

There were fifteen people and we jumped one night into the boat and we left Cuba. We were planning for years, trying to escape from Cuba. The conditions there were not the ones that I wanted for my life and the future of my family.

Castro opened the coastline. I mean, he decided that everybody who wanted to leave could do it so we took advantage of that moment and we jumped. For me when we jumped in the water we already knew that probably we would end up in Guantanamo or somewhere else. We ended up this time in the Bahamas. There was already American government officers and they took custody of the boat and everything that we brought with us. They placed us in a coast guard boat and we ended up in Guantanamo Bay.

When we got out of the coast guard boat there were a lot of... there were two lines of soldiers waiting for us. We had to walk through them. They... we got into buses, you know like school buses, the same kind and they drove us to different camps. They had already set camps for us and we were... we were given a cot and we were like fifteen people each, in each tent, and that was the first night we started living in refugee camp.

It was the first time that I saw something that was not Cuba and it was very nice to see the coast line and the lights and the streets and the cars. They were new! You know the cars in Cuba are not so it was a totally different world.

It was really hard every morning, or every day to listen to the mines blowing up. We knew there was a Cuban either coming in or going back to Cuba. It was really stressful for the Cubans in the camps but also for the military. We saw their faces too. You just hear the boom and you see the smoke and you realize that someone had died right there. And that was a daily life situation during the first three or four months. Basically there was a lot of turmoil.

There were fights in the camps. People did not know what would happen with us, if we would end up coming to US or basically turn back to Cuban territory. In that case we knew there would be some kind of punishment, retaliation from the Cuban government against us so we were really tense. At that time was the time that they created a special prison for the refugees so refugees that misbehaved in the camps, they would end up in another camp that we, the Cubans, baptized as X-Ray Camp, the prison that right now, you know, is a prison for al-Qaeda, you know alleged, al-Qaeda members. We call it that way because it was a camp that had a bunch of lights, like stadium lights kind of, around twenty four hours so you felt yourself like in front of an X-Ray [machine] all the time.

And then everybody knew more or less what time they would be leaving Guantanamo and arriving to US. In my personal case I got the bad luck of being one of the last three hundred people leaving Guantanamo so I basically closed the camps. We are talking about a year and a half period that personally I felt were like twenty years of my life. I left Guantanamo in January 23, 1996. I got two birthday celebrations in Guantanamo.