

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview with **Elisabeth Isais (CN 74, T57)** for the Billy Graham Center Archives. No spoken words which were recorded are omitted. In a very few cases, the transcribers could not understand what was said, in which case [unclear] was inserted. Also, grunts and verbal hesitations such as “ah” or “um” are usually omitted. Readers of this transcript should remember that this is a transcript of spoken English, which follows a different rhythm and even rule than written English.

. . . Three dots indicate an interruption or break in the train of thought within the sentence of the speaker.

. . . . Four dots indicate what the transcriber believes to be the end of an incomplete sentence.

() Word in parentheses are asides made by the speaker.

[] Words in brackets are comments made by the transcriber.

This transcript was created by Bob Shuster, Katherine Graber, and Paul Bartow was completed in September 2013.

Please note: This oral history interview expresses the personal memories and opinions of the interviewee and does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Billy Graham Center Archives or Wheaton College.

Collection 74, Tape 756. Oral history interview with Elisabeth Isais by Robert Shuster on May 6, 2010.

SHUSTER: [Music playing in background for first few minutes of interview] This is Bob Shuster interviewing Elizabeth Fletcher Isais for the archives of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, USA and the interview took place at 12:08 Central Standard Time on May 6th, 2010. Why don't we start with a little background information. When and where were you born?

ISAIS: I was born in Terre Haute, Indiana.

SHUSTER: And when was that?

ISAIS: July 21st, 1925.

SHUSTER: And how did you come to attend Wheaton?

ISAIS: Well, my mother and father were both graduates and my paternal grandparents were also graduates.

SHUSTER: So there was a long family tradition

ISAIS: Yes, but actually I was born in Terre Haute, but I never lived there. The family moved to Elgin, Illinois when I was a very small child. And...my father became one of the...well, he became the director of the band at the college about a year or two before I got to be that age, you know, of going to college. Actually, I really didn't want to go to Wheaton [both laugh]. I got a scholarship to another school, and I wanted to go to that. But my mother was friends with Dr. Dyrness....

SHUSTER: Enoch Dyrness? Registrar.

ISAIS: Yeah. And he offered me a scholarship of \$100 for the first couple semesters. And so, I mean that was a lot of money in those days. That was all the tuition in those days. And so I ended up going to Wheaton. And of course I loved it after I got going.

SHUSTER: And what years were you at Wheaton?

ISAIS: What?

SHUSTER: What years were you at Wheaton?

ISAIS: Okay. Well, I graduated with the class of 1946. I entered in '42.

SHUSTER: '42 to '46.

ISAIS: September '42.

SHUSTER: When and how did you first meet Billy Graham?

ISAIS: Well, I don't know that I actually met him while I was at college because I was a very young freshman, and he was a senior, but he was older than the other students, you know? And we used to see him and Ruth walking on the campus. And they were a very impressive couple, I remember that. And...I used to go to the Tabernacle after he started preaching there. And I really enjoyed his messages a lot, you know?

SHUSTER: Uh-huh. What was his physical appearance? What did he look like at that time?

ISAIS: Well, he was very tall and he was good looking. And Ruth was a very...rather tall and very pretty woman, and they just made an impressive couple, you know?

SHUSTER: And was that what made them impressive? Their physical appearance?

ISAIS: I think so. I don't know. But I remember that we all kind of looked up to them, you know?

SHUSTER: Looked up to them why?

ISAIS: Because, I don't know. There was just something about them. I think he's always had a special charisma.

SHUSTER: A special what? Oh charisma.

ISAIS: Yeah. And he was...he was really a very good preacher. Even though I know that he became famous after the Los Angeles campaign. But...he was very good. And very sincere. And there was something very attractive about him, you know as a preacher.

SHUSTER: You mentioned as a preacher that you went down to the Tabernacle, the Union Gospel Tabernacle to hear him. Where was the Tabernacle located?

ISAIS: I don't remember. I know it was located in the Masonic temple, but I don't remember where that was really. But it wasn't far from the campus. In those days, nobody ever had a car. We always walked everywhere. So it probably wasn't very far.

SHUSTER: And what did...where...what did the inside of the Tabernacle look like?

ISAIS: What?

SHUSTER: What did the inside of the Tabernacle look like?

ISAIS: Well, you wrote me that question, but I don't really remember. I don't think it looked much like a church. But it probably...

SHUSTER: It was an auditorium of some kind?

ISAIS: Probably that type of place, yes.

SHUSTER: Who came to those meetings?

ISAIS: Well, the students, a lot of students went. I think it was pretty full as a rule, you know? And I remember very well that I used to take notes on his messages. I don't have any of those notes of course [both laugh].

SHUSTER: If it was all students, why wasn't it just held on campus somewhere?

ISAIS: I couldn't tell you. I don't know. But he wasn't a student anymore when he did that you know? It was after he had graduated as far...I don't think it was the first year.

SHUSTER: No, well, he was...he was the pastor there from '41 to '43. That's when he was a junior and senior, yeah.

ISAIS: Oh was he? Well, maybe he...I really don't remember what year it was that I went.

SHUSTER: Did people from the town come?

ISAIS: What?

SHUSTER: Did people from the town come to the services?

ISAIS: I suppose. I really don't know. I had descended from the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Wheaton. And our family was pretty much involved in Baptist work all the time. But I think any...I had some relatives around the Wheaton area, and I think they went to the Baptist church. But my memories are a little vague on a lot of that [laughs].

SHUSTER: Sure. You mentioned that you took notes on his preaching. Do you remember now what his sermons were about? What kind of things he preached about?

ISAIS: No, I just remember they were very...I think they were very Christ-centered and very biblical, you know?

SHUSTER: What was his preaching like at that time? How would you describe him on the platform?

ISAIS: Well, he was a very good preacher. He was very interesting and very biblical. I think...I mean that would be my main comment.

SHUSTER: What made him interesting?

ISAIS: What made him interesting?

SHUSTER: Did he tell a lot of anecdotes? Did he have a powerful personality...?

ISAIS: Well, he had a very attractive personality. As far as.... I don't remember those details, you know?

SHUSTER: Did he walk around a lot when he was preaching? Make gestures or...?

ISAIS: I don't remember that. I don't think he walked around a lot. That wasn't so typical in those days.

SHUSTER: What...?

ISAIS: Yeah?

SHUSTER: What did a typical service at the Tabernacle consist of?

ISAIS: Oh it was a normal service with some singing, prayer, and then a message as far as I remember.

SHUSTER: Did they give testimonies?

ISAIS: Did they give testimonies?

SHUSTER: Were there testimonies or anything...?

ISAIS: I don't think so. I don't think so.

SHUSTER: Did Graham give an altar call?

ISAIS: I don't remember. Of course the students were pretty much Christians in those days.

SHUSTER: Sure.

ISAIS: Not all of us, but many of us. In fact, my first year at Wheaton, we had a very strong revival in the February evangelistic meetings. And it was the first of all the...I mean later they had other revivals that became sort of nationwide news, you know? The one we had in February of that first year wasn't so big but it was very...it was very impressive on our lives. And I know there were some students in our first year class that became Christians at that time.

SHUSTER: That was in '4...

ISAIS: In four years...When we entered Wheaton we had 600 people entering and by Christmas, almost all the boys had left because the war effort was...I mean the war effort didn't...you know

affect everybody immediately. And people began to go into the army you know? The men that were not physically with some kind of problem, you know? I remember we had a couple of boys that had heart trouble, and they couldn't go. And they were very upset about it. And...we had.... This one, I'd like to mention this one thing. It's not about Billy Graham but....

SHUSTER: Sure, before you can I ask you...before you do, can I ask you, can you turn down the music a little bit?

ISAIS: Well, the trouble is it's my computer and it started doing that when you rang and I...if you'll give me a second I'll turn it off.

SHUSTER: Okay, thanks.

ISAIS: Just a minute. [Long pause].

SHUSTER: Thank you...

ISAIS: It was bothering me too.

SHUSTER: ...I think that's a little clearer. You had mentioned, you had said that there's something you wanted to mention?

ISAIS: Well, about the...about the war effort. I thought it was very interesting that in those days, if a young man said he was planning to become a preacher or a pastor, they did not take him into the army or into the military. Because the United States believed in those days that chaplains were very important. And to me that's very interesting. It's so far from what is the truth today, you know?

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

ISAIS: And um...

SHUSTER: What is the situation today?

ISAIS: Well, what I know about the States (I don't live there anymore) but...as far as what I read, it would appear that the military doesn't give an awful lot of importance to the chaplaincy, you know? But the thing is that in those days, it was considered important and...we had...well, for instance, the president of our class in our last year is somebody that became quite well known. Howard Hendricks. And you know, there were...we had some very fine boys that were still at the...in college. But the reason they didn't go to the war effort is because they were going to be servants of the Lord. And it was...to me it was quite significant in those days.

SHUSTER: I think that Graham too might have been in a chaplaincy program.

ISAIS: Possibly. Yeah. Otherwise he would have been recruited.

SHUSTER: Yeah.

ISAIS: Because everybody was...was going, you know? But we...we ended up with very few men in our class and that's the reason that I was able to become the editor of the newspaper and stuff [laughs].

SHUSTER: I think there were also some soldiers stationed on campus for educational programs as well, weren't there?

ISAIS: Well, that...not right away. I know that the US...I know that Wheaton had ROTC. But that wasn't during my time. I don't think during the war that was...

SHUSTER: Yeah, I mean apart from ROTC some actual non-Wheaton soldiers had been...some of them were getting some education on campus as part of...

ISAIS: Well, I don't know. Maybe there were when I was there. I don't really remember that.

SHUSTER: Did you have any classes with Billy or Ruth Graham?

ISAIS: No. Like I say, I was just a freshman.

SHUSTER: I know in Graham's senior year in '42 and '43 he was elected president of the Christian Council.

ISAIS: Uh-huh.

SHUSTER: Do you recall anything about that?

ISAIS: No, I think at that time the Christian Council was not something really major, you know? Um...but I don't remember. My interests were in band and in the newspaper.

SHUSTER: *The Record*, yeah. We.... Some folks have told us that occasionally Dr. Edman asked Billy to preach in chapel. Do you recall that?

ISAIS: Not specifically, no. It's probably possible, but I really don't remember that. We went to chapel everyday, you know?

SHUSTER: Sure. Also, some folks have told us he was involved in something called the Mooseheart Sunday School.

ISAIS: Yes, you wrote me about that. I don't know anything about that.

SHUSTER: Okay. Anything else about...as far as Graham's time as a student on campus that you want to add or mention?

ISAIS: No. Really, there wasn't much for me to add. As far as when I was in school, I always admired Billy Graham a lot. And I always thought he was a very fine servant of the Lord. I really did. And also Ruth. I mean there was something about them both that was very attractive and seemed very real, you know?

SHUSTER: You had mentioned about all of the men being drafted for the war. Were you on campus when the news of the attack at Pearl Harbor came?

ISAIS: No. No, that was the previous December before I entered.

SHUSTER: That was December '41, yeah. But you did mention that there were so many men that were drafted or had gone into the service so that...I suppose...

ISAIS: By the end of the first semester Wheaton...our first class was much decimated. And then by the time, well, by my third and fourth year, we had some of the men coming back but it had...bad health situations. Like they lost an arm or something, you know? And they would come back. But there weren't a lot of them. But there were some, you know?

SHUSTER: So how did that affect life on campus? Both the absence of so many men and just the war effort in general?

ISAIS: Well, as I say, we had these ministerial students, you know. And...I mean we just accepted it, I think.

SHUSTER: You also mentioned that...I mean it seemed that you were saying that because so many men were absent, you were able to take a position such as editor of *The Record*. Is that correct?

ISAIS: Yeah. Well, I think that possibly. Because they didn't normally have a woman editor. There had been some in the past, but very little, you know? And while I was editor, I mean the paper wasn't doing real well as far as competition with other schools. But the first semester that I was editor, we went up to first class (classification) and the second semester I was editor we went up to all American which was the highest you could get for college. And then the college kept that level for quite a few years after that.

SHUSTER: Oh excellent!

ISAIS: So that was kind of nice, you know?

SHUSTER: How is that...how is that determined?

ISAIS: Well, it was...there was a collegiate association that covered colleges of more or less the same size, you know?

SHUSTER: And they made judgments as to what class you went in?

ISAIS: Yeah and I...and we would go to an annual...like a convention thing, you know? It was...it was nice to get that honor, you know?

SHUSTER: Were there many other women students who were in positions of leadership because of the war?

ISAIS: Oh, well, we had men that were in positions of leadership I think in many ways. But there were women too, you know? Our class was quite small. When we graduated, there were only two hundred of us. And I mean...because of the war, we were just...went down, you know? It was a very serious thing. I mean the war ended...just a few months before we graduated. So it wasn't yet affecting the school that much, you know? As far as Billy Graham, I was going to tell you a story about...my husband. But maybe you want to ask me some other things first.

SHUSTER: No. Please go right ahead. Your husband of course was Dr. Juan Isais, is that right?

ISAIS: He wasn't a doctor, no.

SHUSTER: Oh, okay. Reverend.

ISAIS: Yeah. But...well, the thing is that his first contact with Billy Graham was quite interesting. We were missionaries with the Latin America Mission, and we had been serving in Costa Rica. But he used to travel a lot with evangelistic campaigns. And...

SHUSTER: Was that for Evangelism-in-Depth?

ISAIS: Well, it wasn't yet, no. Evangelism-in-Depth didn't start yet until 1960.

SHUSTER: Oh.

ISAIS: But in...in 1956 we were sent to New York City to work and to start a Spanish project there because Puerto Rico had become part of the United States and the people were having US passports and there was a cheap air flight from San Juan, Puerto Rico to New York and it was...there were just many Puerto Ricans coming into New York. And they were living in these horrible tenements and they were working in...particularly the clothing industry. And...they were...it was a very...difficult situation because the parents were working and were not learning English and their children were in school learning English. So it caused them a great division in the families and there was a need of the Gospel, you know? And besides, Puerto Rico at that time was not very evangelized. And so this was a real need and our missions sent us up there. So we were...we started a bookstore down on 14th Street in lower Manhattan, you know, in Spanish. And were doing...we were in touch with all the churches (there were churches in those days in Spanish). But one day my husband was not real busy and he got a bunch of tracks and he went to the...one of the subway stops and was giving out tracks in Spanish. Whenever he would see somebody that looked like they spoke Spanish, he would say something and give it to them. And after a while, he noticed two men that were real tall and they were wearing overcoats and they were watching him. And he

didn't know if he was doing something wrong or what (laughs) but he didn't speak a lot of English in those days. But anyhow, these guys finally went up to him and said, you know, "Who are you? What are you doing here?" They said, "We are from the office of Billy Graham and we are working on a Spanish rally that the program wants to have in New York City." He was in the middle of his Madison street...

SHUSTER: Madison Square Garden?

ISAIS: Madison Square Garden campaign which was quite a few months.

SHUSTER: Right, that was in 1957.

ISAIS: Yeah. And so...they said, "We just can't get anywhere with the Spanish pastors. We don't know how to work with them and we don't know their language and we just are real frustrated and he wants us to organize a Spanish rally on this one Saturday." And Juan said [plane noise in background] "Well, I know how to work with Spanish pastors, and you're not doing it right because you're trying to do it by letter." And you don't do it that way. You have to do it in a personal way with these Spanish-speaking people. And so they said "Well, would you come down to our office and help us?" And so he ended up being coordinator of this Spanish rally they had. And it was the first time that Billy Graham had ever spoken to a Spanish auditorium. It was on a Saturday and as I recall, we got about 14,000 people. And Billy Graham was very impressed with the way they sang (the Spanish-speaking Christians sing out with all their heart, you know?).

SHUSTER: Okay.

ISAIS: And at that time, the tradition in American churches was sort of to sing kind of calmly, you know (laughs) and so he was...he said, "Well, I'm gonna visit Latin America. And I'm very impressed with this meeting and all of this," you know? It ended up that Juan became one of the advanced men for the visits in some of those countries. I don't remember them all. One I think was Puerto Rico and Venezuela and Costa Rico and Mexico are the ones that I remember.

SHUSTER: Right in '58 there were a number...there was a rally in Mexico City...

ISAIS: One of the advanced men was gone quite a while at that time and...

SHUSTER: The rally in New York City, where exactly was that?

ISAIS: It was in the Madison Square Garden.

SHUSTER: Oh, Madison Square Garden, okay.

ISAIS: Yeah. But it was the first time and so...you know Juan had a picture taken with Billy Graham and with a couple other of the leaders. He was very...and then he was like an advanced man as I say for these campaigns.

SHUSTER: Well, in '58 I know there were meetings in Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, Puerto Rico...Panama...Puerto Rico and Guatemala and Mexico City. Was he the advanced man for those or the Mexico City one in particular?

ISAIS: Well, Mexico City was one of them. But he was also one of the advanced men for some of the others. I remember he was like—I remember Venezuela and Puerto Rico and Costa Rica. And Mexico. But I mean he became in fact once or twice he was even the preacher in the advanced meeting because somebody failed, you know? And he used to say that was his ministry, you know, to fill in. But it was...it was quite a privilege he felt, you know? It was...I just had a brand new baby when he left. It was kind of hard, him being gone. I think he was gone several months.

SHUSTER: And you were living in New York City at that time?

ISAIS: Yeah, I was living in New York City and I was running the bookstore and everything. And it was...but I thought it was an interesting story because it happened because he was giving out tracks at the subway. And these two men, one of these men was the Leighton Ford that was standing there watching him. And he didn't know if it was police or what it was, you know? But it worked out. It was a real wonderful connection, you know?

SHUSTER: Now there had been...the Graham association also had another rally in Spanish Harlem in 1960. Were you still in New York at that time? Were you and your husband involved?

ISAIS: No, the mission took us back to Latin America in 1959. And we were in Nicaragua. And we had Evangelism-in-Depth in Nicaragua from '59 to '60 and then we moved to Costa Rica. He went back to New York and helped something about Billy Graham for a while one summer. I think it would have been the summer of...possibly the summer of 1960.

SHUSTER: That might have been the Spanish Harlem rally...

ISAIS: It might have, yes I don't really...I'm not real clear about that. But I know he went back. I think as I recall he left around June or so. But...there was an interesting anecdote about that because in those days, he flew out of Managua, Nicaragua. I had two little girls plus a little baby. And I went to the airport with the children to say goodbye. And we, in those days the airport, you know the runway was just grass. And you went right out by the plane, and it was just so informal compared to now. But we watched him walk up the steps to the plane, get in, and then we watched the plane fly away. Well, then we went to church (it was on a Sunday) and so we arrived at the church and the pastor saw us, and he said, "Oh, where's Juan?" And so my girl, my daughter who was between four and five, she said, "He's just gone to heaven with Jesus." (Both laugh). So I said "wait a minute, you've got this a little wrong."

SHUSTER: He's gone into the clouds.

ISAIS: Yeah, she saw him you know?

SHUSTER: Sure. Sure. How old was she?

ISAIS: Well, she was between four and five. She's now quite a preacher herself.

SHUSTER: I know that in '58 for the Mexico City Rally, Dave Howard was involved in the planning for that...

ISAIS: Yeah, Dave Howard and Juan worked together in that.

SHUSTER: Did he tell you anything about what was involved in being an advance man or you mentioned he filled in for people sometimes.

ISAIS: Well he told me of course you know. But...it was quite stressful because Mexico is not an easy place to be for things like that. It's always very stressful. But they had a very good campaign, you know?

SHUSTER: What made it stressful?

ISAIS: Well, here, Mexico traditionally was not a country that was run by missionaries, let's put it that way. As far as the Christian aspect was concerned, in Mexico the laws from the middle of the 1800s were different. And so to be in Mexico as a missionary, you had to have a real, real special kind of visa. You couldn't be a missionary you know as such. And so the church in Mexico was always run by the Mexicans. Not like in the rest of Latin America where the missionaries were kind of in charge of all of the church things, you know? That today has changed today of course. But anyhow...

SHUSTER: You mean it's changed in the rest of Latin America?

ISAIS: Yeah it's changed. Definitely. But one of the first efforts you might say to make it more nationalized was through Evangelism-in-Depth. I remember in Nicaragua the missionaries would visit us when we were doing Evangelism-in-Depth there, and they would say, "This can't be that you have nationals being the leaders." And we said, "This is what has got to be. This is what has got to be in the future." And they said, "Well, we don't know if the nationals could do it." Well, of course the nationals could, you know. [Shuster laughs]. And so it was kind of a breakthrough that started in '59, you know?

SHUSTER: Evangelism-in-Depth was the mass evangelism methods that were developed in the Latin American Mission.

ISAIS: Yes, right. And my husband was the national leader of it in each country. The first three countries until he said that he felt he had to go to Mexico to work. And so from then on other people became the national coordinators.

SHUSTER: How did you first meet Juan?

ISAIS: We were both missionaries with the Latin American Mission in Costa Rica.

SHUSTER: You...and he were also involved in the Grand Campaigns in Mexico City in 1981, were you not?

ISAIS: Oh yes, definitely.

SHUSTER: How did that come about?

ISAIS: Well, actually it was my husband's vision. He wanted to bring Billy and he organized a group of Mexican leaders and he got them all to fly up to Nashville, Tennessee where Billy was having a campaign. I couldn't tell you what year, but it was probably '78 or so...

SHUSTER: Yeah we actually have some correspondence from '76 from when he was writing BGEA staff people suggesting a meeting in Mexico City.

ISAIS: Yeah, well, he went up and Juan took this group up. And they made a big delegation to formally ask Billy to come to Mexico City and have a campaign. And also in Tabasco. And...so that was...I mean Juan was the spearheader of that and he was called the Executive Secretary of the Committee that was planning everything and...then about half way through he resigned because he was very unhappy with some things that were going on and so he resigned. But he continued to be very involved in the campaign. And so Augustin Acosta became ...I forget if he was the president or what his position was formally, you know? And...so then in Tabasco, Juan was the leader of the master of ceremonies and everything. And we had about 20,000 people in Tabasco for that campaign. It was very exciting. Juan had been doing Evangelism-in-Depth in Tabasco before that and the church had really grown terrifically. It's now one of the states with a very high population of evangelicals. But...anyhow I remember from that we were staying in this hotel during the Tabasco campaign and one morning they knocked on our door about six o'clock, and they said, "If you want to pray with Billy Graham, go up to his room" and it's such and such a room. So we went up there real early in the morning and I was very impressed because he was sitting on the floor.

SHUSTER: Billy Graham was?

ISAIS: Yeah and leading this prayer time. It was very touching. And different people were in the room that were involved in the campaign and everything.

SHUSTER: So these were different BGEA staff and local pastors?

ISAIS: I suppose, yeah. But I really will never forget that scene, you know?

SHUSTER: What made it so memorable?

ISAIS: Because he was sitting on the floor. I mean, you know and he just had an ordinary room. He didn't have a fancy suite like you would think for somebody like him. I was very...I have always admired him a lot. I've always read his books, and he's just a very special leader to me, you know?

SHUSTER: You had mentioned that your husband was instrumental in bringing the Graham Association to Mexico in '81 and that this was his vision. Why did he think Billy Graham in particular was desirable to have him come to Mexico?

ISAIS: Oh that was the one he admired the most of course. Definitely.

SHUSTER: But why bring someone from the outside? Why not a Mexican evangelist?

ISAIS: No, because he felt Billy Graham had a great deal of power and a great deal of appeal, you know? But he felt that he had spiritual power, you know?

SHUSTER: And you mentioned that he had resigned because a couple of things. What kind of problems had arisen with the...?

ISAIS: Yeah, well, you know...he was...that was...not a real pleasant situation and he was kind of mad about the thing you know? But he continued to work on the campaign and everything. He was really active about it. And he was doing everything in the Tabasco aspect of it.

SHUSTER: Sure. But what kind of difficulties had arisen?

ISAIS: Well, for one thing they didn't want to have it in a small place. They wanted to have it in a big place...

SHUSTER: This was in Mexico City they wanted it?

ISAIS: Yes, Mexico City. And so he had made some contacts with a big stadium. And so the people that were in charge of setting it up and renting it and fixing it up supposedly had arranged it. But the thing is, they did not get a written contract and my husband was pretty upset about that. Well, then about three weeks before the thing started, they said, "We're not allowing this to go on," you know?

SHUSTER: Who had said that, the state government or the...?

ISAIS: No the...

SHUSTER: Or the renter...?

ISAIS: ...stadium I think it probably could have been government interference. I don't know [coughs]. Excuse me.

SHUSTER: Sure.

ISAIS: But anyhow...so then what they had to do, they had to rent a much smaller place and it was called the *Arena Mexico* and it was you know the most you could squeeze in there was 20,000 people or seventeen to twenty. So it ended up that the street around the place had people in it, you

know? They had to block off some of the streets. But it was...he was pretty upset about that because he had always insisted that they must have written contracts and stuff.

SHUSTER: Juan had insisted on that?

ISAIS: What?

SHUSTER: Juan had insisted on that.

ISAIS: Yeah but they didn't do it and then they lost the place, you know? And then in the 70's we had a campaign with Luis Palau in '72 and that we sent up in the...and it was in the same place as Billy Graham ended up being in. And it was the *Arena Mexico* and the state department went to the campaign, and they said that, "We are going to put Luis Palau in jail." Because he's not authorized for this...

SHUSTER: And this of course was the Mexican State Department?

ISAIS: Yeah. And so Juan said, "You're going to put me in jail, not him." And...he made a big deal about it and it ended up that they did not put anybody in jail. But it was because...and the state department really respected him a lot, you know? But at the moment right now we have really missed my husband because he was a leader that would stick his neck out, you know?

SHUSTER: Indeed.

ISAIS: And we needed that. We don't have it right now. But I know these things are in God's hands.

SHUSTER: Amen. You had mentioned how in Tabasco there...the evangelical community has really grown?

ISAIS: Yes, uh-huh.

SHUSTER: Was that because...did the...evangelistic crusade...did the Graham crusade have any influence in that or impact on that?

ISAIS: Well, I think it all helps, you know? Juan had had worked there a great deal because ...well, he had worked there, we had an Evangelism-in-Depth movement for about a year with the Presbyterians there and they just grew like Topsy during that year. They ended up with about 1,000 preaching points they did not have before. But the history of Tabasco is quite complicated because they had had a governor that was extremely anti-religion and was...

SHUSTER: When was this? In the 1970s or ...?

ISAIS: Well, I don't know for sure.

SHUSTER: But approximately when was it?

ISAIS: When they had the governor?

SHUSTER: Yeah.

ISAIS: I didn't look that up. But his name was Garrido and he was the governor [Tomás Garrido Canabal was governor of Tabasco, 1920-1924]. And he was so bad that the Christians had to bury their Bibles in their yards, you know, and things like that. He was very strong against the believers.

SHUSTER: And this was during the time when you and Juan were in Tabasco?

ISAIS: No, we were never there together. But Juan was...Juan spent almost a year there going all the time. I mean we weren't living there. But he went, you know. But the thing is, persecution always produces fruit. And so there were a lot of factors that influenced the fact that in Tabasco the Word grew not only among the Presbyterians... there were Pentecostal movements very strong and so forth. And so the...and Billy Graham's campaign was very important. There were just a lot of factors, you know? Since then they've had many famous names go and preach there and so forth. And in fact, the governor once when Luis Palau went there, the governor invited him for a special breakfast and things like that, you know? So the persecution ended up helping the cause of Christ there.

SHUSTER: In Mexico City what were the fruits of the crusade if any?

ISAIS: Well, there were many people converted and...the other day I was talking to a very nice young man who has a very high position with one of the banks that's connected to the Citibank and it's one of the biggest banks in Mexico. And he's a fine Christian. So I said "how did you get converted?" And he said, "Well, I got converted in the Billy Graham campaign." And you know, the...he's a fine Christian man. And people all over were touched by it. It was a very exciting time for us I remember. But the young man that married my daughter Sally was one of the ones that would...the young people were going out into the subway system and giving out literature and everything. There was a real boost of evangelistic fervor on the part of the churches and it was a very influential event for the church you know? I really believe it's an exciting...it's kind of a rallying point for the churches when they have this type of campaign, you know?

SHUSTER: It encourages them to get together and work together?

ISAIS: Yeah, it does. I was in a class recently when one of the men was saying, "Oh, these big evangelistic campaigns, they're no good." You know? I said, "It's because you've never been in one, you've never seen one, you've never felt the excitement of one. And you don't understand what that excitement can produce," you know? "And how it helps people to witness in a way they don't do it otherwise." And so forth. To me it's something that's ...I mean, you can't have it every day of the week, it has to be something once in a while, you know? But I said "I wish people like you that think everything has to be intellectual, it would be great if you could experience one of these campaigns," you know "to feel the excitement of it," and, you know, "to see all these thousands of people pouring into a place and their enthusiasm." And a choir with five hundred people or whatever. It's kind of exciting.



SHUSTER: Like the excitement of Pentecost.

ISAIS: Yeah. Well, I don't know about that.

SHUSTER: Well, with the enthusiasm of the crowd that was...

ISAIS: Yeah, and it's good to do that once in a while, you know?

SHUSTER: Indeed! Is there anything else you'd like to add or bring up about the meetings in '81?

ISAIS: Well, that would just be...I mean it was so disappointing not to have a bigger place you know? The one in Tabasco was as big as the one in Mexico City which was ridiculous. I mean here we are millions of people, you know. And Villahermosa is a good sized city but it's not like Mexico City. And so it was very discouraging not to have a bigger place. But at that time, we were...and I understand that right now the government of our city has given orders but secretly to all the big places in the city that they are not to rent to Christian groups.

SHUSTER: Why is that?

ISAIS: Well, because of their prejudice. They are very against anything religious including the Catholics, you know?

SHUSTER: So it's more of a secular government that's against any kind of religious...?

ISAIS: Yes it is. I mean this government that we have in Mexico City has voted in abortion on demand, they voted in homosexual marriage, they voted in homosexual adoption of children and euthanasia. And so there's much more that they can do, you know? But this...this business of not renting to Christian groups is quite interesting, you know? So lately, when there are big events, they have to have them out of the city limits.

SHUSTER: And back in the...back in '81 when the arrangements for the large auditorium fell through, do you think that was deliberate?

ISAIS: Oh yes, I do. Of course.

SHUSTER: Not to have a Christian meeting there

ISAIS: Yes of course. But it wasn't an auditorium it was a stadium.

SHUSTER: Stadium.

ISAIS: Uh-huh. It had about 50,000 you know. We have now a stadium for the Olympics that holds about, close to about 100,000. And there have been Christian meetings there. But now with our current government I guess it wouldn't be possible. But no, we have places, you know?

SHUSTER: Is there anything else you want to add about the '81 meetings or just about your friendship with Reverend Graham over the years?

ISAIS: Well, no, not really. I don't know much. I mean, I can't say that I was in personal touch with him at all. My husband was more in touch, but not...I mean the poor guy, he's been all over the world, and he has to deal with people all over the world.

SHUSTER: Sure.

ISAIS: And he had a very fine team. I mean we still get Christmas cards from Cliff Barrows and from Billy Graham you know. Well, one thing, well, thing that might be interesting is when this New York thing was happening...

SHUSTER: That was in '57.

ISAIS: Yeah, Billy wanted Beverly Shea to sing something in Spanish. And so they asked Juan to be kind of his tutor to get a good accent in his Spanish singing. So that was a real privilege that Juan had to work with Beverly Shea.

SHUSTER: How did that work out?

ISAIS: Well, it was...it was you know, that detail that they met once to have Juan help him with his Spanish accent.

SHUSTER: Did...when the BGEA organization came in '81 for the meetings in Mexico, did they adapt well to life in Mexico? I mean were they able to adapt their methods from the US to...?

ISAIS: Well, they were just there a few days of course. It was very fine. No complaints.

SHUSTER: Anything else you'd like to add

ISAIS: Well, I don't know what else might be.

SHUSTER: Okay, well, maybe we should stop there then.

ISAIS: Uh-huh.

SHUSTER: Well, thank you very much. It's been a very good interview, and I appreciate once again your willingness to talk with the archives.

ISAIS: Well, it's good to feel that someone is interested in all of this.

SHUSTER: Indeed, very interested!

ISAIS: Uh-huh.

SHUSTER: I'm going to turn off the recorder now.

ISAIS: Well, you wrote to me that you were...

SHUSTER: Well, just a second, I'm going to turn off the recorder now.

END OF TAPE

