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INTERVIEW WITH DR. FRANCISCO BARRIOS
INTERVIEWED BY CHRIS GUTHRIE
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GUTHRIE: This is Chris Guthrie and I am about to interview Dr. Barrios who is an immigrant from Mexico. He immigrated to the United States in 1954. Dr. Barrios, could you tell us a little bit about what you did in Mexico before you decided to emigrate.

BARRIOS: Yes. I was a pediatrician for about eight to ten years, and in addition, I was a professor for a private university for girls, one of the exclusive type of universities for rich girls. I was on the faculty of chemistry. I taught physiology and anatomy.

GUTHRIE: When and why did you decide to immigrate to the United States?

BARRIOS: I decided to see the American type of medicine first. I wasn't completely satisfied with the way I was practicing medicine at that time. So, in addition, several problems arose in Mexico. Most annoying to me was the socialization of medicine which I didn't go along with, not because it wasn't good for the average worker and the Mexicans, but because it was bad for the medical profession. We lost our individuality. The normal relation between the patient and physician was lost. So I didn't like it, and then I came here in 1954 for one year. I liked it here and decided to come back and practice medicine. So I did the following year in 1955.

GUTHRIE: When you came in 1954, what did you like about our medical techniques?

BARRIOS: I didn't have too much time to inquire, because my main goal, at the time was to learn English. I thought I knew English because I took several courses in English, but they were English from England. So you can imagine a Mexican trying to speak English with an Oxford-Mexican accent. So really I didn't know English at all. So for one year the only thing I did in addition was to be an intern at a hospital and to try very hard to speak the language and get all the expressions and slang and things like that. At the same time I refreshed my medical education with some meetings and conferences and I practiced the medicine in all aspects in English. So I did everything surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics and so on.

GUTHRIE: Where did you do this practice?

BARRIOS: It was in one of the most beautiful town in the United States: It was in East St. Louis, St. Mary's Hospital, a very busy hospital there, very good for learning English.

GUTHRIE: You got every aspect in East St. Louis. When you decided to come to the United States, what was your image of the United States at that time?

BARRIOS: I'm afraid I have to quote a famous politician of the United States. I'm afraid I was brain washed. I really say that very candidly, because the image of the United States in Mexico, at that time, at least, was through beautiful movie pictures and radio and television. In other words it was the perfect beginning and perfect ending, a love story of a movie picture. I really didn't know the real United States. I had the idea that the United States, at that time, well it is really a highly civilized country, but I never expected that poverty, hunger or any other of the problems of my country were present in the United States, too.

GUTHRIE: In 1955, when you did decide to emigrate, how much red tape did you have to go through in order to get over here?

BARRIOS: Well, red tape, unfortunately, is the same in any country, in any official office. It wasn't the red tape that bothered me. I could cope with it, but it was the peculiar bureaucratic philosophy of confessing the candidate to come to the United States. I was sworn and asked if I was a drug addict, whether I was involved with prostitution, and whether I had any criminal tendencies or whether I belonged to a communist group. Now of course those things are very annoying, and they still practice it every day. Now we know, through the newspapers, people want to come to the United States.

GUTHRIE: When you came over did you come directly to St. Louis? Or did you stop somewhere in the Southwest where the racial problem is higher than it is in St. Louis?

BARRIOS: No, I came straight to here, although I knew the country before as a tourist. So before I came here and settled down, we already came here, my family, my children and I to visit the United States. We came here under very peculiar conditions, we didn't face that problem.

GUTHRIE: That's good. Would you say that the racial problem in St. Louis is anything at all?

BARRIOS: The racial problem in St. Louis, as I see it, is very subtle. It's not a blunt, frank approach like we have in the South, where Negroes are Negroes and they are still supposed to be separated, like the apartheid in Africa. Here is a subtle U.S., a very intelligent negro worker where I work said yesterday to me, "Every time I see a forced smile, what it really means is they are laughing at me and I resent it." That's the subtle type of discrimination we find in St. Louis. We have the problem of housing, and the mingling of people, whites and blacks, I think still is very strong, very subtle.

GUTHRIE: How about as far as your race is concerned?

BARRIOS: Well we are somewhere between the devil and the deep blue sea. We are not considered 100% white, we are not considered blacks, so somebody said "Well, let's go into the brown business." So we are browns. We may or may not have discrimination. I personally have not faced it really, maybe because of the layer of work or profession that I am in.

GUTHRIE: So now you settled in the United States and you found, more or less, your position. How did people of your profession treat you, and how did the economic balance

between the two countries?

BARRIOS: In the environment where I work they treat us very nicely. It is the official business that bothers me. For instance, now it's changed fortunately, I couldn't practice as a physician, because I wasn't considered to be a physician, although I was already graduated in Mexico. I had to prove to that gigantic institution, the American Medical Association, that I was a physician, and I quote, "with the same level of high standards of education," to be able to practice medicine and not cause any harm to patients in the United States. I was already a specialist in my country. I had to start as an intern, as a resident, then go back through the trials and tribulations of getting a license to practice medicine. For the license I had to show the document stating that I was to become an American citizen, That was in Illinois. In Missouri, I couldn't get my license until I became a citizen. They change the rule now because they need more physicians. That's true.

GUTHRIE: Is that the only reason?

BARRIOS: That is the reason we know, it is not confessed, of course, they don't say it, but there is a tremendous shortage of physicians, so that is the reason.

GUTHRIE: Well, when did you become a citizen and allowed to practice in Missouri?

BARRIOS: I became a citizen in 1964, and then I immediately applied for my license to practice in Missouri, although I was already licensed in Illinois.

GUTHRIE: I understand you are a teacher of pathology at Washington University.

BARRIOS: Yes, I am an assistant professor.

GUTHRIE: How did the economic levels differ as far as the two countries, as far as you are concerned?

BARRIOS: As far as the teaching, as far as the students?

GUTHRIE: As far as you and your family?

BARRIOS: There is no question. This is one of the best countries in the world to make a living, especially in my profession, and again because of the shortage of professional people in the United States. I believe, and this is an amazing thing in the United States, the physicians are almost on top of the socio-economic level. It's fantastic how we can manage and make a very nice living which is not true in Mexico and other countries of the world.

GUTHRIE: Well then you didn't really have any trouble getting settled, say in this neighborhood, and the city itself and as far as educational assistance for the family?

BARRIOS: No, no. That's one of the nicest things I can say about the United States. I'm really very grateful because it was easy for me. Of course you know nobody can get something out of nothing. The more one wants to get anything, the harder he works. And I really worked hard to achieve what I have achieved. It wasn't given to me as a gift, let's put it that way. In the United States the more you work the more you get.

GUTHRIE: What do you think of our educational system?

BARRIOS: I usually separate the aspects of education in the United States, I'm familiar with it from my own experience and the experience of my family and my children. Grammar school is lousy. I have to be frank. In eight years of grammar school, they give pre-digested things to the fellows. They seldom flunk. In other words they conduct them as if they were blind people. Sometimes I think they must think they are feeble minded, they don't know what they are doing, they have to digest, they have to grind things and to spoon feed the, and that's ridiculous. That's bad, in grammar school that's not good. And you can compare, you can read, I'm sure you know, England, Germany, Latin America have an excellent grammar school system. High schools are still very good abroad, here except for a few institutions, and I believe my son is very proud of the secondary school he is attending. He attends St. Louis University High School which is very good and a couple more in this area. The others are lousy. Why? Because there is more emphasis on the sport activities and the candidate for the basketball queen, and that's true. The academic level is bad, not as bad as the grammar school. When you come to professional college, I think it's very good, but very expensive for many people to attend.

GUTHRIE: Would you like to tell us what you think of the secondary school system, Frank?

FRANK BARRIOS: Private schools, the one I attended are excellent, but the public schools, I agree with him are just not... the level could be a lot better. Primary schools, I don't know about public schools, but Catholic grammar schools are really bad.

GUTHRIE: If you feel that this is a loaded question, we'll just throw it out. How do you feel about the political system of the United States compared with Mexico?

BARRIOS: That's a very good question. Let me start with Mexico. Mexico struggled for many, many years, due to several bad political systems. One, un-fit individual became president in Mexico. They practically sold out the country to foreign companies. And they also permitted several military invasions of our country. The French invaded Mexico, the United States invaded Mexico twice without any justifiable reason, and I quote the late relative of the Kennedy

relation, of the United States and Mexico was one of the most unjust affairs, the United States should be ashamed of the past. But I say of the political systems before 1910 was just dictatorships as it was in South America. One particular dictator in Mexico lasted 30 years, Porfirio Diaz, and during thirty years of dictatorship, everything belonged to foreign powers. That means telephone, telegraph, railroad, oil, everything. So that abused 95% of very poor people in Mexico, and 5% owned the entire country. So as a consequence, the Mexican Revolution which was before the Russian Revolution, started in 1910, and the story was very bloody, very bad. and lasted a very long time.

After that the constitution is very good. In other words, the president doesn't last more than six years and he is never, never allowed to re-elect, which I like. The bad thing is what we call the directed, democracy, or conducted democracy, one big party and two, three little ones is good and is bad. It's good because it can go all over the country to feed the small groups of families and workers, but they are leading questions. They say, "Listen fellows, we have here three or four good candidates, we feel that Mr. SO and So is the one who should be elected." That's the leading question and they shout

"why." Well, people realize that they can't fight a political system of that sort, and the elected candidate of the big party, he really works very hard. He goes all over the country to small towns, and he really makes a tremendous campaign, and he is eager to find the causes of social, economic problems, and he tries to do his best. But everybody knows that he is going to be elected, so what happens? On election day they are going to vote for him and he is elected,

legally elected because people vote for him. They know he is going to be elected, you know, he is a fairly good man. They think, 'Why should I fight the system?'

GUTHRIE: They really don't think very much of -their one vote?

BARRIOS: No, they go really to vote and vote for the official candidate.

GUTHRIE: Well, what I think I'm trying to say is, if they had really thought about voting for one of the lesser candidates would they have?

BARRIOS: They still vote for them, many people vote for them of course.

There is a race, but probably in their minds there is no use in fighting a big system which is going to win anyway. So in the long run it hasn't been good for the people who can't do what they want, they are not able because of the political affairs, now here, it is difficult to explain. I took the pains to find how the politics are working in the United States. I found out that the people of the United States can not elect the candidate. They don't. Political representatives are the ones who elect the candidate. So that means that during election day, people don't have too choices. The last time for instance I personally went to vote, not for a candidate, I went to vote against a candidate cause I didn't have any choice. In other words, the people of the United States don't elect the president.

GUTHRIE: The Electoral College does.

BARRIOS: That's right. And I am disturbed, because my wife buys Ajax because it is advertised people buy a president because he has money enough to be on television. I think the book on The Making of a President specifies that very clearly. It takes a big advertising company to sell a candidate to be a President, and they use all the names, propaganda over television and movies. The only thing they don't do is give away Eagle Stamps

GUTHRIE: You don't really approve too much of the political system in the United States? What do you think of the President as far as he cares about the rest of the country?

BARRIOS: I'm afraid I'm biased against him for some reason. Before I knew of him, I didn't like him which is bad, and then I discovered things about him, for instance when somebody started saying, 'Trickle Dickie', and wouldn't buy a used car from him' or something. Then I tried to find out why. Well, I think the explanation is obvious. I don't know whether it is because he belongs to a specific party or it is a trait of his personality everything he does is for the big companies or the people who have money. I don't believe he works for the entire country. One of the things which is very touching, the prisoner of war for instance, he is making a great, great issue out of it as part of his constant political campaign every since he was inaugurated. He has been on television and everything doing politics, selling himself for re-election. But as soon as they called his bluff, have you

ever heard him talk about the prisoners recently? The explanation is very peculiar, they won't leave Viet Nam until the prisoners are released.' There hasn't been any war, or any history of any country where the first thing they do is give prisoners away. In other words, you can't end the war by releasing prisoners first. You have to settle it first, whether it is political or military. And, secondly that's why it's a vicious circle. He doesn't end the war because they don't really take prisoners, but as long as that war is there, as long as fifty Americans are there they may be able to become prisoners. So instead of releasing prisoners, he is in the position of giving away more prisoners.

GUTHRIE: What do you think of the war itself?

BARRIOS: I don't like any war.

GUTHRIE: Do you think it has a worse effect on the United, States than any war has before?

BARRIOS: The only thing I know now is that I am more directly involved than ever before. I know because I am living here, and I am an American. I don't like wars to begin with. I never liked them just because they are wars. But if a war takes the youth of the country, the young people of any country, good and bad boys, the promise of the future—they are supposed to be—what do you expect of the country? That it be run by elderly people?