organization always gave us free movie passes. Donckers, of course was across the street. The Donckers family was very, very influential in the Catholic Church because Fred was on the school board. So, they would allow us to come over for--we'd get tokens--to have a Saturday night after the movie type thing-- where they were still open for soda fountain service. We would enjoy ourselves. Before they shut down Donckers the first half (fountain of the store) of course now it's opened up to a full restaurant again. Yes, we do movies, dances. There were a lot of dances in the high school--which were typically called sock hops. Most of the time at lunch, during the school day, Bishop Baraga (our old gymnasium) was turned into a dance thing. We

would go to the dances. Of course, the basketball games during the winter. Basketball. A couple of the Cubans were very, very good athletes. A couple of them were on the varsity basketball team. Football, Bishop Baraga had a really small group of boys. We only had 350 in our high school—we go to football games, basketball games. A lot of times we would attend Marquette High School stuff because we had a rivalry. At the time, we had three high schools in Marquette, J.D. Pierce would be competing against us, Bishop Baraga and of course, Marquette High School.

DK: So, the top floor of the Orphanage is the boy? How many boys were up there on that top floor?

RR: When I arrived there--I think—if I remember correctly, there were 25 boys there. Then, it started growing; more children were being allowed by Castro to leave the country. Then, I found out later from a priest (talking to him a lot about this), they would arrive in Miami and were becoming over populated in these Cuban Camps. So, when the Federal government realized that this was unmanageable. Really, the camps were not very kept up—clean. What the Federal government did is they entered into a contract with the Catholic Dioceses across the United States. They would pay support of these refugees and they would send them out to the different dioceses across the United States. Bishop Barga's, Monsignor Weber, who taught and had been a priest in South America, when he found out about this program--convinced the Bishop, Bishop Noa at the time. There were no more American orphans at the orphanage; the last ones had been fostered out. Only the Native American boys were left and they were found foster homes. So they went into it. They agreed to take the 25 to begin with but by the time I was a junior--there were over thirty-five of us--well 34 Cubans and one American boy (me). So, that was at the peak. There were 35 but as they graduated, they went off to college; several went to Michigan Tech, graduated from there. They'd come home on weekends that sort of thing and stayed with us at the Orphanage or they went to Northern. A lot would go back to the Miami area because starting around 1966 or so, Castro began allowing the parents to leave Cuba of those children. But they had to leave--the only thing they could arrive in Miami with was the cloths on their back--all their property was confiscated, all of their income, banking, everything was confiscated by them (Cuban government). They would be reunited with their children. I saw, over the course of two years, all these children get reunited with their parents who were arriving in America. Of course, they would be...Dade County was getting over run...so they would place the parents and the families all along the East Coast or a lot were placed in Chicago. Now, eventually, today they are mostly back in Dade County.

DK: So, the second floor was for the training of nuns. The bottom portion was the Chapel, the kitchen, the dining room?

RR: Yes, the first floor actually was all devoted to offices—the convent offices, the Catholic Social Services offices were all there (both, lay people as social workers and some of the priests were social workers), they had a Chapel, on the other wing of the orphanage (it was quite large) they had a big dining hall with kitchens attached to it. There also were a couple of classrooms. Bishop Baraga became over crowded and in one case, I use to take classes (the first two hours of my courses during the school day) was in

the basement of the Orphanage; I didn't even have to walk down to the high school. I would just go down the elevator and attend class there. So there were classrooms, offices, all of the...well there was a rec room...a large rec room.

DK: Is that were the TV was? The kind of "hang out" place?

RR: Yes, we used to call it the TV room but we had a very large room that used to be a dormitory because originally most of the Cubans were set up in a military style. The beds and footlockers were lined up beside each one. As you—there was a pecking order—as you stayed there long enough—there were probably a series of about ten rooms that had attached bedroom with a center.. Almost like the dormitories would be at Northern (a shared suite with a bathroom in between) but there were only ten of those. So, most of us had to sleep in a big sleeping hall where we're all just lined up with foot lockers, metal lockers...

DK: The military.

RR: The military exactly.

DK: How did the name "Operation Pedro Pan" come about? Do you know that?

RR: Yes, I found out later that when Castro agreed with the State Department to allow these children to leave, the parents were given permission; they could send their children to America based on religious grounds. There were a couple of Congressmen, at the time, I am sorry I can't put a name on these Congressmen. But they developed the program through the Federal government because they had to get the funding. That is what they named it Pedro Pan or Peter Pan. It was named after Peter Pan but Pedro Pan became the organization that received all the children and assigned them a foster home whether it be an orphanage or individual home. It now numbers in the area (last time I understood when I was down visiting some of these Pedro Pan boys that I stayed with that were older) originally 11,000 -13,000 children that were airlifted.

DK: All over the United States?

RR: All over the United States. In fact, Marko Rubio who is now a Senator from Florida his parents were Pedro Pan people—he is offspring Pedro Pan program. Now, he is a U.S. Senator (See Xerox on this dispute).

DK: Did you have a ping-pong table as well in the social room?

RR: Yes, yes, pool tables ping-pong, and the Cubans were very, very good at ping-pong—very good at it. So, we would always have big tournaments. We had two or three big tables. Like I said, we had a very large rec room. Pool tables, ping-pong and whatever else. We had a Library too that we were supposed to use (a lot of the kids didn't use it)--the Library to access materials to study.

DK: How well did you learn to speak Spanish when you were immersed? And how well did they learn English?

RR: They learned English a lot quicker than I did Spanish. I learned all the bad Spanish. The stuff that they would teach me I would parrot back but I got to the point, where I could understand more than I could actually speak it. I knew what they were talking

about or I knew not word for word but I could figure it out. On the other hand, a lot of the Cubans when they arrived in America had already taken quite a few English classes in Cuba; they were already bi-lingual. There were a couple that were practically without any English. The teachers at the school would assign them to the buddy system with me. We would have to, for example, take an English class together. I remember, one boy, Amando Pena couldn't speak very well and he couldn't understand it. So, I was assigned to every class he had. I had to go with him, sit next to him and we would just do the process. We had tutors at night too. During the study hall, the priests would bring in people who had teaching as a second language they would come in and work with the boys.

DK: Were these college professors that were brought in? Or were they Spanish-speaking people in the community?

RR: Some of that but also, I remember a Spanish teacher, at the time, Mr. Domer from Marquette High School, he'd come over and he bring some of his top notch--maybe a Senior who had four years of Spanish under their belt. They would come over and work with the kids, too. At Northern, at the time, foreign languages at Northern were quite big and the language department would send over tutors, too. They really took to the language very quickly.

DK: Wow. What did the Cuban culture--how did it influence you—their morals, things that they did at home, how did you think that influenced you when you were with them? I mean, did they highly prized education.

RR: Oh! Very much so. I always said, that they were a direct influence on me because they were very motivated to work, to get a job to get ahead and they valued education. Of course, it helped being under the Catholic education system at the time because that was very much advocated. I think, as a result, of their motivation—of going to college, I also wanted to go. I realized that's what I wanted; I needed to further my education but then that was interrupted being drafted into the military. But after I graduated from high school, I went into the military and then came back to Northern, as an Undergraduate, under the G.I.bill. Thank God. Practically, every Cuban I was with, obtained a college education. Some became extremely successful—there were Tech graduates, engineers, architects, doctors and educators, too. It was quit amazing how they were highly motivated to work.

DK: So, when you came to the Orphanage, you were a run-away, no discipline and all over the place and then how quickly did it sort of...Or did you need the structure of the...?

RR: Yes, I think so because like you described, I was a run-away so I was, I'd say, considered a juvenile delinquent but I was bouncing from pillar to post in terms of foster homes and what not. When, I got to the Orphanage, as the name implies—the name was called Holy Family Home—it really became a family—just all of us boys as a family because we didn't have parents. We had a guardian or a father figure, who happened to be a priest; he stayed right there and lived in his apartment on the same floor as we did. So, he really became our surrogate father. We just grew to be together for holidays and Xmas(s) and it got to be one big happy family.

DK: Your clothing where and how did you get your clothing?

RR: That was also provided by Social Services. There was an account, for an example, at Getz's Department Store and all of us Cubans—the Cubans and myself—we had a charge account. We would be allowed to go down and they would assign maybe two or three types of items that you could have—shirts or pants or boots that were needed. Most of the Cubans arrived in Marquette without any winter clothing. So, that was an automatic first trip downtown to Getz's to outfit them in their winter garb. We were taken care of very well. I realize the Federal government supported a lot but I'm sure the Diocese also had to come across with...

DK: Right, it seems like the community supported the Orphanage with the Catholic Church. In the article that you gave me, it stated that you had a live-in social worker?

RR: Yes.

DK: Did you have meetings with her or him? How did that go?

RR: We had—the Director, Father LeLivre, who was the Director of Catholic Social Services was also in charge of the program. He lived on the same floor as us. There were also four other lay social workers. We were also required I think it was—if I remember correctly—once a week or twice a month—we had to go for a hour session to check us out, talk to us, how we're doing--everything from academics side of things to the adjustment side of it--if there were any emotional problems. A lot of times, the kids would have emotional problems because of being depressed, away from their parents and there were some discipline issues. The Cubans are typical—the Latin Americans—they have a real short fuse or temper. They're very flamboyant in their speaking and their actions. Sometimes they would get into real skirmishes between each other including sometimes with me. We all would get along in the end.

DK: How did you—were you there till the end of the close of the Orphanage?

RR: Yes. The article originally done on me was referred to as “the last orphan”.

Technically, I was the last American boy (that was placed at the Orphanage) because in 1967--the last of the Cubans were reunited with their parents. There were two Cubans left that stayed in Marquette because they were going to Northern. They were allowed to stay in the Orphanage along with me but Northern had rented that building and that was the original Skill Center. It was called the Area Training Center. NMU contracted that as a skill center and that was the start of the Jacobetti Skill Center. So, the whole bottom floor became Skill Center operations—upholstery, welding—those types of things. But, they allowed us to stay on even though Northern was now running the building in that sense. By 1967--the fall—September, I was drafted of course. I graduated in June; we were allowed to stay through the summer, then the Cubans had to find other accommodations or go back with their families. I went off to the military along with two other Cubans. So at the end, 1967, the shutting down was complete of the Orphanage.

DK: How long do you think that Northern had that as a Skill Center?

RR: I think it went on 2 or 3 years. It was a very, very short period of time--maybe a little bit longer. I think by certainly 1970—71, the accommodations then were at Northern. Of course, the Jacobetti wasn't built then, but there were facilities over there—I think one was called Birdseye Building (where Public Safety is now) that use to be used as part of the Skill Center's classes.

DK: So then the Orphanage was shuttered?

RR: Yes. Well, except for the nuns. The Sisters of St. Paul were still occupying that until their facility was built, which is now the Convent out by 493 or 494 (County Road 492). Anyway, they built a large Convent up on that highway and moved the entire Initiate over to that facility. Then it shut down. And since then its...

DK: Do you think that was in seventies' sometime?

RR: Yes, the early seventies.

DK: Then you went on to Northern...

RR: Actually, I went into the military first because I was drafted. Vietnam was quite aggressive, as far as drafting kids, if you didn't have student deferment. I was 1-A when my draft notice came up. I was taken right away. So, I went away, went into the military, got my training done but I was building up, of course, G.I. credits. I had taken a couple of classes anyway while I was in the military in Maryland where I was stationed. I was stationed in D.C. for two years. So, I took some courses at night. I was highly motivated to go back to Northern. My objective was to do that. I applied at Northern probably 4 or 5 months before I was discharged. I was discharged on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1970 (Rich corrected this date; it was 1971) and started classes the following day (on the 5<sup>th</sup>), practically, at Northern. So, I went from military with a short haircut to college life what its like...

DK: Long hair

RR: Long hair

DK: Oh, my goodness...the hippie era.

RR: Yes. Yes, and I was three years older than the typical incoming freshmen, so they would look at us being...we were the Vietnam people and all that entails.

DK: Exactly. So you never did go to Vietnam?

RR: No. I was on orders twice.

DK: You were lucky!

RR: I was on orders twice. I was lucky and spent my whole military time in the United States. But, as I said, the G.I. bill allowed me to go to Northern to get my Undergraduate degree in teaching. Then I became a teacher here in Marquette (Marquette Senior High School).

DK: And a well respected one—may I add. So how do you feel about this building sitting there all shuttered up and no place to go?



RR: I think it's terrible. It's too bad but the cost of renovating, I understand, would be just phenomenal. There is no way they can do it. On the other hand, just having it be a home to the pigeons and some of the homeless people that have been found there. I think it's terrible because it's in disarray; it's actually dangerous. I had an opportunity; I snuck into it 4 or 5 years ago with one of my daughters. We went in--just on the first floor—we got as far as the Chapel. The stairwells were crumbling and the floors, the marble and terrazzo floors were chewed up. It should be leveled, demolished.

DK: Did the Catholic Church take anything out of the Chapel or is it pretty much the same?

RR: No. When Northern came over, I was there the day that the last pews were taken out. There is a picture of the Chapel in the magazine (Michigan History/September/October/2010) article, "When Cuba Came to Marquette." It shows a beautiful color picture of the Chapel and it had all these beautiful murals throughout. I was there because I was working part-time for the Northern Training Center as a janitor of the building. They came in with painters and spray-painted over all of that.

DK: Oh, no!

RR: Sister Mc McCormick sat down and cried. So, all of the hardware...the candle...the beautiful equipment was taken and sent probably to other Dioceses and churches. They completely gutted the whole thing.

DK: Can you tell me a little about the Reunion you went to in Florida early this year?

RR: Every five years, Pedro Pan has a massive Reunion in Dade County where hundreds show up but I have never been able to attend one. So, last January, I decided to go down. I had some friends going down and they knew some of the Cubans. A couple of my Cuban friends, who I became really close to, organized a lot of the kids who lived with us during that time. We got together. We went to some Cuban restaurants and went out to an open-air bar on Biscayne Bay. We just had our own Reunion.

DK: Yes. (We had to end the interview for an appointment)

***Interview with Rich Ryan Part 2 on October 17th, 2011.***

DK: Rich, did you work outside, the work you did at the Orphanage? How did that work--to get some pin money?

RR: Yes, in fact when I first arrived there, most of us didn't have jobs; we were given an allowance. A basic allowance and in return we had certain chores that we always had to do. The priest, Father, made sure that we all had a weekly stipend so to speak that would cover all our chores. As I indicated before, we did lot of janitorial duties--cleaning up the dining, cleaning up the rec room...

DK: Do you remember how much the stipend was?

RR: No, I don't but it was very small...

DK: A dollar-twenty five?

RR: A couple dollars probably. It was not very much but as we reached the working age of sixteen, that is when the priest, he was very successful at placing us into part-time jobs. Some of the Cubans--older Cubans--had very, very good jobs. At the time I can recall one Cuban, whose name was Marino Ramirez. Marino was a nurse's aide at St. Mary's Hospital, which was right next door to the hospital, which is now the Jacobetti Center (Jacobetti Home for Veterans was St. Mary's hospital; it was across from the Orphanage). Marino, he had to be about seventeen or eighteen, before he went off to Michigan Tech. He was a nurse's aide--an orderly--I found out later that he went to medical school in Florida and became a doctor.

DK: Great.

RR: A lot of us had different jobs, as I said, some were employed by the schools—part time janitors—cleaning up after school, cleaning the gym after the basketball games and several of us received very, very good part-time jobs working in the grocery stores. Mr. Angeli was very, very famous and well known around Marquette. He was famous for hiring the Cuban boys for carry out, checkers and stock boys and so on.

DK: Where was Angeli's (grocery store) at the time?

RR: At the time, Angeli's was...which is now Northern Stationer (of Marquette) on West Washington across from the Freedom Gas Station. Then, later Angeli's moved to the Marquette Mall in 1973 (then the store became Red Owl [groceries], Dick's IGA, Northern Stationers, Marquette Food Coop). I worked for Mike Angeli for over two years. But, then also about that time in the 60's, a program came in called the Neighborhood Youth Core. It was a Federal Program where they put to work young kids under the age of eighteen—I'm not sure who administered that—but we all received jobs working summer programs, which was actually full-time. Whether, it be in Bishop Baraga school, the Parks and Recreation--those kinds of jobs were made available for us. So, we all had very, good part-time jobs, which, in fact, enabled me to save my money. The summer of my senior year, I was able to purchase my first car, which was unheard of--for the Orphanage--to be allowed that. I think--Father LeLivre pulled some strings--to allow me to have the car in my own name, buy it and actually drive it. Then, I became a glorified chauffeur for a lot of Cubans driving them around town.

DK: Great. Can you tell us about your best friends that you hung out with?

RR: Somewhere in my class, my graduating class, some were older than me--Luis Piedra is probably my best friend. He is covered in this article, "The Last Orphan" from the Mining Journal (11/23/2003). In fact, Ms. Kelley also interviewed Luis in Florida, at the time, in Miami when she was preparing this article. Luis, my best friend, he was in the class ahead of me. He was extremely bright and even that the time he spoke three languages. He was relied upon a lot by the instructors at the school because he was so good at translation. Luis later went to Northern with me. He majored and graduated from Northern with a Foreign Languages degree in Spanish Literature and English. Then went on to start a small newspaper in the Miami area, which he still does today. Also, he became my oldest daughter's Godfather.

DK: What was the third language that he knew?

RR: French. His brother, Lino (Piedra), was three or four years older than us. When, I arrived at the Orphanage, Luis was a sophomore, his brother was a freshman at Tech (Michigan Technological University/Houghton) and his brother later went on to graduate from Tech. He then went to work for Chrysler Corporation. Lee Iacocca appointed him the Director of the entire South American automotive system. So, he did that for quite a few years. Luis' brother, Lino is another big success story and he later went on to become a lobbyist for the automotive industry in D.C. Some of the other Cubans, Luis Dearmas was another one that was a very good friend (became a Florida distributor for Penthouse magazine). He was in my graduating class and best friends with Luis Piedra. Juan Dalla Rizza who I also got together with--these people were part of the reunion. Juan Dalla went on to Tech (was deferred from Vietnam of course or he would have been drafted); he graduated from Michigan Tech and went on to start his own engineering and architectural firm in Dade County, which he still presently owns. It is quite a large operation that he runs in Miami; he situated his offices, I think, in Coral Gables because he took us to the offices that he worked out of. The names just go on, but Israel Fernandez was another one that was a very colorful character. He was one of the--number one basketball players at Bishop Baraga Central High School at the time. Israel was another one that we got together with in Miami, this past January, along with three or four other individuals. We had like a mini-reunion because I was not able to attend the previous one for Pedro Pan kids—but they were all Pedro Pan people that we had lived with during that time. It was fun to get together; we spent a weekend going to different Cuban restaurants, just getting together and talking over old times.

DK: Are there any funny stories from the Orphanage?

RR: I am trying to think, there were some incidents, that more than anything that stand out. I use to tell my daughters--this one story--because my daughters would like to know how did I spend Christmas, what was Christmas like, what was Thanksgiving like. Some of the holidays were not traditional for Cubans--but we would still have Thanksgiving dinner even though it was not something they were use to. Of course, Christmas was another thing, but their cultural thing was a little different than ours. But, I remember one time at Christmas, we always set-up and decorated--had a very formal Christmas Party--with decorations--with the nuns and all of us. We would get the tree set-up—get all the decorations out--we would all participate in decorating it and getting it ready for the Christmas holidays. We had a lot of decorations; we decorated the dining room and all that. Well, Israel as I mentioned before, was quite a basketball player. We were always doing stupid, little high school pranks. We...They decided, one time, after we had finished dinner one evening, during the Christmas holidays, and all the clean up was done. We were just sitting around having some coffee and desserts...everybody kind of left us--unattended at the time. So, Israel started taking some of the Christmas decorations...especially the little glass balls off the tree. They set-up a little basketball venue in the dining room and started throwing them into the wastebasket. They broke them all. They went through and actually broke all of the Christmas balls. Sister McCormick found out about that and she just hit the roof. She went into Father Le Livere's office and demanded retribution and we were all grounded. We had to come up with some of our allowance to pay for new decorations; we redecorated the tree and we were put on notice. That was an interesting, funny story because everyone ran and

scattered to all areas of the buildings, all floors of the Orphanage to get away from her. She was a spitfire--she was Irish--she was a tough one.

DK: What did you decorate with? You said you decorated with some glass balls?

RR: Some traditional stuff and then of course, tinsel but we also made things like garland. I remember, the first time I ever experienced making a string of popcorn and cranberry or something like that sewn together. Some of that stuff the Cuban boys would have fun with. They would laugh like crazy over it because it was stuff they never did. It was trying to get us into a family sort of atmosphere and situation and it brought us together. Father would go out of his way to make sure that through the Knights of Columbus and other organizations that there were quite a few gifts that were always donated during that time. A lot of service organizations would put together really neat things to give us as gifts—or ski passes we would get those kinds of things...

DK: Ski passes to the hill?

RR: ...to the hill or ski passes to Al Quaal (Recreation Area in Ishpeming) was a big one. We would go up on a Saturday in our van that we had—I don't know how they acquired the van—but it was a transportation van. They would get a couple of vans—whether they rented them or not I don't remember—we would all spend the day at Al Quaal on the toboggan runs. It was all paid for—covered by service organizations—free passes or movie passes.

DK: So, the Reunion in Miami went well. Are most of the 35 boys...are they still alive? How many people were there at the Reunion out of the 35?

RR: There were about...

#### **TURN TAPE FOR SIDE B:**

DK: So, there were about ten people there?

RR: Ten were able to make it. Some of the Cubans that were in the area were out of town or unavailable at the time. Like I said, we were catching up who was available and who was around. They attempted to contact a lot of the orphans, we lived with, and they have fallen off the map; they disappeared. A few have died. Marino (Ramirez), the doctor I talked about, he had passed away, I understand, about ten years ago. A couple of the other Cubans, had some very colorful things (jobs), a couple are in prison in fact because they went the other way. One was involved heavily in an illegal drug operation in Ecuador. So, he became infamous in-group discussions. But, a lot of them like I said were very successful. In fact, one of them—I never lived with this individual because he had left the Orphanage by the time I arrived. He later became a Bishop near Miami—not Dade County that was quite large—a County in Florida somewhere, a large Diocese but he had made it all the way to a Bishop.

DK: So, in all total with this program, how many boys actually went through the Holy Family Orphanage? I know there was about 35 in your group but...?

RR: All total, from the time I arrived there because it was like a revolving door for a lot of that time—they would come--they would go. By the time I arrived there, the program

had been in existence for two years. All those boys had either been discharged, placed somewhere in a foster situation, placed back with their parents or other relatives that were in the United States. There was a recycling process that continued on. But, I say, all total, from my understanding, it amounted in the area of about 80-90 total that went through the whole program for four years—four or five years. So, it was quite a bit that went through it.

DK: So, some of the boys went to foster homes, even though they had parents?

RR: No. The parents were still trapped in Cuba but they were placed in Spanish speaking homes that became available on whatever list they had. For example, a couple of Cubans that were with us in the group, one I remember, I was really good friends with him. His name was Eduardo Martinez. He was placed with an Uncle--a long lost relative so to speak--that they found in New Jersey. So, he left after two years and went to live with his Uncle until his parents could immigrate. In fact a lot of the Cubans, I met down there during our Reunion, still have older siblings that never left Cuba. They stayed. They never did go. Luis Piedra was an example, his older sister still lives in Havana, even though Lino and Luis left and then his parents came over, of course, after. But they left the older daughter because she didn't want to leave.

DK: So, what do you think they should do with the building, the Holy Family Orphanage?

RR: It's a tough one. In the article in the Michigan History magazine, they interviewed a couple of the older Cubans that had left Holy Family Orphanage before I got there. One of them said (Carlos Naumann) a very successful builder in the Miami area, he really regretted hearing about it because if he had known it had fallen into such disarray. He would have made an effort to get as many Pedro Pan kids that went through there, to see if they could put together some kind of funding, to see if they could remodel it or refurbish it. The other Cuban, that I grew up with in the Orphanage and met during my January visit—Juan Dalla Rizza. He, as I said, is an owner of an architectural/engineering firm had done studies; he married a local Marquette girl and they come home every four or five years. They visit family up here. He is very familiar with the building and being an engineer, of course, pretty much confirmed what I thought too--it's beyond repair. It has fallen in such disarray.

DK: It would just take millions and millions of dollars to renovate it.

RR: Exactly, it's too bad. But on the other hand, it's going to cost the City, they estimate over a hundred thousand dollars just to tear it down—demolish it—get rid of everything. It's really unfortunate but something should be done about it.

DK: Was there anything else you had thought about—to talk about—that you thought was important?

RR: I really can't pinpoint anything else except what we already have talked about. How valuable and really nice it was that the Catholic Diocese involved themselves in this whole program because it really did save a lot of the Cuban boys including myself. It encouraged us to go on and better our lives with education—post education. We had a lot of influence and advice from them to do those sorts of things and that is why people

ended up going to Northern or Michigan Tech or other schools. I think that is going to be a legacy that the Catholic Diocese can always be proud of what they did for these boys because they all became—by in large—successful, productive members of society. They are American citizens and involved in their communities. Most of them migrated back to the Dade County area because it was a cultural thing for them down there. They never, never, ever forgot the Holy Family Home, never.

DK: I am going to ask you a question Russ Magnaghi would ask you. Were the priests trained as Jesuits?

RR: Some were...some were not...Father LeLivre, for example, was; he went to Loyola University in Chicago. He used to tell me stories about his Jesuit training and seminarian background--that's here he went. I am not sure where Father Gibbs came from. We also we're influenced by the Capuchin priests. We always referred to them as our monks with sandals. They would teach some of the religion courses at Baraga but all of the Capuchins were around too at the time. They would come in and conduct religion classes either in the high school or up at the Orphanage itself but Father LeLivre was one that was definitely trained in that area.

I would like to add, one thing that I did forget, most of the priests that I dealt with including Father Gibbs, Father LeLivre, several of the Capuchin priests and a couple of other priests that were on staff at the time--they all left the priesthood. My guardian, Father LeLivre for example left the priesthood two years after I was in the military. He became a Director of Social Services for a small hospital in Appleton, Wisconsin. He married and lived his life out until nine or ten years ago. We understood that Father Gibbs ended up becoming a Research Librarian for the University of Michigan when he came back from South America. I don't know what that says but it was the time, I think. At the time, when the priests were leaving the priesthood in droves, apparently because most of the priests that I had exposure with, became civilians so to speak. They left the priesthood for one reason or another. [Second Vatican Council/Vatican II (1962-1965)]

DK: Gosh, that's amazing!

RR: It is--including some of the nuns we had at the high school—

DK: Really!

RR: Yes, I know of two nuns specifically that did that too—one of them was our English teacher--which we all loved.

DK: Well, I guess Russ Magnaghi would say that, the Jesuits have a higher educational level and the idea that you strive to be a better person and that sort of thing. So, that is why I asked that question because he felt they really had a foot in both worlds, meaning the religious world and the ordinary everyday world.

RR: I think that Father LeLivre really fits that description very accurately because he called and talked to me prior to leaving the priesthood. It was very, very--it was emotionally very, very upsetting to me at the time. When, he took the time and wanted me to know what he was going to do. He said, he had struggled; there was no woman or anything like that involved in his life at the time. He just felt that he had to it but he

wanted me to know that regardless of him leaving the priesthood—everything he stood for and tried to teach us—it didn't matter—it was still going to be there with us. Then I found out that he got married a year later.

DK: Is there anything else you want to add?

RR: I just think looking back on it, when you think of the image of an Orphanage (like in Charles Dickens days) it was nothing like that--abusive or otherwise. We were taken care of, we were fed very well, we were all provide for and it was a very, very good experience for me and for the majority of the Cubans (from what they've told me). In fact in the article that Luis talks about--out of all the Pedro Pan Network that happened during that time—the Pedro Pan Network spread far and wide throughout the United States—not just the Northern Michigan Diocese--it was one of the best placements ever for those kids that came over. They always refer to it as--Holy Family being one of the best placements that they could have.

DK: Great. Thank you very much.

RR: Another thing that I think was really interesting when the Cuban boys all arrived here they became quite a novelty for the high school students in Marquette, both Bishop Baraga and Marquette High School, especially at the dances, for example. There was always some rivalry because a lot of the Cubans were the typical nice looking, dark hair, Latino type and the girls were fascinated by these young boys and of course the American boys would be a little put out because of the popularity of the Cuban boys...

DK: And the competition...

RR: And the competition, exactly. This leads me to say that several Cubans that I know married local, Marquette girls or U.P. girls and made families... made their families that way...three of which, I know very personally, married Marquette girls and return to Marquette because they still have in-laws that they visit from time to time. In fact, I know another Cuban (Luis Meso) who married a girl from Iron Mountain; they had one daughter. Unfortunately, about fifteen years ago, they were traveling from Detroit (he got a job with an automotive company) and his wife was from Iron Mountain. Of course, Luis Meso was the Cuban who lived with us...they married. They were living in Detroit, outside of Metro Detroit somewhere but they got killed in a head on collision on U.S. 2 coming up to visit their daughter at Northern.

DK: Oh, my.

RR: She was left, of course, an orphan but "Thank God", she had an aunt that lives in Marquette and they took her under their wing.

DK: What irony?

RR: I know. It was tragic, very tragic. Yet, she was a U.P. girl (his wife) and Luis stayed in Michigan and went to work for the automotive company. He had been working their twenty-five years. That, I think, is also a spin off of this whole program because there are children now that have Cuban fathers that were living in Marquette at one time.

DK: Well, good.

RR: Pedro Rodriguez, when I arrived, he was in charge of all of us actually--the boys. The priest put a lot of emphasis on him because he was the oldest. He also was 6'6" and 250 pounds, a very large guy. He had his foot broken when he was a young boy in Cuba. He had a real butcher job done on his foot, to the point, where he limped continually because I remember him telling us about this. Anyway, he was in charge of us. It would be like--the enforcer to make sure that we would stay for two hours in our study hall rooms, that we studied, that we did our chores—got things done. He also was the individual that the priest used as the translator because when there would be arguments or fights going on, Pedro would have to break them up along with the priest. Then, he would have to explain to the priest what happened—who said, what, why and so on. Pedro was a very colorful character and he was there for all of the time that I was there.

Then, a local writer, a freelance writer in Marquette, named Carrie Pearson came to me, a couple years ago and said she had an idea about doing a short story or a novel—depending on the length of it. She was always fascinated by the Holy Family Home, especially when she'd drive by there with her daughter, she said. In the process, she started doing a lot of the research, really extensive research on it and put together a fictional story, at the time, a short story. I was the main character of the story. The names were all changed but a lot of the individuals that I have spoken about--who lived with me in the Orphanage--were used as characters in her story. It all centered around me being a run away, my whole background in how I ended up being in the court--a ward of the court—being transferred over to the Orphanage. But, then in the process, a year and half ago, Carrie was asked by the Michigan History magazine to do an article on the Cuban program. So, she wrote an article, which was published in the magazine called, "When Cuba Came to Marquette" by Carrie Pearson. She did a lot of research and obtained original photos of the Cathedral--the chapel, which was in the building itself. She pulled several pictures of the Cubans and Father Gibbs when they attended the Marygrove retreats along with Mr.—James Connors—who was the lay social worker, who later became a Congressmen from the Iron Mountain area. He represented--the House of Representative for eight years in the State Legislature. He was the main counselor at the time. She also interviewed, a gentleman, named Tony Madrigal who was a Doctor of Spanish Literature and English Literature who taught at the University of Miami for quite a few years and retired. They did an interview with Tony (I met Tony once down there) but he did not live with us at the time because he was older. He got together with Sister Agnes Rita who is actually a Filizetti from Marquette (spelled incorrectly in the article) and she was from the Filizetti family...

DK: In Iron Mountain?

RR: In Marquette...long line of Filizettis that are related here in Marquette. Sister Agnes, we always knew her as Sister Agnes; in fact, I didn't know until about fifteen years ago, that her civilian name was actually Filizetti. I found out that she has relatives—she has a nephew that is still in Marquette that I run into occasionally. Tony got together with Sister Agnes down (in Florida) for one of the Pedro Pan Reunions—the big reunions. She attended and that is also covered in the article that Carrie did. Carrie did a real extensive job on researching the whole program and how it came to be.



DK: Do you know where she did her research?

RR: I think it was a combination of a few things. The Diocese, I was aware of, has a real “minimal archive-type situation”, actually in the building that houses the Catholic Social Services is where I originally steered her to. I knew there were articles clipped and saved. I think she did some stuff at Northern: I not sure where or how. Also, she went to the actual Pedro Pan organization, which is represented in Chicago. There is actually a group. I am not sure who the Director is—I spoke to her once on the phone that Luis gave me a referral to. She is the Historian for the Pedro Pan; she is the main archivist of the Pedro Pan program. She was housed out of Chicago, I not sure if it was connected to the University of Chicago or where. She was in charge of all of the material related to this whole Pedro Pan group.

DK: Does Pedro Pan have a Website that you can go to?

RR: Yes, they do. I have to obtain that, but...

DK: That’s OK. I’m sure we can **Google** it and get it. How come the archives are in Chicago and not Dade County?

RR: I think there is also an office down there too (Florida). Luis told me...he has been there. He also talked to Ellie, her name is Ellie (with a Spanish last name) Ellie who is the Director out of Chicago that there is an office (Florida) that he used to go to, for some of the articles, he would do for his newspaper. There is a website for Pedro Pan that has a lot of information. They try to track all of the individuals from the Pedro Pan group, where they are, what they’re doing...like the Native Americans do when they appoint a Historian to document.

DK: Great do you think that’s it?

RR: I think that’s it.

DK: I wanted to clarify one thing. I wanted to know whether you were born in Marquette or not? Then, eventually how you got to Detroit and back to Marquette, again?

RR: Yes, I was born in Marquette, April 2, 1949 and was educated in elementary schools (in Marquette). First, at Fisher School, at the time, was on Fisher Street and then I went over to St. Peter’s Elementary School. I was eleven years old and my mother died in 1960, I believe, yes, 1960.

DK: At that time what did she die of?

RR: She died of a heart attack at forty-one years old.

DK: Oh, my.

RR: So, that left my father, my older sister (who was four years older than me) to fend for ourselves, so to speak. My father was just not capable of taking care of us because he had some physical issues, he was an alcoholic and so that compounded the problems. Eventually, he lost us to Social Services. Social Services back then, was nothing like what it is today. At the time, he knew I had a grandmother, his mother, had a farm outside of Adrian, Michigan. I’m not quite sure how it happened but they co-coordinated

a foster home placement for me downstate, near where my father was being sent to stay with his mother, my grandmother. I found out later, the foster home I was assigned to, there was a connection with my grandfather--my dad's father who had passed by then. There was a connection with working at the Rouge Plant in Detroit. My grandfather apparently got this gentleman a job and so they were willing to take me as a placement. Then, my sister was placed with another family in Allen Park, Michigan. So, at eleven years old, I moved to Detroit and resumed my seventh grade/middle school and I stayed there until the end of my eighth grade year because the foster home turned out to be quite a tough foster home—an abusive situation. So, I decided to go. I stole some money from my foster mother. I made arrangements because I knew a couple, older people, that my sister was friends with, because they could drive. They literally drove me down to Detroit and I bought a one-way ticket—a bus ticket to Marquette. At that time, I was almost 13...I was 13 years old, I go to the bus and came to Marquette. It was almost the end of August, beginning September when that happened.

What I did was basically--came back to Marquette—I was alone. I had one Uncle here but he was a bachelor, World War II Veteran and he really couldn't take care of me. So, I ended up just going back to the old neighborhood that I grew up in and I stayed with friends and their family. I basically couch surfed until about the end of October. As the article indicates, at the end of October, I was actually picked up by the Marquette City Police because I was a truant delinquent. It was the end of October; they found out that I was not in school. I forgot how they discovered it but I was picked up because, I think, it was late at night--one night. I became quite a street kid at the time. I found myself being sent to Juvenile Court and Judge DeFant was the juvenile judge, at the time, and he initiated guardianship over me and I became a ward of the State. That's when he called Catholic Social Services because the Director Father Gibbs was called in at the court hearing as a representative for them. At that time, Judge DeFant asked me if I would like to be placed with this Cuban program going on at the Orphanage or would I like to be sent to a Boys School downstate.

DK: There were Boys Schools downstate?

RR: There was a Catholic school run downstate called Boysville and it was near my grandmother's farm area, Adrian, Michigan. Boysville, from everything I had heard, was quite tough; it wasn't like Boys Town. I decided between the two, I'd throw my lot in with the Cubans because I didn't know what to really expect there but at least it was going to keep me in Marquette.

DK: And that was familiar to you.

RR: Yes, it was actually my neighborhood; I grew up three blocks away from the Orphanage.

DK: You ran away because you felt you were out of control or you couldn't control what was going on in your life?

RR: Yes. As I said, the foster home, she was very, very (she more than the father) they were very abusive to us—her two boys and me. They would use us like slaves. We took our share of getting slapped around quite a lot; we were very, very controlled. I lived

right in the city of Detroit and I started my freshmen year, at Cody High School, which was a very large high school (in fact, later on my wife--I find out--graduated from Cody about four years later but I never meet her until she came to Northern). I went to Cody, as I said, for a couple of months. It was so large, I got fed up with that and wanted to get back to small town Marquette. So, that's how I ended up getting back into Marquette. I was a member of the Catholic Diocese, St. Pete's at the time and whether it was a coincidence that the Catholic Diocese also had the Social Services organization but they called them in to represent me at the hearing. So, that is how I ended up in the Orphanage.

DK: Good.

RR: You're welcome.

DK: Thank You and this is the end of the tape and we will transcribe it soon.

RR: *Note:* After the tape was turned off, Rich Ryan talked about his mentor and guardian, Father LeLivre. How Father LeLivre would comfort and counsel him because the Cuban boys all had parents and were reunited with them in three or four years. ("It was like a revolving door for a lot of that time—they would come--they would go...boys had either been discharged, placed somewhere in a foster situation, placed back with their parents or other relatives that were in the United States. There was a recycling process that continued on.") Plus, there would be good-bye parties for them but of course, Richard Ryan had no parents. So, it was very difficult for him at the time. Father LeLivre fulfilled the role of his parent, which Richard is forever grateful.

*Interview with Rich Ryan Part 3 on December 7th, 2011.* I met with Richard Ryan a third time for a few more questions:

DK: There were some questions after the transcription that I wanted to ask Rich. So, we are going to add these to the document. Rich, can you explain to me again...what was on every floor of the Orphanage? How did that work?

RR: O.K. On the...actually it wouldn't be the first floor... it would be the **basement** of the building. The basement of the building had the dining hall, kitchen, clean-up areas, and storage rooms and on the south side of the basement (on Almont Street)--south side of the Orphanage were three classrooms. Two of the classrooms were actually Bishop Baraga High School's classrooms. But of course the Orphanage was three blocks away from the original high school. All of the shop classes that were offered at Bishop Baraga High School were held in the bottom (floor) of the Orphanage. Students would have to walk from Bishop Baraga up three blocks to the Orphanage to go to class morning or afternoon. So in the basement, those were the facilities that I just described. The **first floor** had all of the Catholic Social Services offices, which probably had six offices if I recall that was on half of the first floor. The other half of the first floor of the Orphanage was part of the novitiate--the nuns--and at the very end of the first floor was the big Chapel that you have seen in pictures. The Chapel was used by all of us and the nuns. The **second and third floor** was all the convent where they trained novices that were coming through the program. I recall that there were quite a few young girls that were in the convent.

DK: How many would you say?

RR: I was thinking probably in the area of 20-25 because at some functions you would see them trailing off to get on a bus; they were going somewhere. You hardly ever saw them; it was out of bounds for us. We were not allowed on the second and third floors. The **fourth floor** would have been all for the Cubans and that is where we lived. On that floor (it was really massive—it was a massive building inside) half of the fourth floor was one huge dormitory. I would probably say--you could put 40-50 kids on that whole floor of the dormitory. The beds were lined up just like you'd imagine in the old orphanages that you might have seen in the past or a lot of the military barracks I was in afterwards were exactly identical.

DK: So this was training for the military...

RR: Yes, it was. It gave me that same feeling when I did get drafted and went in. When I first arrived there, I was assigned to the dormitory where half of the boys were staying at the time. If you were older and had time in the "pecking order", you would get a room to share because there were probably a total of ten rooms off the hallway down from the dormitory that were actually suites. Much like the dormitories at Northern would be, where you would have two rooms and share a restroom. The dormitories would house 30-40—it could take that many—maybe even as high as 50. All of the beds were lined up in perfect order. We all had footlockers at the end of the beds and that was where we would keep our stuff because closet space was not available in the dorms. Down the hall were two very huge showers and bathrooms, which were utilized by us. Then, on the second half of the fourth floor were our day room, TV room, and study halls (we had rooms that we would have to go--in the evening to study). Then one big rec room which was probably half the size of the dormitory at the end (that would be on the north side of the top of the building/the fourth floor) and that was where all the ping-pong tables, pool table and the long, large laundry table.

This is where we would have to pick up our laundry that was done by the nuns. I'm not sure if I ever talked about that. On a weekly basis, we would be turning in our dirty laundry; laundry that would be sent downstairs in a big chute—almost like a mini elevator. The nuns did our laundry. So, there was a big laundry facility also in the basement that I forgot to mention, where they had the massive dryers and washers. The nuns took care of all the clothes. I was thinking about this before. We had to label everything--T-shirts, underwear, shirts, sweatshirts—we all had to label with a magic marker with our initials, so we could identify the clothes because they would all be folded and perfectly laid out on the table. Laundry day, pick up day, if I recall was Thursday or Friday. We knew that our laundry would be up there ready for us to go. We might have been away at school but the nuns would bring all the laundry up and put it on the table. So, that's how we picked up our laundry; it was done frequently because there were quite a few boys; it was a weekly basis.

DK: The kids that went to college, would come home on the weekends and holidays, did they have their laundry service still in use?

RR: No. No. They were on their own. I recall, a lot of the boys I lived with would have older siblings, older brothers, who went off to college (they might have been in the Orphanage a year or two because they were older—I can think of specifically three that went off to Tech—Michigan Tech). During the holidays and breaks, they would come back home, if you will to the Orphanage and spend the holidays with us. They were pretty much on their own depending on if they lived in the dorms or in an apartment at Tech or Northern. I think the ones that went to Northern lived in the dorms at the time.

DK: Did some of the Cubans get adopted here in Marquette?

RR: Yes. Beside myself, there were, I recall three or four. I only remember one by name because he and I were fostered out the first year that we had foster homes assigned to us. We were assigned together on the same block in Marquette; it was on the north side of Marquette, on East Michigan Street. Two families that were very involved with the Catholic Church, St. Peter's were approached...

DK: Would you mention their names?

RR: One was Fred Donckers who owned Donckers' candy store and restaurant at the time. Now, it is still named Donckers' but it has changed hands and actually the Donckers' now has a full kitchen and restaurant like it used to be when we were kids. But Fred had shut down (the restaurant) by the time we were in high school and only sold candy out of the first half of the store. Fred Donckers took me in; he lived on East Michigan Street—actually it was 442 East Michigan Street. Three doors down, Father LeLivre was able to place, Israel Fernandez who was in the class behind me (he was a Junior); he was assigned to the home of Cliff and Mary Ingman. Cliff was the Regional Representative for State Farm Insurance--since then--he has retired. Mary was the Secretary to the first Vice President, Leo Van Tassel for Business and Finance at Northern; she was his Secretary for twenty-some years (*Correction of tape: Van Tassel was never President—see A Sense of Time*). Then, she went into the President's Office with Jamrich (1967-1983)—I am trying to think when Jamrich came--or Harden (1956-1967)--maybe it was even Harden. Mary ran the offices; she was quite efficient but they both worked full time, so Israel stayed there with their daughter, Ann Ingman. Ann was also a student in the Catholic school system but she was probably six or seven years younger.

DK: That was their daughter, Ann?

RR: Their daughter, Ann... The Donckers had two young daughters at the same time too. They were in later elementary, when I arrived there. It was temporary. We stayed for about a year, then we went back to the Orphanage and finished our high school senior year there—at the Orphanage.

DK: So, Israel did have parents but had to stay in a foster home? I'm not quite sure how did that worked?

RR: All the boys had parents but the parents were still, of course, in Cuba. They were not allowed to leave under the Castro regime but they were applying to get their visas, so they could immigrate to the United States. All of the boys had parents. All of the boys there, all of their parents were still in Cuba. It wasn't until that year of 1966 and 1967

that the United States came into some sort of agreement with the Castro regime to allow those parents--who had children already in the United States--they were allowed to leave and immigrate to Miami, literally, with the clothes on their back; that's all they had. All their possessions and property was confiscated. Then, they would start being reunited, as the flow would continue; then you would start seeing kids leaving--some two, three a month—some once a month. It depended on when the parents arrived in the United States and were placed by the U.S. government.

DK: So, in essence they weren't adopted they were in foster homes?

RR: Yes, foster homes.

DK: And the Luke family?

RR: The Luke family was very well known in the community. Bob Luke was one of the names I recall and his brother--and I am at a loss who his brother (for his brother's name). They were big boosters, supporters of Bishop Baraga athletic programs and involved in the Knights of Columbus too. They were very, very helpful and they would donate a lot of things to the Orphanage, like Christmas baskets. They would also take some of the kids out on weekends to recreate--go to their camp and go on trips with them. They were very involved with helping out the boys.

DK: While we are talking about the Knights of Columbus, you had to attend all of the Knights of Columbus events?

RR: Well, when there were events. It wasn't so much...

DK: What kind were they?

RR: It wasn't so much as being required but let's say it was encouraged because the Knights of Columbus did a lot of really nice things for the Orphanage and for the boys--in terms of sponsoring events--outing, sleigh rides in the winter time—Knights of Columbus would sponsor dances, for example, on weekends at Bishop Baraga. They would put on dances for the boys, actually for the community--the Catholic community of the high school. Of course, we would have access going out to the different functions they had at the time.

DK: Well, did you ever think about becoming a priest?

RR: At one time, when I was probably in the middle of my stay there, I considered it because it was talked about. It wasn't like we were being recruited. It was being encouraged in Bishop Baraga at the high school in our religion classes. We would be encouraged to look at some of the seminarian programs that were out there. Kids that were considering going off to college--that was another option. You could go off to the seminary and get your college education while you were studying to be a priest. I only remember two Cubans that actually did. They went off to seminaries—one seminary was in Milwaukee (and I can't remember the name of the seminary there) but there was another seminary in Detroit, which became a very famous seminary in Detroit inside the city limits. I think it was called St. Mary's, I think it was near Royal Oak...

DK: Sacred Heart?

RR: Sacred Heart. Sacred Heart.

DK: Sacred Heart Seminary.

RR: Sacred Heart Seminary and St. Mary's Seminary—there were two that they attended. I lost track of one of the boys—I know there were three or four that went—but the one I do remember who did become a priest and ended up back in Dade County area. He is still in the priesthood; he became a Bishop, which is quite significant at that point after thirty years in the priesthood. I believe now, the boys have told me that I meet—some of the boys that I lived with—told me he since retired but still in the Miami area.

DK: The other question that we need to clear up is the burning of Bishop Baraga High School, were you there? [Bishop Barga High School was were the Marquette City Hall and Marquette Police station are today].

RR: Yes. This is vague to me because I had graduated by then. The Orphanage and the Cuban Program had shut down at the end of 1967. Most of us went off either to college or scattered around. All the boys were being reunited with their families. There were a couple of boys that stayed and went to Northern after 1967. I was drafted and went into the military. So, that occurred when we were away because the program had shut down and that had to be in the very last--right after the last year of the graduating class before the high school shut down and the kids were transferred over to the public school. So, I wasn't even in town when that happened. I just remember hearing about it. *Note:* The Marquette Regional Historical Center documents state the fire was Sunday, May 5, 1974.

DK: And why did they not rebuild? Why didn't they rebuild?

RR: I think it had to do with funding. The Diocese was struggling trying to keep the school open. The most we ever had...

***WE HAVE RUN OUT OF TAPE for this interview. The rest of this interview has been written by Rich Ryan on January 16, 2012 and add to this document.***

**Bishop Baraga:** At the end of 1967, after graduation, I was drafted into the Army (August 1967 for three years) while others went off to college. Two (of the boys) went to NMU—Luis Pieadra and Luis de Armas; Juan Dalla went to MTU. We all graduated in 1967 (from high school). The Orphanage was closed because we were the last children to live there. The building then became the Area Training Center run by NMU. Later this program became the Jacobetti Skill Center. Bishop Baraga struggled with declining enrollments and lack of funding because it was a tuition-based high school and the Diocese finally closed it in that year (**June 1969** Bishop Baraga High School closed, Seasons of Faith by Angela S. Johnson).

**When did your Father die?** My father died when I was 19 and in the U.S. Army in 1968. I came home for the funeral while in basic training. He gave up custody of me when I was 11 years old after my Mom died. I spent a couple of years in foster care until coming back to Marquette in 1964.

**When did Bishop Baraga High School burn down?** Actually, I was not present as I was in the U.S. Army until late in 1971. The property where the school was--is now the current City Hall and Police Station. The parking lot of the Police Station was the High School playground and practice field for the football team. During the winter, it was flooded and made into an ice rink for the City residents. We used the field for recreation during our lunch hour and after school. The only building left from the original high school is the current Senior Center and gym. This was attached to the high school and was used for our P.E. classes and Basketball games during the season. *Note:* The Marquette Regional Historical Center Xerox documents state the fire was Sunday, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1974. The demolition of the school had started 5/2/1974 and it burned on 5/5/1974.

**Were there Art and Music classes offered in the High School?** Yes. We had a very extensive curriculum offered in these areas for such a small school. There were various Art classes as well as Music classes. The choir performed across the street at St. Peter's Cathedral and at Holiday events. Students could also join speech activities such as the Debate team and Forensic team. I was in Forensics for a while and also participated in a play. *Note:* While teaching at Marquette Senior High School, Rich Ryan was the Advisor to the Forensics and Debate Teams.

Every student was also required to take a Religion and a Latin class. All of the religion classes were taught by nuns and Capuchin Brothers. We also had French and Spanish classes, which really helped the Cuban Boys. Shop type classes were offered and taught in the basement of the Orphanage and those students had to walk three blocks from the high school to the class everyday to take the class. Staffing at the high school consisted of nuns and several lay teachers as well.

On the cornerstone of the Holy Family Orphans' Home, Marquette, Michigan is carved in Latin: THIS WORDING:

AMDG	(AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIA) TO THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD
DIE 14 JULI AD 1914	DAY 14 OF JULY AD 1914
FRIDERICUS EIS	FREDRICK EIS
EPISCOPUS	BISHOP
MARQUETTENSIS	OF MARQUETTE
POSUIT	PLACES IT

This oral interview has been edited and corrected by Rich Ryan and Diane Kordich  
February 2012