

**Jinny Nathans:** I'm at the 33rd Conference on Hurricanes and Tropical Meteorology. It's April 18, 2018. I'm interviewing Lixion Avila, who's a senior forecaster at the National Hurricane Center. Lixion, why don't you first tell us the short version of your education and how you got here, just for the record?

**Lixion Avila:** Well, I can say that my education began in the north coast of Cuba, when I can see the waves and the mariners and the farmers looking at the weather. That's how I began crazy for weather and I loved it. Then I went to school a little bit in Havana, but my real education, my master's and my PhD, were at the University of Miami, where I graduated a long time ago.

**JN:** What year?

**LA:** Well, I got my master's in '84. I finish all the exams and everything in PhD, like '87, but then Andrew came in '92 and I didn't graduate until '93.

**JN:** I actually didn't know that story. That's good. So, out of all the forecasters now at the Hurricane Center, do you have the longest tenure?

**LA:** That is correct. If you let me say, it is a very interesting story because when I became a hurricane specialist, I was the youngest hurricane specialist in the United States. That was the time that I had the great opportunity to work with John Hope, Gil Clark, Hal Gerrish, and they adopted me. I was a young kid and I was bringing new blood. They trained me. They loved me. But nowadays, I'm the oldest one. So, that's life. But I'm very happy that I was able to work with those specialists. I didn't have the amount of data that we have today. They made wonderful forecasts.

**JN:** One of the questions I was going to ask you – in a couple other publications you've been quoted as talking about the young people and mentoring. I want to ask you how, over the course of your career, you developed your authority. Have you always been as self-confident as you are? You start out, you came to the Hurricane Center.

**LA:** Well, one thing I know is I know what I wanted to be. I never jumped from here to there. I wanted to be a meteorologist and I wanted to be a hurricane specialist. Sometimes during my career, I decided OK, this is impossible. It's very difficult, but I was very, very lucky with all the people I found through my career. Neil Frank hired me. So, I was very lucky. He helped me tremendously. Every time a student come and talk to me and said, you have to know what you want and if you know you want that, you have to work hard. You have to do it. That's the only way. It's not easy. You need a little bit of luck to be in the right place at the right moment, but it comes. It comes often.

**JN:** So, do you have students that you mentor? Are there interns now that you mentor? What mentoring are you doing now? Mostly with the junior forecasters?

**LA:** Not actually. It's mostly I have participated in several AMS conferences. When I gave a talk for the students, how do I get to where I am. I told them if I have to do it all over again, I will get even more math and more physics and more computers, things like that. But no, I never

had a student because I work operational. That takes the full time you work – hours are midnight and days and it's very difficult.

**JN:** But there are forecasters that you're mentoring.

**LA:** Well, I'm telling you, this new generation that work with me are pretty good and they are really good. Yeah, when they start – for example, I do remember when (inaudible) came to the Hurricane Center, not as director, as a forecaster. He loved to sit with me and I tell him what I was doing operational every day. The same goes for James Franklin because I was already there. That was, for me – if you call mentoring, well, that was – yeah.

**JN:** That was mentoring.

**LA:** Well, I just give him my little tricks. You have to have good tricks.

**JN:** Right, right. Well, speaking of good tricks, you have different tricks from Jack – you all have your own tricks and heuristics and things. One of my questions that I actually have written down was that you guys are a pretty tight community because there aren't that many of you that do all of the work, but you all have your strengths and your weaknesses and your eccentricities. How do you fit in? If it's a family, are you the dad or a brother or uncle? What are the synergies? How do you play off of each other? How does it work to make the forecasting better?

**LA:** Well, we might have, as you mentioned, our differences, but at the end of the day, we have a plan, we have a schedule and we do not divert very much for the role that we have to play in the office. We'll try to do a good job, we all try to (inaudible) there's a brotherhood. We all work together. I'm not afraid to ask any other of my colleagues in the office, what can I do with this? Should I increase the percent of intensity of (inaudible) intensification? We all work with the same – following the same plan, of course with a little spice here, some different spices over there. In the end, we all do the job that we are required to do.

**JN:** Right. Actually, I'd like to ask you a little bit. If you could talk a little bit about how a forecast gets made because not everyone has had the insight, has been lucky enough to see it in action and see one start to finish. You identify a potentially developing storm and you start to follow it, but I'm not even sure everyone realizes you guys work shifts.

**LA:** I love your question because that's what I do every day. As I always am open to tell the people, I haven't retired yet because one of my pleasures in my life is if I worked the day shift, to see the first (inaudible). So, once we get to the Hurricane Center, of course, we get a briefing from the previous forecaster, but you need to look at the whole tropics, you need to look at every system. If we have a system already developed, we talk about that. Then we begin to process every six hours. We have a new advisory. We need to determine where the hurricane or the tropical storm is. Sometimes we have a lot of data, sometimes we don't have any data. So, we have to be prepared for that.

Then, once we know the system, the structure, the intensity, we run our computer models and then we start making the track forecast, the intensity forecast, with all the models. We look at all the fields. This is a process that takes sometimes longer than others. Some hurricanes are more complex than others. But in general, you have to – when you're (inaudible), you need to know where every trough is, where every high is, where every system is, and then you make a forecast. Then, you make a coordination with the local forecast offices within the United States. Immediately, you're talking to all the Caribbean members if they are going to be affected by the storm. Sometimes it's more difficult than others. If it's English, everybody can do it. If it's in Spanish, I have the little (inaudible), but we all try to do the best we can. Then, we issue the forecast. This is what I can – the best way I could.

**JN:** The short version, yeah. I have my own questions about whether or not each of you interjects your own special process into Dvorak, but we won't go there for this interview.

**LA:** We all do. For example, I can give you, I have my experience with Dvorak. That book of 1984, that Dvorak did, I helped him because he came to the Hurricane Center and he needed a student to help to get all these old pictures from the '60s or '70s from the basement of the Hurricane Center. We knew that he couldn't carry those boxes. So, I was so excited that we got the box, the month he wanted. He starts telling me, look at this feature, look at that feature, we have to look at this. I was thinking, this person is a genius. And of course, he was. For me, that was amazing. Of course, you have to practice that every day. If you don't do it every day, you lose your skills.

**JN:** That's interesting. I haven't actually thought about Dvorak as a – later, I was going to ask you about hurricane forecasting and an analogy to ballet, but you just gave it to me.

**LA:** OK. You can ask all you want to.

**JN:** (laughter) There's three different ways I could here. Let's start with cooperation with other nations and islands and the Caribbean and Cuba. I know you're pretty big in the WMO side of things. So, why don't you talk to me a little bit about the international side of your job, other than just translating?

**LA:** Yes. We are so proud of our region. We have what we call the region for Hurricane Operational Plan. We've revised that plan every year. In fact, I just came from Martinique, where we revised our plan. We include all the new products that we produce at the Hurricane Center, the products they issue in each country and where their stations are, but more important, the coordination. For example, if Jamaica gets wiped out by the hurricane, if Cayman is the one that's going to do the backup, if we are the backup of the Bahamas, this is a wonderful, wonderful plan that we have developed.

We have to thank all the previous directors of the Hurricane Center, all the way back to the '70s when Neil Frank and Bob Sheets, (inaudible) better and better and better every year. It's becoming little fancy. Some of the other regions are jealous of the plan. But yes, there we have the phone numbers of every directors, all the forecasters. If we have a hurricane, we have a frank conversation.

Remember, we do not issue hurricane warnings for them. We tell them the forecast and we coordinate with them. All we do is gather all the watches and warnings from these countries and we put it in the public advisory, but they are responsible for their own warnings.

**JN:** So, do you want to talk a little bit? Do you have any anecdotes or any stories to tell me about last season and international cooperation that you can share?

**LA:** Well, I had to talk a lot with all the countries last year, especially in the British Virgin Islands. I've been to all of those islands. I know the struggle in that region. One day, I do remember when – I think it was Irma. Yeah, I think it was Irma – went over, summer time, one of the half-Dutch and half-French island. We got a message that it (inaudible) the entire island was wiped out. I was afraid because the director was a good friend of the Hurricane Center. Then, 10 minutes later, he called me on his cell phone. So, we coordinated.

For me, that was a moment of relief and happiness that he was still alive and we had a contact in there. Poor reception, but that's one of the things. But in terms of the coordination, I'll have to admit that the tracks last year, despite all these intense hurricanes, it was easy because they were all in well-embedded (inaudible) currents. That's why we have low errors this year. There were no those crazy years that don't know which way the hurricane is going. This is basically the way it was.

**JN:** So, when you're watching the track forecast and you're seeing Cuba in the crosshairs, how do you stay objective? How do you keep your emotions off the floor?

**LA:** That's what I was trained for. I was trained for that. Neil Frank, Bob Sheets, Gil Clark – you have to remove your emotions from the forecast.

**JN:** But how do you do it?

**LA:** It comes naturally once you do it a couple (inaudible). That doesn't mean that's what I want, but you have to be very objective and after all, I'm a scientist. I went through a lot of math and physics and equations. I think I can – one thing is what I want and one thing is what you really need to do. In that sense, I think most of us are behaving the same way. We try to move to our emotions away and make the forecast with the science primarily.

**JN:** Right. So, in the last season, all of you had family, obviously, in Miami and you were forecasting Irma. It must have made for an interesting scene once you had to hunker down and live together.

**LA:** You mean my family in Miami, how they –?

**JN:** Your family in Miami, but the forecasting family. When you all –

**LA:** The forecasting –

**JN:** – had to come in and stay.

**LA:** Yes. Well, I had a great moment. The first night I stayed in my office, I slept on the floor. But it was peaceful and quiet. Then Dave Zelinsky, another forecaster, came to me. He said, Lixion, I have an extra mattress in my office. Do you want it? I said, me and my wife bought two, but she's at home. So, she gave me that mattress and I slept there three days. It was the best bed ever because I was so tired that every time I went to that – so, we're pretty good in the –

**JN:** I was just curious because I don't think the general population realizes that. What are the criteria where you're called in and you have to stay?

**LA:** People have some crazy ideas. I know it comes from the old timers. Many people, especially Miami, they come from the Caribbean islands where when there was a hurricane, the director and the forecaster had to stay in the office for a week. But we have a very good plan. We don't want to burn everybody. The moment we stay, well, our management said, well, from now on, we're going to close the doors like Irma, but in the rest of the time, we have a pretty good schedule. We cover everything. Sometimes we have to come an extra day, work an extra hour. But it's very well planned. Honestly, it's very well planned.

**JN:** I was just thinking about Irma that people didn't realize you had to actually sleep in your office. It's a thing. (laughter)

**LA:** Yes.

**JN:** You're pretty well known for inserting your personality into the discussions. Right? You have a Wikiquote page.

**LA:** Yeah. I didn't do it. Somebody else prepared.

**JN:** I noticed over the last few years, they're toned down quite a bit. I wondered if that was your decision or if it was suggested that you –

**LA:** Actually, nobody has ever forced me to go one way or the other. But you have to adapt to the atmosphere that you have surrounding. The same thing you said, my webmaster always come to me and gave my supervisor that I got the most amount of compliments on the web from people. He's down to earth. His grandmother can't understand what he's saying. That's what I'll learn from Neil Frank and from Max. He said, when you write something, your grandmother has to understand what you say. You're not writing only for the (inaudible) scientist or the scientist. You need to write for everybody. But my supervisor told me, well, people like your discussions because they're cute.

**JN:** Cute?

**LA:** That's what he said. But he didn't like it. Then, my answer was OK, and yours are boring. Both are accurate, but you could be cute and accurate – it's worse than boring and accurate. There was never a mandate to say no, you cannot say that.

**JN:** Well, that's good. I'm glad.

**LA:** That's me.

**JN:** You just adapted.

**LA:** It's probably me that I'm getting old.

**JN:** You're maturing, right?

**LA:** Yeah, yeah. Probably.

**JN:** (laughter) Well, I've not seen this side. So, I was curious about how do you personally handle – if you blow a forecast, how do you learn from it? What do you do?

**LA:** You learn that from all the years that you've been working here.

**JN:** Let's give some advice to the young ones. How do you move on?

**LA:** For example, last year. I showed that in every presentation that I've been going to. I did it at the AMS. For example, I think it was Lee in the Atlantic and the system became completely decapitated. There were no clouds. I wrote the last advisory. Well, a couple days later it has an eye again, but I had learned that with the job – it's funny because a few minutes ago, if you let me talk natural here.

**JN:** Please.

**LA:** I was talking to a colleague here. We were talking about ballet and a dancer fell down. I said, well, you and I won't fall down because we're not dancers. But if you're a hurricane forecaster, you're going to make mistakes, you're going to make wrong forecasts. There's nobody perfect in my office or anywhere. Sometimes nature has some tricks that we haven't learned yet. Yet. We will one day, but not yet.

**JN:** What do you think are some of the big questions we don't have the answers to yet that would help?

**LA:** Well, I have a lot of trust in this new generation of students that are coming out from the university with tremendous knowledge. They have tools nowadays that I didn't have when I went to school. They have everything and (inaudible) internet. They don't have to go to a library and search for 500 books. They go to the internet. Thanks to the librarians, they have it all together and put it in a nice place. However, I have to admit that I have fun in these meetings when I hear some of the new students coming and tell me, moisture is good for hurricanes. They just discovered that. They just discovered that the upper level winds are bad for hurricanes. But that's part of the process. What they are learning is how to think, how to present your results, but I still have fun.

**JN:** Right. So, let's talk a little bit about the AMS and the conferences. You and Jinny, the librarian/archivist, were talking before the interview about some of the first ones. So, when was your first one? You were a student then.

**LA:** I was a student.

**JN:** Do you remember how you felt or what you presented?

**LA:** I remember like if it's right now. I am in the picture. Miami Beach in 1980. I went and I met Neil Frank. I was there and I was in the picture. My advisor from UM took me to the meeting. I could not believe that I had in front of me Dr. Krishnamurti, Dr. Bill Gray, all these people that you've heard all your life. That was my first AMS tropical meeting.

**JN:** You've been to all of them?

**LA:** I think that I have missed maybe one or two at the very beginning when I was a student and it was in remote place and there were no funds. But I think I've been to almost all of them.

**JN:** That's what I was thinking.

**LA:** And the AMS annual too.

**JN:** The annual also?

**LA:** Yeah.

**JN:** Not everyone goes to both. So, you try to go to all of them?

**LA:** Well, I always decided that once I got settled in the job, I said, well, if they don't pay for me, I'll pay for my own because I need to be there.

**JN:** So, what is it about the AMS that –? The journals and the interactions, the conferences –

**LA:** No. It's that you talk to your colleagues. You (inaudible) here the best of the best in our world. It's like going to a ballet festival, you see the best dancer. Well, here, you have the best meteorologists in the world. They are here. Like right now in this meeting, they are here. Why do you need to go somewhere else? This is the place. If you like what you're doing, this is the place to be.

**JN:** So, the centennial is coming. Obviously, you're going to go to Boston in January, which will be interesting for us all to get there, but it will be fun. The AMS is special to you. You're a fellow.

**LA:** Yes, I am.

**JN:** What year did you become a fellow?

**LA:** To be honest, I don't remember exactly. It was the year after Max Mayfield became a fellow. But I have served the AMS. I was part of a program beginning, the program of this meeting. Then, one year, I became the chair of this. Then, I became the chair of the tropical committee. That was in 2005 or six. I do remember that they wanted me to stay for another period, but I don't know if it was legal or not legal. I wish you could stay. I was at the STAC meeting that was always on Saturday before the meeting. So, I have served the AMS and I'm still serving the best I can.

**JN:** Great. So, obviously, you'd encourage your colleagues and young students and everyone to come to as many meetings as they can afford to get into their lives. I know you like to travel, so it's –

**LA:** Well, I tell my friends not from the United States, but if I go to Mexico, I see/meet students. I go to all the places and say, hey, if you like tropical meteorology and you want to hear good presentations or if you want to present some of your good job you're doing, (inaudible) and go to the AMS tropical meeting. That's part of your education, your development. To be here and listen – these presentations and these fantastic speakers. They're all not good, but that's like in everything. Not all the baseball games are good.

**JN:** Well, someone at dinner the other night referred to the AMS tropical meeting as a two-year family reunion because they get to come every two years and see all the people they might have been on a field campaign with or in grad school with. So, I'm curious to know – who do you not get to see regularly. You're in the hot bed of tropical forecasting, obviously, but who are your colleagues that you look forward to seeing that you really only see when you come to a meeting?

**LA:** Well, we all have jobs, but I want to clarify something from my point of view. It's a big family reunion, but it's not only a family reunion. It's a reunion of the scientist that is a family. The science. It's not just a party. It's just the two things. I want to make sure that people understand that it's not just here to come and have a drink. Well, if we can have it, great, but we come here mainly to see this wonderful (inaudible) but most of my friends – sometimes I miss some people. They have problems – family, work – but I see we have a little group that we've been together for so many years. We've been in Australia, not only with AMS but related meetings. Jenni Evans, she's the new president. She and I been maybe half of the world together. We went together to Cuba for a meeting once. Amazing people we get together all the time.

**JN:** Yeah. I was looking to see if you would name some more of –

**LA:** People that I want to see here all the time?

**JN:** The people you want to see here all the time.

**LA:** Yes. (inaudible) I want to see, for example, Jenni. From the middle generation, I like to see – I'm going to tell you because I call him tidbit. He has his website [Tropical Tidbits]. I call him tidbit, but I love to see Levi Cowan. I don't know exactly how to pronounce his name because I call him tidbits. He's a genius. He's a good kid. He has a website. He texts me,



Lixion, are you going to the Hurricane meeting? Yes. Well, see you there. So, I can go from the young generation to see, for example, here – (inaudible) the fathers of this field. It's a very impressive meeting.

**JN:** Were you involved in TC-90?

**LA:** No.

**JN:** No? I didn't know.

**LA:** No. TC-90, no. I was not because that was the year they hired me as – 14 senior hurricane specialist. It was not the best moment.

**JN:** It's too much.

**LA:** Yeah.

**JN:** Yeah. So, while you've been here at this particular conference, have you noticed anything that surprised you in the science? What have you learned? Did you learn anything at this meeting so far?

**LA:** You always learn things.

**JN:** I know.

**LA:** I know, and I'm having fun because it's part of the fun. Some of this they change. They make a term in a very sophisticated way. Instead of (inaudible) they call it potential vorticity something to make it fancy, but it's the same trough right there. But it's not only the new science, but it's the new approach – how they get the new data, how they can input that into the models. That's very fascinating to me.

**JN:** A few people have been talking about the science side and whether or not we are making incremental, small, little advances and if we're ignoring big pictures. So, I've been asking everyone.

**LA:** There's always going to be – that's why we come here, to have this diversity of thoughts, but I can tell you that when I became a hurricane specialist, I had one map of 500 millibar forecast for (inaudible) that we posted on the wall via fax. That's all I had. Today, I have everything possible. I'm sure there will be more 20 years from now, but all this that we have today has come from these meetings, results of this meeting. They get clean. They get everything in this world (inaudible). All of this advantage that I have today, all the things that I can do today, it's coming from here.

**JN:** That's a big testament to the value of the AMS meeting.

**LA:** Well, it's my opinion.

**JN:** Yeah. Well, that's what I want, your opinion. You're the one here right now that we're talking to. So, on that, there's always these two camps, the observationalists and the modelers. You use the models probably more than a lot of us. You know what the ins and outs are of all of them and everything. I just wanted to know if you wanted to talk a little bit about the value of models in your forecasting now.

**LA:** There is no way you can make a five-day hurricane track forecast if you don't have the global models. When you made a 24-hour forecast, you look at a synoptic map and you need to look at that little trough that was in the central US that in 24 hours will be along the east coast. But if you're going to make five to seven-day forecasts, you're looking at the shortwave that is over Japan now, what is going to happen to that. You cannot do that with your own eyes. You cannot integrate primitive equations in your head. You need those fancy, good computer models that we have today.

**JN:** I was thinking about the ensembles. I'm not going to ask you which one do you value over another because we can't answer that really, but I know everyone has their favorites, right? (laughter)

**LA:** No, I'll tell you one thing that I always say everywhere. Don't get married to a model. Use them all.

**JN:** (laughter) That's awesome.

**LA:** (laughter) They all have their skills. They all provide you with something. For example, I'm going to give you one typical example. Some forecasters criticize the Canadian global model. They criticize the Canadian global model because it produces many storms. But then I said, well, not even the Canadian is developing that system. Well, my numbers (inaudible) are going to come down. So, they all help you.

**JN:** They would. That would be part of the package. I never actually thought of that, so you just broke my brain. (laughter)

**LA:** But did you understand what I said?

**JN:** Yeah, I understand completely.

**LA:** This model develops every storm. The environment is always (overlapping conversations; inaudible)

**JN:** (overlapping conversations; inaudible)

**LA:** So, if that one doesn't develop, the environment should be really bad. So, don't increase the numbers.

**JN:** See, learn something. Always learn something. Why are there so few hurricanes given that the conditions are generally present?

**LA:** It is so difficult to put all of the things together. It's like roulette. In order to get – when you have the SSD, you don't have the moisture. When you have the moisture, you don't have the vertical wind profile. There always has to be a perfect combination. That happens once in a while. It happens once in a while. You get just good conditions. But it's very difficult to get one.

**JN:** I'm going to go there. I wasn't going to go there, but do you think –

**LA:** You can go wherever you want to.

**JN:** I was going to ask you about the hurricane and climate change question.

**LA:** I'm going to give you my answer.

**JN:** Tell me.

**LA:** My expertise doesn't go that far out. I can tell you about five to seven-day forecasts. When I'm thinking about climate change, I'm not sure what's going to happen. One thing I can tell you is we have to take care of our planet. That's two different things. We have to take care of planet and continue to study, but I'd rather emphasize – of course, without forgetting what's going to happen in the future, we need to also put our resources also in our five, seven-day forecast. But I'm not an expert in – I don't even – it's like when I hear the seasonal forecasts, I'll tell everybody, I don't care.

For example, I was in a meeting in Mexico last year. The seasonal forecast for 2017 came with a very active – so, of course, the media grabbed that. The Mexican media immediately said, 20 hurricanes are going to affect Mexico. You know how they manipulate. Well, Mexico wasn't affected by anything, despite the big system we have in the Atlantic. And Bermuda, the island of Bermuda that every year get two or three, it was not touched this year. So, Bermuda told me – the hurricane committee – this was a wonderful season. We didn't get anything. But when you just get one in your community, that's the problem. And nobody can tell you if we are going to have one in our community.

**JN:** Right. That's your goal.

**LA:** Of course, I would love –

**JN:** Your professional goal is the forecast and the warning for –

**LA:** To be good. We're also victims of our own success because right now, the forecast in 24 to 48 hours, the error is so small that most of the times the impact of the systems cover much larger the area of the – because people don't understand that we're tracking that center. It's complex and that's what comes with the communication. That's what we need to communicate our uncertainties to the population.

**JN:** So, that makes me have to ask you about the cone.

**LA:** You can ask me about the cone.

**JN:** What's your idea?

**LA:** It's getting smaller.

**JN:** It's awesome that it's getting smaller.

**LA:** Ideally?

**JN:** Yeah.

**LA:** It will be wonderful if we can express our uncertainty in a different way. But I know people like (inaudible) and other ones are working very hard trying to change the cone for something that is more – it's better to present to the public. So, I go to fancy countries and they tell me, why don't you – the French, for example – why don't you use the ensemble and I said, because the ensemble means if you do that and you do the cone with the ensemble one time you're going to head for New Orleans and the next package will head for Corpus Christi. The ensembles can do that, but their official forecast cannot tell the population is going to New Orleans in this package and is going to Corpus Christi in the next package. That's why we need to be very careful. One day, we will. One day, we will, but I think we're not ready yet.

**JN:** Right. That would be a media frenzy, wouldn't it?

**LA:** Well, it's the message. How do you express that?

**JN:** Yeah. How do you express that? I'm supposed to ask you about mojitos.

**LA:** You can ask me all you want to.

**JN:** I want to know your recipe.

**LA:** My recipe. Well, if you go to my Facebook (inaudible) some people claim that I am known by my forecasting abilities at the Hurricane Center, but I'm really known by my mojitos.

**JN:** I know that. So, when you bring them to the supplication party.

**LA:** I will make this year for Chris Landsea's party. Again, make it easier – I do not know, but the secret is if you're going to make it for so many people, you put that mint in a blender and grind it and then pass it with the lime juice.

**JN:** That's a lot of people.

**LA:** I know. But it's good. Then, the mint, but you have to put it through a colander with a paper towel. That's the difficult part because you don't want any of these little pieces of

mint. Then you put it – add the rum and the seltzer water and the sugar and ice. Voila, we have mojitos and we have fun.

**JN:** Great. And if it's just at home for you?

**LA:** No, I don't make them for me. I go to Miami Beach and get one (inaudible). For me, it's too much trouble.

**JN:** Too much trouble for the mint, right? I had this idea that you were growing mint on your patio or something.

**LA:** No, I (inaudible) public (inaudible) or any store.

**JN:** OK. So, I want to talk a little bit about – I want to ask you about ballet because you're a public persona. You're in the media. People know that you have this passion for dance. Did it start in Cuba, in Miami? How did you get into ballet?

**LA:** Cuba is the country of the three B's – baseball, boxing and ballet. Three different things. One of the good things in Cuba is that ballet is very popular. You can take a taxi in Cuba and the taxi driver knows the show that occurred last night and what the dancer did. It comes with the culture. It's different. In the United States, it's a little more for the elite. I'm not saying it because of the Cuban government. It's because people like ballet. Cubans like to dance. So, ballet is part of dancing and music. I'm proud to say that in every company in the world, important company in the world, the principles are Cubans. You go to Boston, ABT, San Francisco, (inaudible) Paris, London, the Cubans are – this is something that I grew up with. Since I was a kid, my mother took me. My family went. My father, everybody went to the ballet. That's it.

**JN:** How did you get to be such good friends that you can get your pictures taken with them?

**LA:** I'll tell you. It's very simple. It's very simple. It's a matter of respect. Some people are not prepared to be friends because these dancers spend six months getting ready for that wonderful performance. The person that comes to say hello to them, say, oh, I wish you could have done this, I wish you could have done that. You have to appreciate, there have been six months – I learned that you have to wait. If you (inaudible) really did something wrong, they will come as your friend, what do you think, you wait. That's one thing. The second thing is there is a ballet festival. I get a plane ticket. I go and I stay at the same hotel with them. After the show, we sit in the lobby, we drink a couple of beers, we talk. There is a little bit of they are very interested in my profession. All of them, they introduce me (inaudible) the hurricane man, the hurricane forecaster. That's why sometimes I don't want to retire because then, to them – they give me free tickets to the hurricane man. When I retire, I will be the old man that follows them everywhere. It's a joke.

**JN:** It's a joke.

**LA:** It's a joke. It's a passion. I like to meet them. They are good. I know them all over the world. It's a matter of respect. They respect my profession and I respect theirs, very much.

**JN:** It might be the six months in between. Right? They work on a role for six months. You have about six months between seasons.

**LA:** No. They're constantly working, but in the morning, they rehearse something. In the afternoon they have to do something else. In the evening they do something else. So, it's very, very hard work. Besides they cannot eat. You have to feel a little bit of compassion of them because they have to have a perfect – otherwise, they can't jump. (laughter)

**JN:** What is it in your profession that you had to practice and perfect? We talked about Dvorak, but there must be some things that make you yourself, personally – not all forecasters – Lixion – ready to go. What keeps you sharp? How do you stay in practice so you can jump?

**LA:** I love to forecast. I love to learn new models. I love to adapt to the new thing. For me, the most difficult part of my career, and still is, is because I wasn't born in the United States. I have Cuban accent when I talk. It's difficult to – everybody has been – but sometimes it's difficult. They don't understand me. You understand me because you know me for years. You're used to my accent. But you have some new people coming and it's hard. That's what I try to work hard. But I'll tell you one story if you allow me to do it.

**JN:** Please.

**LA:** In '96, I took an accent reduction class at the university. Wonderful teacher. It was amazing. I got A plus in that exam. So, when I did the next interview, all the media knew me, said, what have you done? You have lost your emotion. You have lost your emotion.

**JN:** (laughter) Your emotion.

**LA:** Because I was thinking of how to pronounce the next word, so it was terrible. Another story of that was they interview all of the specialists. I'm talking about the old building. The BBC of London wanted to have some kind of a documentary. Well, they picked me for the documentary. Then I called the – I said to the producer, but why do you pick me? First of all, I didn't want to do it because I have to bring the same shirt every day because it took four days (inaudible). Then he said, I'll tell you why. When people listen to you on TV, they have to pay attention. So, said, oh, let's see what that person is saying. So, they listen and they get interested. One group of people. That was the producer of the BBC. Then, the other thing is – the other half of the American will say, I don't know very well what he's saying. He has an accent. But if he's in that position – he's not an American, but if he had that position he must be good. This is studies they do in England, probably (inaudible). So, I ended up in the documentary.

**JN:** You have an IMDB record. You've been in two movies playing yourself.

**LA:** Did I?

**JN:** Yes.

**LA:** Which movies? I don't remember.

**JN:** (laughter) I'd have to look. I thought I'd throw that in there as a surprise because I found that when I was researching you. I can't remember.

**LA:** I suppose they're hurricane movies.

**JN:** Yeah. They're hurricane movies. You played yourself in the movies.

**LA:** Oh my gosh.

**JN:** I just noticed. I was like, whoa, he has an IMDB record.

**LA:** When you work 30-plus years, you get – well, I was nominated for Emmy a couple times. I didn't win. I didn't win.

**JN:** You didn't win.

**LA:** No.

**JN:** Do you know what you were nominated for?

**LA:** It was a communication. It was how to – a documentary to deliver the forecast (inaudible) public. It was by Carl (sp?) (inaudible) one of the old TV forecasters, he did. It was very interesting. Good experience.

**JN:** Hot Cities and Savage Skies. Savage Skies.

**LA:** Yeah. Was I in that?

**JN:** Yeah. Apparently, one episode. Hot Cities you were in.

**LA:** Wow. When I was at the AMS annual meeting, somebody came to me and opened a book. They produced a new book and here I am with my picture and said, when Lixion finishing forecasting he goes home to watch ballet.

**JN:** I saw that. You put that on Facebook.

**LA:** I put it in Facebook because I was surprised. But I'm not going to be upset. I loved it. That's the only reason I put that little thing. I'm also in a couple of other books that people used to interview – but, for me, it's like regular work. If you're lucky, the moment you're there working and they come to you during the day shift – you're working the day shift, you're the one to get interview. That's most of the time how it happens.

**JN:** Yeah, but you like it more than some of the others. Admit it, you do.

**LA:** Yeah.

**JN:** You'd rather do it than Jack would.

**LA:** I'm not afraid to talk. I have nothing bad to say about anybody. This is fun. Like in this interview, you're getting –

**JN:** I'm asking questions. So, most of the people that have come in here have had stories about other people. Do you have any funny stories you want to tell about someone?

**LA:** Probably. I have to think about – I have to think about – I have many because when you work many years. I have one – yes, I have one. I was working with Gil Clark many, many years ago. I don't know if you met Gil Clark, but he was loud and funny. So, he said, Lixion, look at that satellite picture. There's some monster (inaudible) storm coming to Florida. He told me that. The guy from the Herald was there. The next day, the headline of the Herald – monstrous (inaudible) storm heading for Florida. Neil Frank yelled at me and Gil. You, Gil Clark, Lixion, what are you doing? He didn't say anything, but it was learn how to be careful when you're around the media. You have to be careful what you say. I have stories. I'm thinking about stories of forecasting a hurricane that it didn't happen. There are many in these meetings, but I can –

**JN:** That's all right. We do that another time. We'll collect stories.

**LA:** Yeah. Maybe that's for my book.

**JN:** Your book, yeah. That's good. You have a book?

**LA:** No, I don't.

**JN:** You have an idea?

**LA:** No.

**JN:** But you don't have an idea for a book?

**LA:** There's a guy in Cuba. The book is right there. The (inaudible) book. That guy is a genius. When I go to Cuba to some meetings and he gives a talk, I'm fascinated because the way he delivers how the weather service of the United States was in Cuba, how they built all the stations, how the Weather Bureau back then was launching balloons and how the (inaudible) developed all that. It's fascinating to hear all that. So, he's a good friend of mine. He came to Miami last year. He went to Belen School and he gave a beautiful talk. I said, if someday I want a book, I want you to write it for me because he will make it fun and accurate.

**JN:** That's awesome.



**LA:** But I don't know if he's going to do it or not.

**JN:** You know the AMS published that book.

**LA:** Yeah, but let's get the book first. (laughter)

**JN:** So, good ideas. Do you have anything else you want to say or talk about?

**LA:** Somebody wants me – to know what I'm going to when I – what you want to do with me when I die. I always think about Jose Partagás. Jose Partagás was a forecaster from Cuba, here in the United States. He never became a specialist, but he was wonderful person. Everybody loved Jose. When he died, he didn't have any family, he was lonely. I don't know if we can say this, but his ashes, they took into a C-130 and threw it, but we cannot say that.

**JN:** But you just did. (laughter)

**LA:** That was 15 years ago. The supervisor that did it is gone or dead.

**JN:** Right, and over the ocean I'm assuming.

**LA:** Yeah. That was an interesting (inaudible) do I want that? I don't know.

**JN:** Are you going to retire?

**LA:** I'm debating my retirement. I'm not prepared. I'm not ready. This is something that you need to prepare mentally. I was thinking maybe I would retire in December after IWTC (sp?). Then, the new director said, but why don't you postpone it after the next hurricane committee, which is in April. But then I said, well, (inaudible) April, the new season is right there. However, if we get too many East Pacific storms this year and nothing in the Atlantic, I'm out because I can't stand those East Pacific storms. They all form and die in cold water immediately. But honestly, I do not know when I'm going to. I'm not prepared. One thing I told you at the beginning of the interview is that I know exactly what I want. And I do not want to have a goodbye party. I just want the last day, just to go home because that, I can't do it. That I don't like. As much as I love parties – but not that one. For everybody else, that's fine, but that one, I'm not ready.

**JN:** Since you know what you want, what are you going to do when you retire? Do you have a plan?

**LA:** I don't have a plan, but there's one thing I could do that people tell me, besides going more often to the ballet. But that's not (inaudible). I would love to help some of the Caribbean (inaudible) service and USAID has talked to me. (inaudible) said you are a wonderful person that could go – not full-time, but you can go there in the season to certain countries in the Caribbean. You know them all, you know all the directors, you know all the forecasters. You can contribute a little bit. It's not about money. It's not about money. I mean, of course, you need the money to do the thing, but it's not about money. Because if it's about money, I could

retire now because I'm not going to get much more different. It's about a little bit of what you like to do.

**JN:** Do you have any questions, Jinny?

**JN:** I do.

**JN:** You're looking like you do. Why don't you sit?

**JN:** I want to take your chair.

**JN:** All right.

**JN:** (laughter) I just have a couple of questions that occurred to me. Did you know that when the very first AMS Council was formed in 1920 that one of the member was from Cuba?

**LA:** I didn't know. In fact, there are many things I didn't know when I came to the United States that I found out here. Like, the first hurricane forecast ever, warnings, were issued in Cuba.

**JN:** In Cuba. And his name – and I know I'm going to say it very incorrectly was Millas (sp?)?

**LA:** Millas.

**JN:** Millas. Then, after the Revolution, he came to Florida.

**LA:** Correct. Well, the book that this person is writing right now – the Cuban guy who wrote (inaudible), right now, currently, he's writing the book about Millas. He's in the process of working on that. He came to the University of Miami and got a lot of information too, at the library.

**JN:** I'm sure he knows about this, but that would be very interesting.

**LA:** I will tell him to contact the AMS to – yes, I will tell him to contact the AMS for more. He'll be happy.

**JN:** Actually, I had looked up some of the information in the Bulletin for Rick Anthes, I think for this book. But I would love to be in touch with him if there's anything I can do.

**LA:** Yes.

**JN:** OK.