

**SARASOTA COUNTY WATER ATLAS  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
NEW COLLEGE OF FLORIDA—FALL 2010**



**Interviewee:** Juan Rodriguez  
**Date of Interview:** November 6, 2010  
**Interviewer/Transcriber:** Kaitlyn Bock  
**Subject of Interview:** Juan Rodriguez's childhood in Sarasota, surfing, and his surfboard building career.

**Bock:** Okay, can you please introduce yourself?

**Rodriguez:** My name is Juan Rodriguez. I was born in Sarasota, FL in 1951.

**Bock:** Where was your family originally from?

**Rodriguez:** My parents actually met in New York City. My father was from the Dominican Republic. He came to America and joined the Army in 1942. My mother grew up in New York State of Czechoslovakian background and was going to college at Columbia in New York City after going to Cornell for four years. They met in New York City, got married in Cuba, and settled in Sarasota for a year and couldn't make it here. They moved back to New York City for another year and then gave it another try back here, and they've been here ever since.

**Bock:** What did your parents do?

**Rodriguez:** My father made a living by fixing transmissions in cars. His business was called Manny's Automatic Transmissions. It's still on Bee Ridge Road. He sold it in the '70s, but it still bears his name. My mother was a housewife that was very much into horses. So, I would go to a lot of horse shows with her around the state. She had Arabians.

**Bock:** So she owned horses?

**Rodriguez:** Yeah, my mother owned horses.

**Bock:** Was it Western or English style riding?

**Rodriguez:** No, she didn't like Western riding. She was on the equestrian team at Cornell and did hunter/jumper. And when she got her first horses and started doing the shows it was all English. Like different classes of riding that probably a lot of people don't know about but there are a lot of different classes of riding. There was Pleasure. She did English Pleasure, which was really boring. The Arabians are really good at what they call Park, English Park. It's more of accentuated, kind of choppy-looking steps that Arabians look really good at doing. Then she did Costume and stuff like that. She did Halter. And she was state champion a few years. She had a beautiful horse.

**Bock:** Wow! So what year did they move back and you were born?

**Rodriguez:** Well I was born in 1951, and they were back in New York in '52 and then, I'd say settled back here in '53. I'm just guessing.

**Bock:** Do you have any brothers or sisters?

**Rodriguez:** I have one brother who is ten years younger than me. He flies a 747, so he's a pilot. And I remember when my brother—Joe is his name—was going to be 16 years old. And our dad had a plane and my brother was really into planes. I was a bit older, kind of doing my thing, surfing and getting in trouble occasionally. I didn't really want to hang out with my father but my brother did. They would go to The Venice Airport on Sunday. So my brother really loved to fly. My father would let him fly the plane. You know, not take off or land but once you're in the air it's pretty easy. I used to do it all the time. I think every kid does that. It's pretty fun. But on my brother's 16<sup>th</sup> birthday I had arranged for him to take his solo pilot's license. And I paid for that, for him. That was my birthday present to my brother. And the day he was 16 he got his solo pilot's license. He got his instructor's rating. He got his multi-engine rating and he got his instrument rating. He just got all these tests. He had everything all lined up so he just got all these tests. For about 3 months he was the youngest flight instructor in the country. And then some kid from California was a little bit younger and he did the same thing. Another kid probably did it after him. It was like a little thing that you did in the world of flying. So he's still a pilot and now he flies the thing that all pilots aspire to fly if you're a commercial pilot and that is a 747.

**Bock:** So before you found surfing did you ever think you would pursue flying?

**Rodriguez:** Before I discovered surfing I played baseball. I was a big baseball player. I loved baseball. I thought I was going to be a major league player. Didn't know what position but I played little league and all that. And when you're a little kid, you can be an astronaut and a fireman or a doctor—heaven forbid president! I don't think anybody should have that job, in their right mind. But I wanted to be a baseball player but then discovered surfing. In one of my classes at McIntosh Jr. High, actually I don't even know if it was called J. High. McIntosh School was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year that it opened and it was this experimental kind of school kind of thing. Anyway I was in class and this girl that sat kind of next to me that I knew brought a

surfing magazine to class that her brother had brought back with him from California. And there was a little bit of a rumble about surfing with these beach blanket movies and the Ride the Wild Surf type of things. You know, these really hokey Hollywood movies. They were totally stupid except that some of the footage was actual footage of some of the guys surfing. And it just kind of captured a bunch of people's imagination. Like you could do all this stuff and be out in the water and there would be parties and girls and, you know, the lifestyle, everything is just really cool. Nobody worked in these movies. All they did was surf everyday and party every night. Which is still kind of true in a way, but that's what I wanted to do. And I dropped baseball. At that time there was already a little bit of a surf scene here in Sarasota. So I got involved in it, got a surf board and started surfing. And here I am, 46 years later, still dreaming about the girls and the partying and not working! [Laughs]

**Bock:** [Laughs] Okay, so, let me just ask you a couple more questions about your childhood. Did you have a big family?

**Rodriguez:** No, I didn't have a very big family—small family with a really large extended family in the Dominican Republic. But here in Sarasota it was my mother, father, brother, grandmother and great grandmother for a while. But, basically a small family.

**Bock:** Where was your house growing up?

**Rodriguez:** I grew up, since I can remember I was about 5 years old. No, I was actually 3 years old in Bee Ridge which is about where my mom's house still is today which is about a mile from here, from where my shop is. So that's where I grew up. Not in the same house. They rented a house and my mother had gotten this money from the Carnegie Foundation for saving this mother and daughter who were drowning off Venice Beach. My mother swam out. She had been a lifeguard when she went to Cornell and she swam out. This mother and daughter were caught in the rip. The daughter was caught and the mother paddled out, or the other way around but they both got caught and they were going down. She got out and dragged them both to the beach. And I think that endowment [Carnegie Hero Fund Commission] is still active. She has a bronze medal about as big as an orange flat, in a really nice case. She got that medal and there was a cash reward. There are 3 different grades for what you did. If someone got a gold Carnegie medal it was posthumously because they were dead but they had sacrificed themselves. And the silver medal they had sacrificed themselves and got a little messed up doing it—like life-threatening and maybe injured. And then the bronze was just that you had went out and saved some people's lives like go into a burning building or whatever it was. But she had this money that she had gotten and bought five acres and they had built a house there. And the house is still there.

**Bock:** And how long did they live in that house?

**Rodriguez:** Well, let's see. I think I was about 7 when they built the house. So 52 years, something like that? I did go to Rearview High School. I passed math, so I can count [Laughs].

**Bock:** Can you describe your childhood growing up before surfing entered your life?

**Rodriguez:** Oh yeah, it was fun! I had a great childhood. It was a small neighborhood but a lot of kids. And unlike the generation today, and this is like a big... Anybody reading this or listening to this that is over a certain age is going to understand completely. There was nothing on TV, to start with—basically no TV. There were two stations, and they were both stupid because this was in the 50's. This was in the beginning of television as a largely accepted form of entertainment. Like, the shows were retarded. Any of the shows that were on were aimed at adults and not kids. The only stuff on T.V. for kids would be on Saturdays. So there was no reason to be in the house because there was nothing on TV. Plus, there was no air conditioning. [Phone rings] Um, let's see...

**Bock:** You were saying there was no air conditioning.

**Rodriguez:** Oh yeah! Anyone that's like my age is going to understand exactly what I'm saying. There was nothing on TV. plus there was no air-conditioning. So, you're in your house in the daytime. It's like, you could bake pizzas in there and there was nothing to do. But on the next block, there were ten or fifteen kids that were going through the same things I was going through. Didn't want to be in the house, nothing to do, let's go out and play. Great! Let's go build forts, let's go climb trees, let's go fishing, let's go camping, let's walk down the railroad tracks, let's pick up railroad spikes, have orange fights. Let's do all this stuff. That is just what you did. You played ball- football, baseball, softball. [We] fished, hunted, camped. It was great. You know, we would have big wrestling matches, big wars with each other. Nobody got really hurt but it was a great way to grow up. Unlike today where kids come home from school, they get right in front of the video game or TV. Because you can't go outside. Because of these jerk-offs, these pedophiles. I really have a strong feeling on what should be done to them. Whether they're sick, mentally ill or not. I have a way that would probably cure that mental illness in a hurry because what good are they? They're creating fear and they've changed a whole lifestyle. A whole generation of kids are afraid to go outside. You can't go outside to play because someone might kidnap you.

**Bock:** Do you feel like it was safer when you were younger?

**Rodriguez:** Absolutely, absolutely it was safer and a lot more fun because society has become so litigious with lawsuits, public liability. You can't play ball in somebody's field anymore because if you get hurt you can sue them. Or, you can't play ball because you're not on the team having signed all these release forms saying if I get hurt I'm not going to sue the county or whatever. They've just taken all the spontaneity and all the fun out of a lot of different things. Are things a little bit safer? Probably but to what point? What's the cost when you can't jump off the bridge anymore? We used to jump off bridges and it was fun! And no one ever got hurt hardly, except a couple times but we buried him [Laughs]. No, but really it was just a lot more open as far as

what you could do without getting in trouble. Now if today people did half the stuff that we used to do, you would get in a lot of trouble. And it was innocent fun. We had a lot of fun.

**Bock:** Did you guys bike to a lot of places?

**Rodriguez:** We rode our bicycles everywhere. We would have big bicycles races like 20 kids in a bicycle race. And there would be the best wrecks! It was so much fun. And you wreck your bike, two or three guys run over you. You cry for a few minutes and then you start laughing. I had a great childhood growing up. I don't see how it could have been much better.

**Bock:** Where was one of your favorite places to go?

**Rodriguez:** Well, I liked all of them. I liked it all because no matter what we did the potential was to have the best time you ever had in your life doing any of those things. So, I didn't really have a favorite. It was all my favorite. Life was my favorite.

**Bock:** What was the school that you went to?

**Rodriguez:** Well the first school that I went to was Philippi Shores. And then a new school had just been built and I went there the first year. It was called Brentwood. So I went to Brentwood. And then the first year McIntosh was built I went there. And then I went to Brookside Jr. High. And then I went to Riverview where I graduated! But I didn't really like school. I wasn't into school, at all.

**Bock:** Did you always have the same classmates?

**Rodriguez:** Yes, growing up they always kept the same classmates together in elementary school, basically. So you got to grow up with the same group of kids. You have to remember it wasn't a very big town then. So in second grade there might only have been 3 second grade classes. So there could have been a little bit of intermingling. But despite that, you knew everybody anyway because you see the same people over and over. So it created some bonds that are still there with some of us that grew up here. Whether you liked the person then or not, you still know them and they're still your friend for 50 years or 40 years.

**Bock:** So you have some friends that you knew when you were a kid that you still know now?

**Rodriguez:** Yeah, even though as people get older you define your interests in life a little bit. You know, you narrow things down. When you're young everything seems really cool. So you have a lot more in common with a lot of people, I think. So the guys that I know today, some are lawyers, some are construction workers, some are doctors, accountants. Some guys clean swimming pools. But we've all had a relationship in the past whether it was through surfing or playing ball. You know, having fun as a kid... I think intimate occurrences whether you're in like a pressure situation, or—I don't know where I'm going with this—when a group bonds for whatever reason, either from being in an orange grove and having a giant orange fight or playing

football or just going to a dance, there are things that bond people together and that is like the key element that glues people together. Now when I was in junior high there would be dances on Saturday nights at the Sarasota Armory and at the auditorium. When I was in high school, for a dollar you could watch The Allman Brothers. For a dollar fifty, I saw BB King at the auditorium. And there was like a little minor league circuit that the musicians would go on. You know we had a lot of musical groups that came through Sarasota back then. And it was kind of fun.

**Bock:** So did you go to a lot of concerts?

**Rodriguez:** Yeah because it was something to do on the weekends. That's all there was. There might be a football game. Oh yeah, the football games! Everyone would go to the Sarasota High football games. Riverview didn't have their own stadium they would use the stadium at Sarasota High. So you would go to the football games on Friday night then go to the concerts at the Armory on Saturday night. It was a small town and you would see the same people. Everyone kind of knew what to do because there wasn't that much to do. It was fun. And after the game, on U.S. 41 near where the hospital is, there was- I think it's a Pizza Hut now- there was the second McDonald's built in Florida. You probably didn't know that.

**Bock:** No...

**Rodriguez:** There was a McDonald's. I'm kind of skipping around on the chronology a little bit but this McDonald's was a little block building that was covered in red and white tile. It had a little cement shelf that stuck out about a foot coming out of the building and a slide screen door, little small little screen door where you came up to the shelf, kind of leaned on it, stuck your head by that screen door. The girl opened the screen door, you placed your order, and when your food was ready she opened the screen and gave it to you. It had the golden arches that were separate from the building. It started at the ground, and went up and over the building and came back down behind the building. Those were the golden arches. And I remembered they had the sign, and we would all look at the sign that said- I remember when it said- over 1 million sold! Then it said over 5 million sold, and then they were building a lot of models and they just quit counting. They would say "Millions sold!" Anyway the McDonald's was like the big hang-out after little league baseball games. The big thing for all of us, I was like 11 or 12, and the big thing for all of us was to get your mom to take you to McDonald's. And you could get a hamburger. I think the burgers were ten cents or eleven cents and a cheeseburger was fifteen cents. So that was pretty cool but what was really neat were the greasers.

**Bock:** What was that?

**Rodriguez:** The greasers were the guys that had the fast cars. And they would park their cars in the parking lot of McDonald's and hang out with their girlfriends. And they had the white tee-shirts and the jeans with the cuffs rolled up, the motorcycle boots. Their hair was all slicked back, all pompadour looking, all tough. Sleeves rolled up with a pack of Lucky's up here and these cars! And they would get in their car every once in a while. Start it up. Rev the engine up a

few times. Go around the parking lot a few times. And go out on 41 and go north from where the McDonald's was about less than a mile about to where the Burger Queen was on the other side of the road. The McDonald's was on the East side of 41, the Burger Queen was on the west side of 41. And they would do this lap in the parking lot of the Burger Queen. And there would be a bunch of greasers there in their cars. And sometimes they would get on 41 and have a drag race between traffic lights.

**Bock:** [Laughs] Sounds just like the movie *Grease*.

**Rodriguez:** It was just like the movie *American Graffiti*, if you've ever seen that. It's a really good movie because it kind of captured that feel. So, yeah, that was pretty neat. On a really big night there, guys would come in from Bradenton or Arcadia with their cars. And sometimes there would be fights because, you know, they were tough guys. And nobody had a gun, nobody had a knife, nobody had a ball, bat and maybe they all did but they never broke them out. But what they would do is have these fights. And the fights would last 2 minutes, you know, a couple punches and they would be rolling around the ground. They didn't want to get their jeans ripped or their t-shirts dirty so by the time they hit the ground, it was over. And they would hug each other and shake hands and get back in their cars and be friends. It was like this pretty innocent time. It was kind of magic. And a lot of us got to see this. And we were too young to participate in any of that crazy stuff. But we knew who all the bad guys were, all the tough guys. And they were not like super heroes, but kind of. You know, they were tough guys. And there would be fights at the football games where hundreds of people would be in a circle around these two guys. And sometimes nothing would even happen. They would just stand there and look at each other and posture and people would be egging them on and no punches would ever get thrown. But everyone was like happy. "Oh, he woulda kicked his ass!", "Oh no he wouldn't!", "Yes, he would". And then there would be fights behind the Sears Roebuck. Well Sears was on the corner of Bahia Vista and [US Highway] 41, just kind of down the corner from the burger places. And behind where Michael's on East Avenue is, that was an open field. And you could park your car behind Sears and nobody could see it from 41. And fights would happen back there. And you know, nobody got hurt real bad, like going to the hospital or anything like that. It was kind of fun. It was exciting. I don't know what kids do now. What do you do?

**Bock:** [Laughs] Well, no fighting for me... Just go to the beach, go to the movies.

**Rodriguez:** Yeah... [Thinking] So, at some point I discovered the beach. My mom used to take me to the beach when I was little. And I loved the water. I was always in the water. When Susie Cook brought that surfing magazine to school, I remember- I don't know the year- but I remember it was when President Kennedy got assassinated. Because, I remember being in that classroom. I remember having the same teacher when he caught me with the magazine. I was looking at the magazine and he caught me. But I remember he was the same teacher who told us when President Kennedy got assassinated. I don't know what year that was. 1961 or '62 maybe?

**Bock:** That was the same day?

**Rodriguez:** No, but it was the same teacher. So it would have to be the same class and the same year, that's what I'm thinking. I don't know. I can't remember... [Thinking]

**Bock:** '63, I think? Or maybe it was later... [Thinking]

**Rodriguez:** Well it was either the same time, earlier or later [Laughs].

**Bock:** Oh yes, you're right [Laughs]!

**Rodriguez:** Yeah, thanks! Anyway, I started surfing.

**Bock:** Where was it you caught your first wave?

**Rodriguez:** Okay, there were two groups of people that surfed in Sarasota at that time. There were guys that surfed at Siesta Beach. Just a few guys. And there was a group of guys that were older than me. Well, all these guys were older than me by 2 years or 3 years that surfed at Lido. Well, I didn't know any of the guys that surfed at Siesta Key. I had a friend that said he knew the guys that surfed at Lido. So we would hitchhike out to Lido Beach or take the bus out. And I remember going over the Ringling Causeway when it was wood and hearing the bus kind of clanking on the wood kind of rhythmically. And seeing how close the guardrail was to the side of the bus. Like freaking out- I had never really taken a bus before. So the first wave I caught was at Lido Beach. At the little jetty which was next to where the Lido Casino was, which they tore down, which was a really great building. It was like the coolest thing. The swimming pool is still there. They didn't tear the pool down. But I caught my first wave there on a borrowed board. And the first wave I caught I stood on my feet. I didn't stay up long but I did make it to my feet. And then that day I could catch a wave and stand up. So the first day I could stand up. And I loved it. It was like the coolest feeling. I thought the waves were like six or eight feet. Looking back now it was maybe waist high [laughs]. You know, you didn't have anything to compare it to. And you wanted it to be better anyway, bigger and more exciting. So the first place I caught a wave was there. I hung out there for awhile until I realized that from where I grew up right out here, to get to Lido was a big deal. To get to Siesta wasn't that big of a deal. At about the same time I was getting into surfing there was another group of guys more my age that started surfing at Crescent Beach which was the closest beach to my house. So, I would go to Crescent Beach and we would surf there. We went as far as, one year we built a surf hut that we used to sleep in on the weekends. And on cold nights, cause we would surf there year round, whether it was cold or hot, we would always go to the beach. A lot of times there wouldn't be any waves. Sometimes there would. It seems looking back that there were waves more then than there are now. I think it's because we weren't as picky about what our definition of a wave was. Like if it was knee high, we would go out. If it was smaller than knee high, we would go out. So you went out all the time. Summer or Winter. In the winter if it was cold we would be staying in the hut we would go down the beach and get all these wooden lawn-chairs, these really nice old Adirondack

chairs, take them apart and burn them. That didn't go over too well. Just to stay warm, sometimes in the day time. Sometimes right where the chair was. So it wasn't like we were trying to hide it we just didn't know. I just thought there would always be chairs. I didn't think that someone had to buy these chairs. We all did. We saw a chair, we were freezing. Nobody had a wet suit. We would go out all winter long without a wetsuit. And you know how cold it gets here in the winter with the wind blowing and the water in the 50s and come in and you'd be blue from hypothermia. I mean really cold, it would take hours to warm up if you didn't have a fire. If you did have a fire it wouldn't take that long. You could go out again. Which looking back I'm amazed I went in that water without a wetsuit. To this day I don't like cold water. I don't like wearing a wet suit. I don't care how good the waves are, I just don't like it. But we had fun out there. That was at Crescent Beach. And a big trip would be to go to Bradenton and surf with the guys from Bradenton or to go to Venice and surf at the jetty. That was a big deal. Even going to Turtle Beach from Crescent Beach was a big deal because you had to have a car to get there and nobody had a car.

**Bock:** Was there a big community of surfers that you were hanging out with?

**Rodriguez:** I wouldn't say it was a big community. It was still a pretty underground thing. But everybody that did it was like totally loyal to it. It was like zealots if you surfed. So it was a pretty tight community. I remember going to football games and if you saw somebody that looked like they surfed, you would go up and start talking surf with them and you would become friends like that. I remember we went to a football game and I think a team from Ft. Myers came, or from somewhere down south and this guy had a surf shirt on. I started talking to him and I'm still friends with him today. I never saw him surf, I've never surfed with him but he said he surfed back then. So that was the fraternity that you looked to be a part of.

**Bock:** There was no girl's surfing?

**Rodriguez:** Well there were a couple girls that surfed and some girls surfed pretty good, but it seemed like it was more of a guy's thing because of the lifestyle. You know, sleeping at the beach at night, it was just kind of a guy's thing. Now there are a lot more girls that surf and an average girl that surfs today is better than the best guys were back then just because of the equipment and knowing what to do. The lightness of the boards mainly, the weight of the surfboards. I remember it was pretty territorial as to what beach you surfed at. The Crescent Beach guys would go up to Siesta Beach. Even though it was only a half hour walk it was a big deal. And you would surf with the Siesta guys. We always thought we surfed better, they always thought they surfed better. Pretty soon we sort of blended in so that instead of exclusively going to our beach we would mingle a little bit. The Lido guys kind of kept their spot though. That was a little too far to walk. The first surf contest happened in Bradenton at Holmes Beach. And we went up there and got to see guys. It was the first contest around here. And we saw the guys from Bradenton that were a little more advanced than we were. Not much, but a little bit. And then some guys from St. Petersburg and Clearwater came down and surfed in this contest. I think the

reason some of them were better is because some of them were older. And then they got in on surfing about the same time that we did, maybe a little bit earlier. I'm still friends with almost all those guys. Still. Some of them have died, which is another thing. Losing friends. I've seen a lot of my friends die. But... um... the surf contests were fun. It was a way to network. And surfing was just a fun sport to do. It was like an adventure.

**Bock:** What did you like about it? What made you want to do surfing instead of baseball?

**Rodriguez:** Well, in baseball, I was a pitcher so there is almost a correlation. Between pitching and surfing in the fact that you have to focus 100%. Let's say you're on the pitcher's mound. You throw to the catcher. There is a guy standing with a wooden club that wants to hit the ball. There is a chance, not a great chance but there is a chance that the guy is going to hit the ball right back at the pitcher and knock your head off. Okay? So you don't want him to do that you have to focus. Really be into it. You're in that moment. Surfing is the same way. You see the wave come. You have to get yourself in position to catch the wave. You have to be in the right position to get the wave which is really important. It's more than just catching the wave. If you catch a wave that breaks all at once, the whole wave breaks at once, that's called the wave closing out. If the wave closes out there's no ride. I mean you make it to the bottom of the wave then the whole thing breaks and it's over. So why do you want to catch a close-out wave? Well you don't. A lot of people still do but what is the point if you're going to get blown up if you catch the thing? Why not wait for a wave that you can make. So you have to figure that out. You have to focus on that. Am I going to be able to make the wave? Is it a big wave? Is it a small wave? Is it dangerous? Are there rocks on the beach? Is it really shallow? Are there girls on the beach so you get this good ride? That's important too. Are your buddies paddling out to watch you pull into a big barrel, do a nice nose ride or a good turn? You have to focus. It's a solitary thing where most of the time, if you fall off it's your fault. You know sometimes you'll be paddling out and someone will get in your way or they'll get out in front of you and get in your way. But if you screw up mostly it's your fault. So you have no one to blame but yourself if you fail. If you get a great ride, hey I did it! So it's a great feeling of accomplishment. And it's a great way to be outside and kind of commune with nature. Anything can happen when you're sitting on your board waiting for another wave to come in. I've seen sea turtles some up right next to me. Baby sea turtles wash up over the deck of my board in a wave. I've seen porpoises come up right next to me. I've had manatees come up under me, scare me to death. I've had sting rays jump out of the water and smash into me. I've been hit by fish. I've seen whales. I've seen sea snakes. I've seen sharks... I've seen sharks.

**Bock:** Even at Siesta or Lido?

**Rodriguez:** I've seen sharks at a lot of places. There is a reason why one of the biggest shark laboratories, it's called Mote Marine laboratory, I think it's in Sarasota [Laughs]. There are a lot of sharks. Everywhere. I mean Mote could have been anywhere really because there are sharks everywhere. But I've seen a lot of sharks. I've been stung by jellyfish. I've been stung by man-

of-wars—Portuguese man-of-wars—so badly that I had a hard time breathing because it kind of works on your central nervous system. I've seen porpoises jumping right out of waves. A nice big swell will come in and 5 porpoises will be inside the face of the wave swimming. And you'll see them through the water. All of the sudden they'll all jump! Like ten feet in the air. And do this arch right in front of the wave. I've seen them catch fish and come up to the surface, look at somebody in the eye with a fish in their mouth, crunch the fish (makes crunching sound) with their teeth and flip the fish up in the air 20 feet. When the fish hits the water, they'll take off and grab the fish again and do it again. Showing off to people! I mean that's the best way I can explain it they are putting on a show. So you never know what you're going to see out there! It can just be this amazing show of nature that you just never thought it would happen. Or, it could be kind of like a nightmare if you get stung by jellyfish. Or something happens where a predator comes up too close to you. It's kind of spooky. And if someone tells you they aren't scared of sharks in the water, not overly concerned, not to where it's like your main focal point but if you don't at least think about it, they're either really in denial or they're lying. Because you have to think about it. I mean it's not like foremost but I keep my eyes open. When I'm waiting for a wave, I'm not just sitting on my board wagging my feet underneath me, lah-dee-dahing along. I'm trying to be aware of what's around because there is a lot of stuff out there.

**Bock:** Would you say that that's part of the appeal? The risk factor?

**Rodriguez:** I don't think that's an appeal in any way at all to me. I mean, no, not at all. I'd rather surf and not even have to think about that. And I know a lot of people that have been bitten by sharks. A lot of people! Probably fifteen people I've met, maybe more that have been bitten by sharks. 99% of them have been bitten by a small shark that mistakes their hand or their foot for a fish in the water because the shark goes for movement. The water is not always clear. The see something flash by them they are going to spin and bite. What, to these people has happened, the shark will spin and bite their hand, bite down on it, shake their head a couple times and figure out that it's too big for them to eat and let it go. So, you have a superficial wound with maybe a dozen or twenty something holes. Alright, little teeth marks. But where the bad part happens is when they shake their teeth are like little razor edges on both sides. So when they shake it cuts back and forth. It's not just these holes going straight in like a dog bite. When they shake, I describe it like exacto knife blades. And they're slicing tendons and little arteries and veins and that's where the problem is because they do shake. So, it could be a shark that's two feet long and it shakes a couple times. By the time you're out of surgery there is like twenty stitches on the outside but maybe one hundred on the inside. And your hand is not right. You can't straighten your fingers. Your fingers are locked in place. So, and that could happen to anybody. A few years ago in one of the big news cycles in the summer was all the shark attacks in New Smyrna Beach. Right? People getting bitten every day. Well, they are getting bitten by 3-foot-long sharks. About ten people got bitten in the surf contest some genius decided to hold when the sharks are spawning in this migratory period and they are all inshore chasing bait fish. And they want to have a surfing contest. So all these kids are out there in this surfing contest. Most of

them got bitten walking out in the water, not on the surf boards but stepping on these sharks because the water was so shallow. So yeah, they're out there. When they're there you don't go in the water. When you see hundreds of sharks, you know, schooling, you don't go in the water. I mean, I'm no genius but I know that. That's why I haven't been bitten.

**Bock:** Wow. Okay, so let's go back to your teenage years. What did you do when you got out of high school?

**Rodriguez:** When I got out of high school. I believe, possibly the day after I got out of high school, I got in my car and drove to coco beach. I spent the summer in coco beach. And I was there living in an apartment with, I don't even know how many people or who they were anymore, I can't remember. It was just a place to sleep on the floor and surf every day. I had a little bit of money saved up. I got a job at a restaurant and met some other guys that had this idea to go to California. So I hooked up with two other guys and we hitch hiked to California. We got one really long ride that let us off in Oakland, California. This was 1969. Oakland, California was where, I believe, the Black Panther party started. Because Oakland, it's kind of an industrial, kind of worn-out city... a lot of people walking around. And, I remember we were on the corner and people were walking by trying to sell us drugs. Acid, mescaline, peyote, STP, hash, Thai stick, weed, and then all kinds of pills that I never even heard of. And then there were these Black Panther-looking guys. These black guys with big afros that looked kind of cartoonish with polyester shiny shirts and bell-bottom pants. Big heels on their shoes. I felt like I had just fallen off the hay wagon into outer space somewhere. It was like overwhelming almost. It was like surreal. So anyway we were hitchhiking from Oakland. I wanted to go to a town in Southern California called Encinitas. I don't know why I picked that town out but I did. And the other guy said Okay, let's go there. We could have been anywhere but that was our destination. So we were hitchhiking and kept hitchhiking and hitchhiking and hitchhiking all the way to Encinitas and found a place to stay. I got a job in Encinitas working at a surfboard factory. And still am in touch with the guys I met then. Still, I'm in touch with those guys. I know those guys. Like I was saying before, you make these connections that are kind of lifetime bonds that you make. I surfed all the time, worked on making surf boards. Surfed and saw this stuff happen. We were talking about sharks before. I was on the beach and they had a lot of kelp. It was just off shore and sometimes the kelp would wash up on the beach. Sometimes during a storm you would get a lot of kelp washing up on the shore. Big long strands, it's like cable. Big long leaves. I don't know if you've ever seen kelp before. But I saw these flies buzzing around this big clump of kelp and I walked over. It was a pacific porpoise and they look a little bit different than the Atlantic or Gulf Stream porpoise. They're just thicker and just bigger. And this thing had a big bite out of its side. Like a big bite. Like a shark bite. And I don't know where he was when he got bit. You know the current, how long he'd been dead. But that was kind of bizarre. Anyway California was absolutely great. I loved it.

**Bock:** How long were you out there for?

**Rodriguez:** The first time I was out there for a little over a year. Then I came back because I kind of told my parents I would go to college. So I did. I went to college at Brevard Junior College which is in Cocoa. I lived in Cocoa Beach. I surfed at Sebastian Inlet every day. I didn't do so well in school. Caught a lot of waves, though. And I met some guys from that period in my life that I'm still friends with too. Surfing is kind of like a tribal thing. In the big picture there aren't like zillions of things—I guess there are a lot of people that surf, but there's a core group that travels or is in the industry. You know, is just more connected than the masses. I don't want to say that the core group makes things happen but they do—and now it's like big business, but back then they were like the manufacturers or the team riders. The surf shop owners. People that were more involved in the industry. And those were the guys that I'm still friends with and are still involved in one way or another. And, yeah, so it is tribal. And there are guys I know from all over the country and other countries besides America. You know, the Caribbean and Costa Rica and France and Spain and Brazil.

**Bock:** Did surfing take you to these places?

**Rodriguez:** Yeah, absolutely. There's always been that travel aspect in surfing that now just as much or more than ever, guys will work two jobs, save every penny they can, live in their van, crash on people's couches and save enough money to go on a surf trip. And they'll be gone for months or as long as they can. I used to take 4 trips a year. I would work every day- I had it totally figured out. If I worked for 90 straight days then I could take 30 days off and go on a surf trip. And the way I had that figured was if you work five days a week you're working 20 days a month. Well there are 30 days a month so if you work every day a month, you're adding up ten here. So if you work three months, 90 days, then you have a 30 day vacation period that you've saved up. You have 30 days that you can do whatever you want to with. So I did that for years. And it worked.

**Bock:** Where did you go?

**Rodriguez:** I went to Mexico a lot. Went to Hawaii, went to Europe. Went snow skiing a few times. I went to Costa Rica. Wherever I wanted to go.

**Bock:** Where was your favorite place to surf?

**Rodriguez:** Well the answer I give now is anyplace that's warm and the waves are good. One of my favorite places because of the quality of the waves and the excitement factor, cause it's pretty dangerous and I've been there a lot, is this place in Mexico called Puerto Escondido, it's in the state of Oaxaca about two or three hundred miles south of Acapulco.

**Bock:** Is that on the west side?

**Rodriguez:** Yeah. It's on the Pacific. The waves come out of really, really deep water and they're really thick. They hit the shallow sand bar and it's really barrel-ly waves. It's called the

Mexican Pipeline. It's pretty intense. And it's beautiful. Big fish and I've seen whales; whales breaching, eating krill. I've seen sharks and I've seen sailfish and I've seen sea snakes, tons of sea turtles, all kinds of marine life. It's kind of remote. Beautiful.

**Bock:** How long did you do this? Where you were just working for 90 days and...

**Rodriguez:** I did that for about four years. But even if I wasn't going on my 90 day thing, I was still going on a couple trips a year anyway. I just had my life set up so I could do that. You know, it was part of what I did. Yeah I loved it. Looking back, I may have taken it for granted because it was normal. Now I wish I had the time to go on a trip. The way it is now, I work really hard. My body hurts. Like, I hurt. My shoulders hurt, my elbows hurt, my back hurts because I work as hard as I did when I was young. So I'm glad that I went on all my trips when I was young instead of what some people do is they work their whole lives to do this retirement thing where they're going to go do whatever. Climb mountains, bike ride, I don't know, whatever people do. Well when you get to the point where you can retire and you have all this money saved up and you want to do all this fun stuff, you can't do it. You're too beat-up to do it. And playing golf, you know very zen-like sport. A lot of concentration like playing ball or surf but it's just not for me. I need something faster. So I'm glad I went on all my trips and did my thing when I was young when I could really enjoy it. I'm glad I did all that.

**Bock:** Were you usually traveling by yourself?

**Rodriguez:** Usually it would be with a group of travelling partners. I've been on trips with a lot of people and there are a lot of people that I will never go on a trip with again because you really find out about people when you're in some third world place and real problems can come up. It can get scary or uncomfortable. And the language barrier, some people think everybody should speak English. Guess what? They don't. And if you go to their country, is it their job to make you feel comfortable and fit in? Or is it your job to make them feel comfortable that you're here and to show them that you do want to fit in? I mean, there's a responsibility when you travel not to come across as the ugly American, which is real. I mean the arrogance that some people show, and not often, but it is there. It made me embarrassed when I saw it.

**Bock:** So at what point did you make the surfboard crafting your primary occupation?

**Rodriguez:** Well, when I was 14, I got a ding in my surfboard. Ding is, well a ding. And at the time there was no one in Sarasota that really repaired surf boards, except one guy that said he could do it that I never really liked. He said he could surf and do all this other stuff and he couldn't do any of that. So, I thought he was full of crap. When I was a kid I always made things. Either model cars or I used to make little dug-out canoes out of tree branches. I just made stuff with my hands. So I had a ding in my surf board. So I went to Economy Fishing Tackle and bought some resin and fixed the board. The first time I fixed my board I almost—and this doesn't happen anymore because they changed the formula—but the resin could catch on fire. Back then, if you put too much hardener in and the resin got too hot, it could ignite. Well, I put

too much hardener in. So, I'm crying, freaking out. I dig out all the bad resin, fixed it again and it came out really good. So a few weeks later, I'm at Economy Tackle because they carried Hobies. That was like the closest thing we had to a surf shop here in Sarasota at the time. Although there was another real surf shop at the Lido Casino that these two women opened that were from California and they were around for awhile. But Economy Tackle was closer and they had Hobies, and I kind of liked the name Hobie. So that is where I went. Anyway, I showed the guy the ding in my board that I had fixed up and they offered me a job right there being the ding guy. So I had all the business in this area. I learned how to fix boards through trial and error because no one showed me. I didn't know how to do it because no one knew how to do it. So, that is how I started with the ding repair business. At one point Economy Tackle rented surfboards. Someone who had rented a board was driving back from the beach. He had the board, the tail of the board was sticking out the passenger window. The nose of the board was in the back seat of his VW Bug. He took a turn a little bit too tight and the tail of the board hit a telephone pole. Before the tail broke off the board, it squished the driver up against the steering wheel and messed him up because the seats didn't have those little clickers back then. So it squished him up against the seat. It hurt him. Well when he brings the board back he had to pay for the board. I think he went to the hospital. He was messed up. So anyway the board was in there broken. They gave me the board. I stripped the fiber glass off it, and I made my own surf board. It was the first one I made. And I rode it and it worked, sort of. And I sold it. And I made some money selling it. So I thought this is what I want to do. I want to make surf boards. So this was in 1967 and there was a transition in surfing going on where people didn't want to ride long boards anymore. They wanted to ride short boards which were smaller and lighter. They didn't work at all because nobody knew what worked back then, but they knew they wanted to ride a short board. So people were giving long boards away. So I was getting these long boards, stripping the fiber glass off of them, reshaping them into some kind of spaceship I thought was going to work, which they never did. None of them ever worked, and I still feel guilty about sacrificing these beautifully-made long boards that were just great solid boards and making some piece of junk. I just killed these boards. I wish I had all those boards that I stripped the glass off of. But I kept working, trial and error, and I finally got some real surf board blanks, the foam, and started making boards. And I was making quite a few boards and making some money and a little bit after that was when we hitchhiked to California and I got a job in a real factory. I kind of had some knowledge. According to what was going on in that factory, I wasn't even close. I mean, they had it down. It was a real surfboard factory that had been in business for awhile. They were great craftsmen. It was a real job. I wasn't a little kid in school or at home making boards in the carport. So I really dedicated myself after that to learning how to make boards. So, what other jobs have I had in my life? Basically none. I worked construction for a while—hated it. I worked as a busboy—fun. And then I worked in a factory that made molded fiberglass bath tubs and hated that, but I learned a lot there as far as mold making and plugs. And how to make things straight with no wobbles. I'm real detailed, meticulous on how I want things to look when they're done. I'm a really terrible critic on my own work. It's been hard for me to let that go.

And because of that, what I learned making molds, I had the idea to make molded skim boards in 1987. Before that, I made skateboards. I made a lot of skateboards. I'm jumping around here. The skim boards, I had the idea to make molded skim boards one night. When I did fall asleep, I woke up the next morning and had it all figured out how to make them. And it took about six months to work it all out because I broke my ankle playing football. And figured out how to make skim boards and became the largest skim board manufacturer in the world in the early '80s. I still have the first molded skim board ever made because I save stuff. I'm a collector. Anyway I sold that business in '89 and just dedicated myself just to making surf boards.

**Bock:** Is that how One World came about?

**Rodriguez:** Yes. When I came up with the name, I was in France, in Biarritz, France and watching television in some store. And CNN was on. I hadn't heard English spoken in like a month. And they said there has been a late-breaking story. There's been a 5.8, or whatever the Richter scale was, earthquake in Oakland, California. That earthquake was the one that collapsed the freeway. They had a multi-level freeway and squished all these cars with people in the cars. Like, they just got squished. So, I'm thinking "Wow, this is happening right now. I'm in France, the other side of the world. This is happening right now but about that (snaps fingers) later then when the guy spoke those words in the CNN studio, because the signal is bouncing off all these satellites, like we're living in one world now." And I thought that wow, that's a cool name. One World. And was it the first time I ever heard the word? No. Did I make it up? No. Did I like it and keep it? Yes. And I thought it was pretty appropriate for the way things were at the time. So a few months later, I sold Western Flyers. That was what my other business was. And registered the name One World, and I've been One World since 1989.

**Bock:** Wow. And has it always been here in Sarasota?

**Rodriguez:** Yes. Unless I had been living in Hawaii or California, I would be there. But mainly be here because I've traveled around to work with other people in the surfing business.

**Bock:** Why do you keep coming back to Sarasota?

**Rodriguez:** Oh... Because of the wonderful people here and the sunny atmosphere and the progressive vibe. And the kind of way that Sarasota has evolved into a very special place in my heart [Laughs]. My real answer? I have no idea. I don't know! I guess because I'm comfortable here.

**Bock:** Yeah. Do you think there is something special about Sarasota?

**Rodriguez:** Yeah, absolutely I do. Every time I drive over the Ringling Causeway from Lido Beach at night and you look at the reflection from off the water—that's like a postcard. Or you're on the beach at sunset. It's beautiful. Sarasota definitely has its magic. Or now, there are like hawks and eagles and osprey and wild animals that have come back. It's great.

**Bock:** How did it look when you were younger, as opposed to now?

**Rodriguez:** Well when I was young, Sarasota really was a smaller place. Where I grew up, back then was described as the middle of nowhere. Now it's almost in town. There were a lot less people. There was a lot less to do. It was a small town. The place is like... if you've ever seen pictures of then and now it is like incredible. I remember when there was a drive-in theater where Gulf Gate is. You know the little train there. Like I said, when the Ringling Causeway was wood. It's just a lot different.

**Bock:** Was there a lot more open spaces? What about parks?

**Rodriguez:** No, there was no parks. None of the planning. And, I liked it better back then. Yeah, there might be more opportunity now because there's more people that need services or whatever they need. But it was just a little quaint town back then that was kind of special. We would go out to Crescent Beach and it was just beautiful. No condos. On Siesta Key there were no condos.

**Bock:** I bet you could see more stars at night!

**Rodriguez:** Oh yeah. And the luminescence in the water at night. It was... fish in the bay. Before they dredged and filled Bird Key, the bay was clean and clear, fish everywhere. It wasn't all fished out and polluted and funky. There was probably the same percentage of people that worked hard or people that didn't work hard or people that didn't have a home. I think those percentages stay the same. It wasn't this totally idyllic place; there was still a down-side to it. But it was great! I should have run for mayor. Maybe I still will.

**Bock:** You still could. [Laughs]

**Rodriguez:** Yeah. I think I'm going to announce my decision to run for public office.

**Bock:** On this?

**Rodriguez:** Yeah. This is it. I'm going formally announce my intentions any day now.

**Bock:** So do you still go out and surf?

**Rodriguez:** I love to surf. Yes, I love to surf, absolutely. It's a great, great way to just kind of erase yourself from what your everyday life is and just get out into a different head space for awhile. It's a good, good space to be in.

**Bock:** For someone that doesn't surf, what would you describe the sensation of surfing like?

**Rodriguez:** It's hard to describe in words. It's a great feeling. You can't describe it. It's like asking someone to describe the ocean. You know it's a big thing of water. It's really hard to say.

**Bock:** Is it hard to learn?

**Rodriguez:** It takes time. It takes real effort and dedication to learn how to surf. And not everyone that tries it gets hooked on it. But the people that do get hooked on it will usually surf most of their lives. Yeah.

**Bock:** So speaking of people that surf, we all are familiar with the surfer stereotype, or the typical surfer. In your opinion, who are the real people that surf?

**Rodriguez:** Well, I don't know what your typical definition is, but I don't know. I don't know what the typical surfer is. I see some guys that don't really have anything at all going for them at all other than they just want to go on surf trips and just want to surf. Like their goals are just to surf. And I see other people that are professional people that love to surf just as much. I think there is a big cross-section and not an average that people fall into. Because everyone is different. However, there are a lot of people that just live to surf, and it's kind of sad in a way. To see their enthusiasm is cool, but to see that they've chosen that so they didn't have to do something else. That's kind of what I think about some of them. And I think there are people like that maybe in every sport. I think it's a consistent percentage of people have always been highly motivated. No motivation. Wonderful people. Terrible people. Thieves. Philanthropists. I think the percentage is always about the same. I really think that. I think people are kind of hard-wired at birth and they're going to turn out a certain way. Almost like a pre-destination. That's kind of what I think.

**Bock:** Then again, you are someone who found a job doing something you really love and are really interested in. Was there a time when you thought or worried that this wouldn't work out?

**Rodriguez:** No, I've never been worried about it because I've never been motivated by money. I've always been motivated by completing projects and making things because I love making things. And when I've finished something and I got really into making it, I get a lot of reward from that. The money comes after that. But to me the reward is knowing that I did about the best I could do on it and didn't take any short cuts. And am I the best craftsman in the world? Not by a mile. Do I try as hard as I can? Absolutely. Am I still learning and getting better? Yep. Because we all have room to get better and improve? So, that's kind of my story. And I'm stickin' to it!  
[Laughs]

**Bock:** So how much longer do you think you'll be crafting surfboards?

**Rodriguez:** I don't know if I can ever retire! I mean, what am I going to do when I retire? I'm not going to play golf. I already know that. I've already been just about everywhere I've wanted to go. Alright? Missed a couple places. Done a bunch of stuff that we probably don't need to discuss on the tape recorder. So, already done that. Plus, I'm too old. And I love what I do. I love making them, so why do I want to stop? I'm comfortable doing this. Would I be comfortable sitting on a bench at an Island Park feeding pigeons? I don't think so! Would I be comfortable picking up shells on the beach? Nope. Done that. What would I do? Play shuffleboard? Whoa!  
[Laughs]

**Bock:** You might be really good at shuffleboard!

**Rodriguez:** Who cares [Laughs]? Who cares? So I'll probably be doing this until I can't do anything anymore. Because I love what I do. It's not like real work. Even though I work harder than almost anybody that I know, it's not like real work to me.

**Bock:** Even all these years later?

**Rodriguez:** I still feel the same.

**Bock:** With the surfboard building are you able to put a lot of your own style into it?

**Rodriguez:** If you get a surfboard from me, what you get is 35 years of building surfboards. My experience on a surfboard in conditions all over the world. My ideas of what a type of surfboard should ride like and be shaped like and be made like. If somebody can tell me that I'm wrong and they want it a different way, then fine. I'm all ears. Usually if you get a board from me you get the very best board I can make.

**Bock:** Okay. Well, I just have one last question and I probably could have mentioned this at any earlier point but it just didn't come up. But, I was curious, do you ever surf at night?

**Rodriguez:** I have surfed at night before. It's really cool surfing at night. At Crescent Beach we used to surf at night and at Cocoa Beach I've surfed at night. If there is a bioluminescence in the water then you can see anything that is moving in the water. It looks like shooting stars when a fish goes by. It's, um, obviously kind of dark. You're relying on the lights on the beach to see the steepness and the texture of the wave when it's coming in. Because it has to be steep enough or you can't catch it. So if you don't have any reference point because it's dark, well what are you doing? Paddle around in circles. So you need some light. And for me it's really hard to do because I can't see the texture or the steepness of the wave at night and you have to be able to see that or else you can't judge the wave. When you can see it, the light is just right and you get the reflection on the wave. It's really fun because you're going really fast. You don't know what's in front of you. You just know you're going really fast and it's going to end sometime. The bad part about it is you can't really see what's swimming around you. And that's something, I don't have like a phobia of sharks, but they do feed at night, close to the beach. So, I rest my case. It's the same reason you don't go swimming at night. Unless you're making the movie *Jaws* and they pay you a lot for that one scene. So I hope that helped.

[We move to Juan's workshop and he gives me a tour.]

**Rodriguez:** Okay, so we're back in the part of my shop where everything happens here. On the right as we're walking toward the back I have two redwood surfboards that I made. The board on the left was made out of the root-ball out of a giant redwood tree. I made that in 1996, and that might be the nicest board I ever made. It's one of my favorites at least. The one on the right... The one on the left that particular type of grain is called burl and it's pretty unusual. The board

on the right is a different cut of the tree and the wood all came from stumps. So no actual trees were cut. So they're the stumps of trees that were cut about a hundred years ago. That wood on the right is called curly wood and it's like an iridescent type of glow to the grain of the wood. A little bit further in, on the corner there is another one of my boards that I actually ride. It's balsawood that came from Ecuador. I made that board about 10 years ago. I shaped it the morning after my best friend had died. He and I started surfing together. I met him when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. His name was Mike Barnes, and we started skateboarding together. Started surfing together, skipped school together, climbed the water tower, sprayed out names on it. We went to the East Coast on surf trips. Started puffing. As I continued to surf going to the direction I was going in. He took a different direction, but we were always good friends. He died of liver and renal failure from alcohol. The night that he died, I was in the hospital room. He was so jaundiced, he was orange and catatonic. I told him "Mike, the nurse just let me know that when you get out of the hospital, if you want to go surfing with me, you can. But you have to let me know if you want to go surfing with me." He had been catatonic for like an hour since I had been in there. He opened his eyes, looked at me, and then nodded his head. So the next morning, I had that balsa blank right there. Eleven feet long, and I start shaping the board thinking about my friend Mike Barnes. Well, while I was shaping it, I did something I had never done in 35 years of shaping surf boards. I stuck my finger in the exhaust shoot of the tool to clean out the wood chips. Well, I didn't use the finger I use always, I used another finger and the blades on the machine, the blades on the machine took the end of my finger off and splattered the balsa wood with what looked like oatmeal and ketchup. It was the end of my fingers. So anyway that board's important to me. So after that I had a memorial service. I kept some of the ashes from his cremation. I put them in a little vial that I wear around my neck when I go on surf trips. So he is still going on surf trips with me. And he's been everywhere. He's been all over. So that's my story on Mike Barnes.

Right here on the left is something pretty unusual. Every time I have a little bit of resin left over—and the resin is a liquid that you use with fibreglasing—every time I have a little bit left over, I dump it on this thing I started about 10 years ago. It's against the wall in my shop. It's not attached to anything but the floor now. It's a million different colors of resin. It looks like what people would compare a wax candle when you burn different color candles and burns down. Except it weighs over 500 pounds and it's 4 feet tall and 5 feet wide. It's all resin. I'm going to make something out of it. Back here are wooden displays of surfboards that I make for a local company that they hang product on. Um, the only boards that I ever really numbered and kept track of are wooden surfboards that I've made. So I keep my numbers on my post right here. The next wooden board I shape will be number 1,176 of wooden surfboards. That's a lot for anybody. Back here are surfboards that I've made with my brand, One World. They're made in China. I order boards by the container. So I have a 40-foot container coming in soon, in the next two weeks, of stand-up paddle boards, which is like the biggest, largest fastest growing water sport that there is right now. It's a big thing. I've been selling stand up paddle boards for about four years. People are waiting for my boards, as you've seen just as we're doing the interview. People

are coming in wanting to get paddle boards. They'll get them soon. Over here, I make wooden surfboard fins for the all old guys that made surfboards in the '60s in California. All the biggest names in '60s surfboard manufacturing are my customers. It's a trip! Because never in my wildest dreams when I was a little kid, looking at Susie Cook's surfing magazine that her brother brought from California, that I would be on a first name basis, in business with the guys that were in that magazine at the time, calling me to order stuff. It's pretty bizarre. Over here, I have a stack of redwood slabs that I make the redwood boards out of.

**Bock:** Is this your favorite kind of wood to work with?

**Rodriguez:** I like to use redwood because, well... you might think I'm weird. Redwood. Let's say the tree is 1,000 years old. Right? The air inside the wood that wood has grown around is a thousand years old. It hasn't been breathed in a thousand years! It's like going into a mummy's tomb in Egypt and cracking that seal and (breathes in deeply) breathing air that hasn't been breathed in a thousand years or two thousand years. When I shape a redwood board, I take my shirt off. I wear shorts and I sand it with as little clothes on as possible to absorb this pre-historic air. And the redwood dust stains my skin, makes my skin darker.

**Bock:** What? Wow!

**Rodriguez:** Yeah! It's pretty cool. Now, these slabs of redwoods... Where have you ever seen redwood slabs this big? No. I may have the biggest collection of redwood slabs on the East Coast. I may! I don't know anyone who has pieces like that.

**Bock:** I've never seen anything like that.

**Rodriguez:** They're huge! They're 11 feet long. They're 5 feet wide, and they're mine. Over here are repair boards, restorations. The restorations are old boards that were made in the '60s that people have a sentimental attachment to that that want to board made to look like it's new again. I do a lot of that. Here's one I finished this morning. This thing was completely beat and now it's beautiful. Isn't it?

**Bock:** It's beautiful.

**Rodriguez:** It's going on someone's wall. Yeah, I'm good at doing those because I'm patient. I think that's it, except for the skim board. I told you I was the largest skim board manufacturer. This is the prototype that I made in 1976. This is the first molded skim board that I made in 1977. It's kind of cool. And then other boards that I made over here, like kind of niche kind of designs. Yeah, so that's my story.