Winning the game of life

From escaping Cuba to teaching, Eastern professor Clay-Mendez always seems to come out ahead in life's various tests.

Prison is a place most people wish to avoid. It is safe to assume Eastern professor Luis Clay-Mendez is no different than anyone else in that respect. However, prison was one place Clay-Mendez called home.

"I was in prison for two months because they thought I put a bomb in a movie theater," Clay-Mendez said. "They gave up on me because I put the bomb in the movie theater, why would I have stayed to watch the movie? It was the worst experience of my life."

Clay-Mendez said Cuba has no due process so he could not call his parents to tell them where he was. He was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1943. At age 16, just two days after he was released from prison, he decided he had been in Cuba long enough. He escaped by hiding in the cockpit of an airplane and came to the United States. "I didn't care where the plane was going, I just wanted to get the hell out of Cuba," Clay-Mendez said.

His plane landed in America.

Prospering in the United States

Clay-Mendez graduated from Central High School in Springfield, Mo. After graduation he attended Southwest Missouri State University where he majored in math and Spanish.

"I wanted to be an engineer, that's why I was a math major," Clay-Mendez said. "My mother was a teacher so I grew up with that culture. In college the doors opened for a doctorate in Spanish so that's what I pursued."


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The campus was left off-line for several days in late August after two viruses attacked the network. Chaterji and his staff is keeping a close eye on other viruses that may come in the future.

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