

TITLE OF VIDEO: Jimmy Palacio and Luis Fernando López

DATE OF VIDEO: August 12, 2019.

TRANSLATED BY: Charlie Lott and Sofía Kearns

DATE OF TRANSCRIPTION: June 2020

[00:05] Jimmy Palacio:	Good afternoon, my name is Jimmy Palacio. I was born in Jericó, and I was fortunate enough to live for 17 years in the city of Greenville, South Carolina.
[00:14] Luis Fernando López:	My name is Luis Fernando López. I was born born in Itagüí, Antioquia. In other words, I am another son from Antioquian families. I lived in the United States from the age of 16 until a year and a half ago when I returned and settled here in the municipality of Jericó.
[00:30] JP:	I came to live in the United States in 1997 with my partner, with my wife; and a one-year-old girl. Her whole family already lived in New Jersey, parents, siblings. We made the decision to go live in the United States. We lived for two years in the north, New York, New Jersey. And from there I received an invitation from a friend who lived in South Carolina to live there
[01:00]	and I made the decision and moved to South Carolina and that's where I lived for most of my time in the United States. "Cositas Ricas" was the first restaurant in the Greenville area, the first Colombian restaurant. I opened it in 1997 because I saw the need to open a Colombian restaurant, I saw that the Colombian community was growing in that area and there was no place to
[01:30]	have our original foods. And that's when I had the idea with my wife and we started a small business with very limited resources, but in the end it gave us a lot of satisfaction and became a staple for Colombians because it was the first restaurant, it was very well received and not only did Colombians come but also people of other nationalities came,
[02:00]	even the residents of the area, Anglo-Saxons who wanted to try our food, and that's how we were making ourselves known to the community. I had the opportunity to meet many Colombians, people of other nationalities and I also had the opportunity to make great friends there.
[02:18] LFL:	Well, I came to the United States because our parents took us, we were children. When I came to the United States, I was just 16, I was going to be 17 years old. Let's say in the New York area, and from there.... My dad was a textile producer in the Rhode Island area. At that time, textile labor was in high demand, especially Colombian workers because we were highly qualified people.
[02:48]	My dad was a weaver and worked a lot in the spinning mills. He left a company called Satexco in Itagüí, and that's how he ended up emigrating to the United States. I think it was around the 70's. Later, he brought his family, he brought

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	along his wife, my mother, and all his children to the area. I had the great fortune to work
[03:18]	in the restaurant industry with an uncle of mine who still has one of the oldest restaurants in the United States, a restaurant that was founded in 1978 in Central Falls, Rhode Island, called the El Paisa Restaurant. The restaurant still exists and at the moment my uncle is very old and it's run by his children, so the restaurant is still in the same hands. And it was one of the first, it was included in the newspaper El Colombiano
[03:48]	during the 70s, they went and interviewed him because selling blood sausage in the United States, selling chorizo sausages and empanadas, was a crazy thing. Well, no one... especially the North American community in the Rhode Island area. Eh ... That's when I learned what restaurants are like. I started collaborating with my uncle at a very young age.
[04:18]	And from there, I started a home and moved, we moved to the Carolinas looking for better living conditions for our small children, my wife and the children we had at that time, a boy and a girl. From there, we came to Greenville, South Carolina, at a time when there wasn't even television or Latin radio.
[04:48]	And for you to watch TV shows, something Latino, you had to buy a gigantic satellite dish that was about the size of a house. Eh, there were no (sic) restaurants, only in Greenville I remember that there was a store that they called "the shop of the awesome," which was well known and they were in all
[05:05] Sofía Kearns:	Don Darío's store.
[05:08] LFL:	Yes, Don Darío's. After that, a little business was started, Jimmy founded the first Colombian restaurant, and it was called "Cositas Ricas." I had the opportunity to share the birth of that restaurant with my great friend, from the moment it was created until it was sold. And he's the kind of guy who is always enterprising, he kept being very industrious.
[05:38]	I was fortunate to create three businesses in Greenville. I had a car sales shop with my ex-wife called Cars Samoa, I had a car bodywork and paint shop, and I had a mechanic shop in the Greenville area, until I came back from the United States, until I came back here and settled here in Jericó.
[06:03] JP:	Well, I met Luis Fernando right at the restaurant. One day he arrived with his wife and children because the restaurant had already had success and the Colombian

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	<p>community that lived in other places began to come, people from Anderson, Easley, including Atlanta, Spartanburg, and other places came, other regions in South Carolina.</p>
[06:33]	<p>Because people in other regions were already starting to hear about the business, people kept coming and the clientele was increasing and apart from that more Colombians, more Latinos began to arrive in the Greenville area due to the boom in employment, labor. And it was a place, and it is a very attractive place to live, it is a very beautiful place, I have the best memories of Greenville.</p>
[06:57] LFL:	<p>In my case, uh, we were looking for a better way to ... Or a better place for the education of our children. And through another friend that we called "the old man", because in that area at that time in Greenville people were known by nicknames, "the old man," "so-and-so", "pouting-face," here and there. Everyone was a collection of characters who were the first to arrive here, long before us,</p>
[07:27]	<p>who came with the textile companies, because the Colombian boom in Greenville was 100% based on the textile companies. Uh, so, we saw the opportunity to come, I was the first one that arrived and I fell in love with Greenville. And then, my wife at the time, she was not very happy, because we came from an area of New York</p>
[07:57]	<p>where everything was so easy, life was fast, now we were coming to a small town where there wasn't even Spanish radio. I remember that the first was Pilar Chávez, one of the first pioneers of Spanish-language radio in Greenville. Along with..., what was his name, the guy who later had something there, Bail Bond, that got people out of jail,</p>
[08:24] JP:	<p>Carlos Garcia.</p>
[08:26] LFL:	<p>Carlos García and Pilar Chávez were the first to promote radio and we have them to thank, the Greenville community has them to thank for what radio is in Greenville right now. They were the first two that launched that adventure. And we thank them because at that time it was exciting to listen to the radio in Spanish, the news, and before that it didn't exist. So we moved in with my older kids,</p>
[08:56]	<p>over time my two other children were born, born and raised in Greenville. I called my family the civil war because I had two who were born in New York, the two Yankees, and I had two from the south. There was something very funny about</p>

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	having the two the two southerners and the two northerners, the Yankees. There I raised my children, they were given a very nice education.
[09:26]	Right now I have four kids, three boys and a girl, who serve the community a lot. They work with the government in the Greenville county area, that is, they are people who give back to society. I feel very proud of the four of them. And here I am, I'm in Jericó hanging out here with my friend Jimmy and giving us an opportunity here where we were born.
[09:57] JP:	I came to Greenville through a classmate, Juan Mauricio López. He was the first person to tell me about South Carolina, so I took a map of the United States and looked at where South Carolina was. I saw that it was very far, but he also told me that it was a very beautiful area and that there was demand for workers. I came to South Carolina to work with him in the construction field,
[10:27]	I didn't know what sheetrock was, drywall, I didn't know any of that. And thanks to him I arrived, he gave me a job; I saw that the living conditions were much better than in the north. At that time, I had been living in New York and knew that New York was not an easy place to live, the rent was excessively expensive, living conditions were not the best, I saw that it was not,
[10:57]	I was not able to live there because economically I was not going to be able to provide for myself, my wife, and my son. So we made the decision, I took a train. I really spoke very little English and I was very scared because it was truthfully 15 hours by train, and we made the decision and I took a train and went to South Carolina, where he was waiting for me with his wife. And well, when I arrived I was shocked,
[11:27]	I found it very beautiful, a very ... It is very similar to what the country of Colombia is like, a lot of mountains, very quiet, very different from New York, the noise... So, I got there and began working in construction for a year, year and a half, but really construction, it was not my thing, I did not like it very much, it was very heavy. And I started looking for other jobs, and that's how I got to work at a hotel, the Phoenix Inn.
[11:57]	I worked there for a while, always with the idea of setting up my own business, and when I saw that there was not much Latin food in the area except Mexican, because there were already some Mexican restaurants at the time. And I remember that, speaking to a manager, a very kind man, I shared my idea and told him that I wanted to open a Colombian restaurant and he bluntly told me that I'd do it "if I was stupid", and I said "Why?"

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[12:27]	He told me, "because there are not many Colombians here, you are crazy." I said "no I want to open it", he said "well, I advise you to sell pizza or hamburgers because there are many people who ...", I said "no, I want to open a Colombian restaurant", he said "well , good luck, I'm going to visit you" and that's how I launched into the adventure, after having worked at the Phoenix Inn for about a year, I recruited money and launched into the adventure of opening a restaurant. For the opening,
[12:57]	what I did was, I did like some snacks, I invited a group of Colombians I knew and what I did the first night was give them away, distribute them among the local community, there were like 30 guests. And those snacks and those meals, very much ours, very typical, were distributed to the people, and that's how I did the presentation of the restaurant to the world, and the next day we started to operate.
[13:27]	I repeat, with very limited resources, a small business but that ultimately became a rite, an icon of what the Colombian community was in the Greenville area. Yes, that name ["Cositas Ricas"]. I stole it from here in Medellín. There was a place in Itagüí, Santa María called that
[13:45] LFL:	Next to "Claro de Luna."
[13:48] JP:	Yes. Right on the avenue,
[13:49] LFL:	Right on 52 [avenue] [laughter]
[13:50] JP:	So looking for a name it occurred to me to put that one and people liked it.
[13:55] LFL:	As a curious fact, I lived on the second floor of Claro de Luna and next to it was Cositas Ricas.
[13:57] Sofía Kearns	In Medellín?
[14:03] JP:	In Itagüí, Santa María.
[14:05]	

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LFL:	Life has united Jimmy and me, in one way or another. [Laugh]. When he named the restaurant Cositas Ricas, I said to him, "That wasn't Itagüí's, wasn't it?" [Laughter].
[14:15] JP:	That's where the name comes from.
[14:18] LFL:	Right there. It was a well-known ice cream parlor that no longer exists now. Now it's a buñuelo [Colombian donut] shop. And that was Cositas Ricas.
[14:24] JP:	Cositas Ricas, yes. As a fun fact, at that time it was very ... mmm, well, the Anglo community was shocked to start seeing names in Spanish, but one didn't, as I say, one always ... because I didn't really understand the culture yet, what I did was put my name in Spanish, but many people did not like it, and others did. In fact, I had customers who congratulated me.
[14:54]	I really remember a man who said to me "I love, I love", that he loved my food and for me that was, well, fantastic to hear. Yes, yes. And that was when I started to get to know the community and little by little we were becoming part of the community.
[15:16] LFL:	But life has smiled upon Jimmy, fortunately that same phrase, "I love your food," is repeated again in Jericó, because there are so many Americans and Europeans.
[15:28]	Yes, thank God.
[15:29] LFL:	Because here, when they come to this restaurant, I have the opportunity to speak with Dutch people, French people, and North Americans, a lot of Canadians, and everyone is delighted with his food, the food of the founder of Cositas Ricas back in Greenville. They still keep saying "I love your food" [Laughter].
[15:48] JP:	Look, right now it's very satisfying to see that people of other nationalities visit us, who want to live in our town and, well, it's very nice for us. In fact, I already have friends here, there are two Spanish families, there are two American families who are already living here,
[16:11] LFL:	Yes, they already bought property here

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<p>[16:13] JP:</p>	<p>Yes, they have properties here and we have become friends. And it's satisfying to accept them here because one day in a country like the United States someone also opened the doors for us, created a friendship that, for an immigrant, is beautiful, because it's... Above all, living in an area like the Carolinas was hard because at that time life wasn't very Latino, and that's normal because unfortunately we arrived in a country that is foreign,</p>
<p>[16:43]</p>	<p>where many people do not respect the rules. But there were also very kind people who opened their country's doors, their city, who welcomed us, and we have only words of thanks for those people. Anyway, I consider that to open a business in that kind of an area was the best thing... Especially when I did not have, at that time, a lot of money with which to open the business</p>
<p>[17:13]</p>	<p>I didn't really know, shall we say, the regulations in South Carolina, how to open a business, I did not have enough language to go and make all kinds of inquiries. However, with my wife and my friends like Luis who did speak English, hey, we launched and could ask where to obtain a license, how to set up a business in the United States, and we launched and thank God we were able to do it.</p>
<p>[17:43]</p>	<p>Luis is a person who speaks English very well and he helped me a lot with the language. My first car, for example, I bought it for ... [Laughter]. He took me to a company that was well known in the area and helped me with English, with credit, and I could buy a good car there, I already had my restaurant, I had already bought my first house and it was very satisfactory. Business during the first five years, especially the first year, was difficult</p>
<p>[18:13]</p>	<p>but then the business grew and it was a success and then that business gave me enough to open another one and I had the opportunity, yes, to grow financially, and it was very nice because it is not very easy in a country ... what we heard about in another country, the American Dream we called it, achieve the American dream, and I could say that I lived it, that it was real, that it is hard but that I achieved it. I was succesful and</p>
<p>[18:43]</p>	<p>I have very nice memories of the United States, especially the Greenville area, which was where I lived the longest, where I made my roots, where I met people who were very dear to both the Latino community and the Anglo community. I had a bar near Haywood mall which was also a very well-known business in the end, it was called Lauros. It was a bar in a square close</p>
<p>[19:13]</p>	<p>to Haywood mall, and it also became a hit because we played our Latin music, and by then there were many more Latinos in that area of Greenville and it was also a hit, people loved it.</p>

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<p>[19:30] LFL:</p>	<p>He was also a pioneer. Jimmy pioneered the opening of bars and night spots in Greenville with Lauros. Then he had a smaller one in Mauldin. I had the opportunity to see this man do crazy things there.</p>
<p>[19:50] JP:</p>	<p>A man with big dreams.</p>
<p>[19:52] LFL:</p>	<p>Yes. In my case, I have to thank my parents who took us there, who gave us the opportunity to grow up in a wonderful country, so that our children were born there and were American citizens like my four children are, and they were productive members of society, as they are now, and the sacrifice our parents made when they came with the textiles because they had a hard time. They are the true pioneers,</p>
<p>[20:22]</p>	<p>those are the real troopers you could say in English. Those who actually put their necks out for us because they came to a place without knowing the language, without knowing where they where, where many times ... There are anecdotes of several of them who said that they went to the supermarket and bought canned cat or dog food, thinking it was tuna [Laughter].</p>
<p>[20:52]</p>	<p>There are incredible stories that they tell. They, all those men and women who came in the era of textiles, which was a boom in the 70s, something like that, the late 60s and the early 70s. To all those Colombians who came with these textile companies in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, in the Carolinas, these men are the true ones who deserve ...</p>
<p>[21:22]</p>	<p>that all of us who had the opportunity to see our children being born and raised in the United States, we owe them a lot because it was them who opened the doors.</p>
<p>[21:34]</p>	<p>Do you remember the name of the textile companies where your dad worked here and there?</p>
<p>[21:39]</p>	<p>Here it was called Satexco spinning mills, something like that. And there he worked in one called Conrad and the other that no longer exists, a textile factory which has since collapsed and is now a federal prison in Central Falls, Rhode Island. I don't remember the name of that one, that textile company. But there were many,</p>

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[22:09]	in the Carolinas there were many characters, many of whom have now passed away, they no longer exist. Berrío we called him, the mayor, the mayor of Greenville. And many of them, all of those people who made it possible for us to come here with our families, made Greenville our home and made it so that my children still consider Greenville to be their home.
[22:39]	Because that is their home, that's where they live, that's where they got married, that's where they have their families. To my brothers, my sister, my mother who still lives there, I hope that they will be there for many years if they want, and if not here they are welcome in Jericó.
[22:56] JP:	Well, Jericó is one of the most beautiful municipalities in the region of Antioquia. It is considered like Southwest Athens because of its culture. It's a well-visited town, it is a Colombian heritage town, it is a town that belongs to the network of Colombian heritage towns. In Colombia there are 17 municipalities so named, one of them is Jericó. The only Colombian saint, Santa Laura Montoya Upegui, was born here, born here one block away
[23:26]	from where the restaurant is located. It is a well-visited town, it is a town that draws much attention for its architecture. It is a very quiet town, that I consider to be perhaps ... at least for me it is the best place to live. Aside from being my homeland. I arrived here when I returned from the United States in 2011. I arrived in Envigado, where actually... At that time I was living in Envigado,
[23:56]	But I already found it to be a very transformed city, with too much noise, too much noise. In general, all of Medellín, and I was already very unaccustomed to what life was like in Colombia. Coming from a city ... Greenville is a small, quiet city and it was not easy to adapt to the life of a city like Envigado. It was then when, through a brother, I moved here to Jericó, I once again saw the opportunity to
[24:26]	open a restaurant and that's when I said I'm going to start a restaurant again. This restaurant has been here for 5 years, thank God, it is a very nice place, I am blessed to be the owner of it and it is a very popular place for locals and foreigners. And here I continue the same fight as always, trying to sell very good food, to provide very good service, I have an excellent team,
[24:56]	I have an excellent administrator, Luis, who recently joined. He's a person whom I love very much, and I know that he will provide me with many things to further grow this business. And if it is a place that, thanks to God, has already become known, not only here in the Southwest area, but people from all over Colombia visit us, including today, thanks to

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[25:26]	social networks many foreigners already visit us and we are referred to as a good place to visit in Jericó. At one time in my life, I never thought I would go back to live in Colombia, I lived very well in Greenville, very comfortably, it seems like a great place to live. Unfortunately, I got divorced,
[25:56]	It was very complicated, difficult to overcome. It was then that I made the decision to return. It was very difficult because the truth was that it was very difficult to stop living in Greenville because I had already lived a good part of my life there, financially my business was doing very well, I had done very well, but unfortunately due to a sentimental issue, I made the decision to return to my country with a lot of pain, and it was a hard decision to make,
[26:26]	I don't know why, but I left South Carolina. Definitely still looking forward to visiting again. Someday I have to go back, and I will go back, because I left many friends there and I want to walk around Downtown again, go to Furman and to the many beautiful places that Greenville has.
[26:47] LFL:	Because of fate, Jimmy and I share the same stories. I was married, happily married to a woman I loved for many years, and things ended the same. A rather ugly divorce and here I am trying to survive and make strides because life has to go on.
[27:13] Sofía Kearns:	Well, thank you so much!
LFL:	No, thanks to you.
JP:	On the contrary, thank you for the visit.
[27:18] LFL:	Greetings to all who remember us in Greenville, through thick and thin, because we are not gold coins that everyone likes [laughs].