

FAIR HOUSING

MAKES U.S.

STRONGER



Fair Housing made us free

The Liza Mendez/Pedro Hernandez Story

Pedro Hernandez remembers a time before the passage of the Fair Housing Act when discrimination ran rampant in the neighborhoods of Miami, Florida. Pedro immigrated to the United States from Cuba in the late 1950s before the wave of refugees from the Fidel Castro regime. By 1966, he obtained his real estate license and began working in an environment where race, more often than not, determined sales.

Pedro stated, “When a person of color came to the neighborhood, [white] people began to panic,” and property values would fall. In stores and businesses, he would often see signs stating, “No Blacks. No Cubans. No dogs.” A move towards integration would face many obstacles in Miami, but Pedro persevered, “Was I discriminated against? Yes. Because I was Cuban. Because of my accent. Because of not speaking English. I didn’t care.”

Pedro was more concerned with establishing his practice and making a name for himself as the go-to Cuban REALTOR®. His firm, where daughter Liza Mendez eventually joined him, was one of the first Hispanic-owned firms in Miami. Between the two family members, they have over eighty years of experience in real estate and have witnessed the impact of the Fair Housing Act.

Pedro explained that the transition after the act was difficult, because the population needed to transition from discriminatory to fair practices – a process made more difficult by lack of understanding of the law. However, he cites the efforts of NAR, the local government, county officials, and other REALTORS® as key to reducing housing discrimination in Miami.

Although she grew up with the Fair Housing Act in place, Liza “never takes it for granted.” At the beginning of her career in the 1980s, Liza faced subtler versions of housing discrimination compared to the vitriol of her father’s early years. The questions about neighborhood demographics were more coded. She soon learned to guide her clients away from those biases, encouraging them to focus on their housing goals and reminding them that Miami was a melting pot—its diverse neighborhoods an asset, rather than a cause for fear.

Both father and daughter would argue that racial discrimination in housing is no longer a problem in Miami, because of the Fair Housing Act. The commitment that they share with other REALTORS® to uphold the act ensures a “more level playing field for everyone.” Liza acknowledged that there is still work to be done for other marginalized communities, such as the LGBTQ+ community, but believed that the Fair Housing Act has the structure to create balance.

With their influence on the Miami real estate industry, and Liza’s leadership positions in local REALTOR® chapters and her certifications in ethics training, Pedro and Liza continue to work with their clients and community to ensure the enforcement of the Fair Housing Act. For them, this is not just a legal obligation. Fair housing is “ethical and right” and opened the doors for anyone to be a homeowner or renter.

As Pedro stated, “Fair Housing made us free.”

For more information, resources and to get involved, visit www.FairHousing.realtor



**NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION of
REALTORS®**