

The Cuban regime would allow the boats with people to leave no matter what the weather was so a lot of boats sank, there were a lot of accidents and people died, and there were drownings. Eight, ten boats would leave every morning full of people and the coast guard were just patrolling all around. And so my boat was sinking. We had to be transported from the boat to the navy ship that was working in combination with the coast guard, the USS *Saipan*. So we are taken aboard, we spend the night there. We stunk because I had been in this space... for three nights in a row without being able to eat or sleep and of course, hygiene? Forget about it. So everyone was stinking when we took to the boat and on board the navy ship we were allowed to take showers, we got fed, then the following morning we were taken to the top deck, flown by helicopter from the... they called it helicopter carrier. It is a multipurpose ship. So we flew from the top deck of the ship to the naval base in Boca Chica near Key West and that was where adventure in the US, if you want to call it that way, started.

There was this principle: the kids while in Guantanamo were under the care of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees office - UNHCR. They were looking [out] for their well-being and their goal is to do everything that will be in the best interest of the child. In most cases their definition of that is to send the kids back to their home country because their thinking goes like: well, they left their country, they have no place to go but the only place that they have relatives is in the country. It is not in the best interests of the child to go to a third country where they are going to be deprived of their culture, family links, and all the life they know. This may be a problem when your family has been killed or you are lost or you are separated from them. Because there were incidents in which kids were returned to Haiti and they were homeless; they had no place to go.

Interesting enough, when I was in Guantanamo, I spotted the same boat that rescued me in Guantanamo. So I approach the officer who was on the plank...

[Interviewer]: That is the boat right there?

Raul: Yea, that is the boat. And I said, "Hey! Do you give tours of the boat?" He said, "Tours? Are you crazy? This is the navy. We do not give tours." "How long have you been assigned to this ship?" He said, "Three years." I saw, "Well I've got seniority over you." "What do you mean?" "Well, back in 1980..." and I told the story, "this boat rescued me in the middle of the ocean." He said, "Oh really? Is that what happened? Well, come on. I'll give you a tour." It was really amazing. So, yea. It was close enough that circle of history for me to be able to get into the boat as a visitor, not as a refugee.