

## TRANSCRIPT OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

JESSE JIMENEZ

This interview was conducted as part of a series on the Mexican American in Minnesota.

Jesse Jimenez, born in Hollandale in 1935, has lived in Minnesota most of his life, spending a term in the armed forces and gaining work experience and post high school education for a six year period in Florida. He has raised four children in Albert Lea, Minnesota, where he has owned and operated a drive-in restaurant business for seven years, as of July, 1976.

Active in civic affairs, Jesse devotes much of his time and energies to providing for the needs and comfort of his parents who live in the same town, as well as keeping close contact with the interests and activities of his children.

This is a transcript of a tape recording interview edited to aid in clarity and ease of comprehension for the reader. The original tape recording is available in the Audio-Visual Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

INTERVIEW WITH JESSE JIMENEZ

JULY 12, 1976

INTERVIEWER: GRANT MOOSBRUGGER

Moosbrugger: I am interviewing Jesse Jimenez, in Albert Lea, Minnesota. Today is July 12, 1976. Do I have your permission to interview you for the Minnesota Historical Society's Mexican American History Project?

Jimenez: Yes, you do.

Moosbrugger: Good. Could you tell us your name, where you were born and the date of your birth?

Jimenez: I'm Jesse Jimenez. I was born in Hollandale, in 1935. I spent just a few years around Hollandale. My folks were migrant workers. We moved around, from town to town: Albert Lea; Hayward; and Bricelyn. Finally, we settled in Easton. I guess I can say that most of my boyhood was spent around Easton. I went to grade school there for eight years. I went to Our Lady of Mount Carlo, a Catholic school. After grade school, I went to Dalen High School for a couple of years. Then they re-district the whole area, so I had to go to school at Wells. Right out of high school, I went into the Air Force. I was in the Air Force for three and a half years. I was in the administrative group. After being discharged, I came home to Albert Lea, where my folks lived.

Moosbrugger: What year would that have been, when you got out?

Jimenez: That was in 1957. I worked at odd jobs, like construction. I got married in 1958, on October twenty-fifth. I had worked on construction. In 1959, there was a bad strike here at Wilson's. My wife and I decided to leave town. We knew there were going to be hard times. We left, and I went to school. We went to Tallahassee, Florida. I have a sister that lives there. I decided to go to a vocational school, since I had G.I. Bill coming to me. That wasn't quite enough, so I went to work at

Jimenez: Phillips 66. Then I went to school. After about a year of working at Phillips 66 and going to school, I delivered newspapers for the Publishing Company. He asked me if I would be interested in a job, and I said, "Well, if it pays good, sure." At the time, we had a daughter, and I was kind of running out of funds, so I decided to drop out of school and go to work. It was quite an experience for me. That probably was the best thing that happened to me, working for this newspaper company. I had the opportunity to talk with people. As far as finances was concerned, I had a chance to collect money, and assume some responsibility. As I look back, I realize now, that those were the years of experience. A great many experience.

Moosbrugger: What subject area were you studying in Florida?

Jimenez: It was bookkeeping and accounting. All the time I spend in the service, I always had a part time job as a food waiter. In the back of my mind, I was preparing for business. I took up bookkeeping and accounting. That's helped me some.

Moosbrugger: You had some background in bookkeeping and administrative work in the Air Force, also?

Jimenez: Yes. In the Air Force, I had some administrative responsibilities and correspondence of all kinds.

Moosbrugger: What year was it when you came back to Albert Lea?

Jimenez: In September, 1965. In the meantime, I did a lot of door-to-door selling for Fuller Brush. I picked up a few extra coins that way. Then we moved to Albert Lea. I went to work for King Sealing Corporation, where they make the Scottsman Ice-Machine. I stayed there for three and a half years.

Moosbrugger: That was what kind of work?

Jimenez: It was making Ice Machines. I worked in the shipping department. I shipped parts all over the country. It was quite a business.

Jimenez: My brother had a little restaurant, that I have now, "Quick-Stop-Drive-In". He was working as the manager. He told me that he was planning on leaving. I told him that I was interested in the job. I had an interview with the fellow, and at that time, the Drive-In was kind of rundown. I felt it was an opportunity for me to step into something. I didn't have a whole lot of money. I thought, "Well, I have worked for a whole lot less." I went to work for the fellow. It was Labor Day Week-end. I had quite an experience. I'd never seen so many hamburgers! It was busy.

Moosbrugger: What year would that have been?

Jimenez: That was 1970, or 1969. Well, I am in my eighth year.

Moosbrugger: Then it was shortly there after you took over?

Jimenez: I took over, then we bought it in March.

Moosbrugger: Of the next year?

Jimenez: Yes. We have been in business ever since. It's been good for us. It was long hours, but when I look back, it doesn't seem like it. I have enjoyed it and I guess the reason why I've enjoyed it, is that it's been rewarding to me. I've never had a job where I can honestly say that I have gotten paid for what I have done. To me, that means a lot. I am living better. My whole family is living better.

Moosbrugger: How many children do you have?

Jimenez: I have four children. My oldest is Jody, she is sixteen, Jaqueline is fourteen. I have a boy that is eleven, Jeff; and the baby is Julie, she is eight.

Moosbrugger: Are they all going to school?

Jimenez: Yes.

Moosbrugger: Maybe we can back up. We didn't touch upon how many brothers and sisters you have. Do you remember, in order from the oldest?

Jimenez: Oh, yes. The oldest is getting up there in age. That's Theresa. She lives in Tallahassee, Florida. Sophia lives in California. She's the next.

Jimenez: Then it's Kathleen; then Victoria. Vicky and Kathy live here in town. I am next, then it's Sarah. Sarah lives in Mason City; Beatrice lives in Pine Island; Dolores lives in Rockwell, Iowa; Frank is in Birmingham, Alabama, working in a restaurant there. Fred, he works for GE in California, he just went back yesterday, after a vacation. After Fred, comes Lois. She lives in St. Paul, she is a housewife. Then it's John. He is the baby. He's finishing school. He should finish college this year.

Moosbrugger: Where's that?

Jimenez: At Mankato State.

Moosbrugger: And your parents just celebrated a wedding anniversary?

Jimenez: They just celebrated their Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary.

Moosbrugger: That was yesterday?

Jimenez: Yes, here in Albert Lea, July 10th. We had quite a gang, quite a few. We figured there's forty-three grandchildren.

Moosbrugger: Have you been active in any clubs? What have been some of your social and recreational pursuits? I think we mentioned before, you were a little bit active in boxing?

Jimenez: Well, ever since I lived in Easton. It was kind of a boxing town. I started boxing at the age of five. I got around the county quite a bit. I went to the state in boxing and golden gloves. That was back in the fifties. I really enjoyed it. At the same time, I kind of looked forward to it. I remember one particular time we fought on a Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, they gave us five bucks a fight. Boy, I was in the bucks!

Moosbrugger: Nice money for a young child.

Jimenez: It was a good experience. I always stayed in pretty good shape. My other brothers took up boxing, too. In fact, Frank and Fred both turned into professionals.

Moosbrugger: Are either of them boxing professionally now?

Jimenez: No. Frank isn't, but Fred is a little bit. He's still doing his road work, when he's on vacation here. In the morning he'd come in all sweaty. He trains kids in California.

Moosbrugger: Working partly and then coaching?

Jimenez: Yes. He enjoys it. It's part of his entertainment, I guess.

Moosbrugger: Have you been active in any clubs or organizations?

Jimenez: Well, I haven't really been too active in any. But I belong to the Legion. Mostly I have been really active in the Lions.

Moosbrugger: Lions Club?

Jimenez: We have a club. They call themselves the Cloverleaf Lions. It was organized two years ago. I help them sell pop and stuff. I belong to the Eagles and the American Legion. I also belong to the Moose, in Austin. I'll tell you why I joined and why I don't belong to the league here. At the time, I was kind of interested in joining the Moose Club. One night I was at the drive-in and a fellow came in and I said, "Where have you been?" He said, "I have been playing cards. Why don't you go over there, so we can get some of your money?" I said, "I don't belong over there." He said, "Why don't you sign up?" I said, "No one has ever asked me." So he took my money and my application. They must have had a drive on, at that time. After I filled out the application, he said, "Well, I'll take it, but you have to give me twenty dollars." I turned around and gave him the twenty dollars. That was on a Friday night. He had a few drinks, I guess. Anyway, he took the application, and on Saturday, it was supposed to be initiation. But he returned the application and the money. No explanation was ever given to me as to why it was returned. Later on, the word got around that he hadn't turned it in. The same weekend, or the following weekend, a friend from Austin asked me to join. I thought, "Well, if I am not good enough to join in Albert Lea, I'll just go ahead and join here. I'm going to be a moose one way or the other." I went and

Jimenez: joined in Austin. Since then, they have been asking me why I don't ask for a transfer or something like that. I really don't care, it's not that important.

Moosbrugger: What do you think the explanation was? Was the problem with this one individual?

Jimenez: Yes, I think the individual himself was the problem. At the time, he forgot that I was a minority. There hasn't been a minority active in a Moose Lodge yet. So, I suppose he was afraid of losing a friend or two. I don't know. I am just assuming this. I thought it was kind of funny that I got the money back, and no explanation. At least if I took someone's application, I'd tell him why I was returning it.

Moosbrugger: Do you feel any discrimination here, in town, against Mexican Americans?

Jimenez: I think so. I think there's a little discrimination here. It's a little, it's not the open discrimination, it's discrimination that you hardly get from a lot of people. You have to sense it. You know it's there. For example, if you don't like somebody you may not show it to him, but deep down in your heart, you don't care for him. That's discrimination. It's really hard to pinpoint. You know when you are among people who don't welcome you. You get the feeling. It's there. But then again, a lot of times a person can bring it upon himself. A guy can get along in the Albert Lea community if he does his share of wanting to belong. My involvement has been because I want people to know I live here and I care about the community and I want to contribute something. I also belong to the Knights of Columbus. That was a real great experience. I was navigator of Knights of Columbus, Fourth Degree. That's equal to a Shriner, and I was the chairman of that for two years. I just finished last June.

Moosbrugger: Chairman of the Shriner's or Knights of Columbus?

Jimenez: No. It's equal to the Shriners, but it's the Fourth Degree Knight's Club. We had some real good events going on. Once a year, we would have a

Jimenez: social gathering of the Shriners and the Knights of Columbus. We celebrated our tenth anniversary on that. It was a real big affair, because ten or twelve years ago there was quite a difference between the Shriners and the Knights of Columbus. They couldn't see eye to eye.

Moosbrugger: A lot of competition?

Jimenez: Yes. Maybe the competition is still there, but at least we talk to each other.

Moosbrugger: There are good feelings now?

Jimenez: Yes, Actually, we look forward to it.

Moosbrugger: Have you been a member of any other organizations, like LULAC or anything specifically for Mexican Americans?

Jimenez: Yes. I was chairman of GI Forum. I was a member of LULAC. I was a member of the Club Azteca. When I started they were all really good organizations. I guess the one that I have in mind is the GI Forum. The reason for that is because it had to do with veterans, Mexican American veterans who had been in the service. Our prime reason for having the organization was to put on projects to raise some funds to send somebody to school. I was chairman of that. It was like all the other organizations. A new organization is hard to get going these days. There's so much going on. But I felt that we did some good. We helped out a few people and gave them money. We were known in the community as the GI Forum. It was really good. I enjoyed it very much.

Moosbrugger: Are any of these organizations like LULAC, or GI Forum or Club Azteca, still functioning at all?

Jimenez: I think the only one that's going on now, I don't know if they have any officers or anything, is the LULACS.

Moosbrugger: Back to discrimination, we are here at your home, a very lovely home in a very nice neighborhood. Do you think there has been discrimination in housing, are there any extra difficulties, or is it just a matter of what

Moosbrugger: you can afford?

Jimenez: I always like to tell a story about when I get together with a bunch of people from different clubs, organizations and groups. They'll ask, "Why aren't there more Mexican Americans included in participating in community activities?" And I tell them this; right now, a lot of the Mexican Americans are, more or less, having a "fiesta." For many years the Mexican Americans worked hard for seven days a week, and they never got paid for what they did. Right now, most of the Mexican Americans in Albert Lea are holding down pretty good jobs. They are making good money and they are enjoying themselves. I think the time is going to come when they are going to have to realize there is more than just living and going to work and living it up. We are going to have to start participating in some community activities and show that we are interested in what's going on in Albert Lea. I bet you in the next ten years there's going to be a big difference, because their children are growing up, and my children are growing up. We have given our children more opportunities.

Moosbrugger: Have you, or any other Mexican American living in this area that you know of, have any interest or thought of running for some kind of office?

Jimenez: Not that I know of. I ran for the school board. I knew I didn't have a chance. My reason for running was that I wanted to show that I am a part of the community and that I was interested in education. I have children going to school. I felt it was my obligation to, if possible, get on the school board. I have run twice since then. The first time, I was working at Queen's, I really put a lot more time into it then. I thought my time was limited. The second time I ran I found that being in business and trying to run for the school board, my time was quite limited. I am sure if I had gotten on the school board I would have had time to attend the

Jimenez: meetings, after all, I did feel it was important. Right now, I am really happy to be on the YMCA Board of Directors. I do like to go to the Y, and I am interested in sports and young kids.

Moosbrugger: How are you active at the Y, besides being on the board?

Jimenez: Once a year, every season, I coached football with another fellow. We are the champs. We have been for three years. I really enjoy it. When I was a kid, I always wanted to be a coach. Financially, I couldn't swing it. So now I really enjoy working with kids. I also sponsor a hockey team, that is my business sponsors the team. Three years ago they asked me if I was interest in sponsoring a team. I went ahead and sponsored a team. That year I coached hockey. Then my boy grew up and as he moved up, I felt I should move along with him, so I got out of the coaching part. I just followed him around and hauled him and his team around. Boy, I am telling you that takes up a lot of time.

Moosbrugger: It sure does. What league is he playing in? A school league?

Jimenez: No. He's only eleven years old. He just plays and travels. It was really something. I think it's important that parents, whether they are Mexican or whatever they are, should support their kids in what they are doing. I know it gave me a good feeling last year I sent my boy to this hockey clinic and there were twenty-eight in the class. They went to that school for a week, and he got a little trophy for being the most valuable player.

Moosbrugger: That is a nice honor.

Jimenez: Yes, it was because it helped him. I think a lot of times, we have to follow our kids a little more, help them along. I have only felt like this, the past year. I felt that my boy wasn't playing enough. So I went right to the coach and said, "There is more than just having a kid on a team. He made that team. He should be able to play." A lot of times, I

Jimenez: guess, coaching is that way.

Moosbrugger: It's good to keep involved in your children's interests. Do your four children simulate their interest in their heritage? Do they get to sample Mexican dishes?

Mrs. Jimenez: This is one thing we have always taught our children: Not to ever forget they are a Mexican first, before anything else. They haven't forgotten their heritage.

Moosbrugger: Do you ever speak the language at home?

Mrs. Jimenez: Sometimes, not often. We have been criticized because they don't know how to speak their own language. But this is another generation. I have had teachers tell me how difficult it is for the Mexican child to learn, when they speak Spanish at home, because they go to school and it's all English. It's very hard for them. We very seldom speak Spanish. My daughter did take one year of Spanish. I think they understand more than they speak.

Moosbrugger: Have either you or your husband taken any trips back to Mexico?

Mrs. Jimenez: Oh, yes. Four years ago was the first time Jesse ever went down there. My father always took us to Mexico. We have been back twice with the whole family. Last year we took a little gal with us and my oldest daughter, it was quite interesting for her.

Moosbrugger: Mrs. Jimenez, could you give us a little of your background? Where were you born and raised?

Mrs. Jimenez: My name is Josephine Gallo. I was born and raised in Mason City, Iowa. I

Mrs. Jimenez: went to public schools. I graduated from Mason City High and started working in what was then People's Gas and Electric, now it's Interstate Power. I started the night after graduation. I always wanted to work in an office, taking shorthand, typing, answering the telephone. I met Jesse in the American Legion in 1958.

Moosbrugger: Was that here in Albert Lea?

Mrs. Jimenez: Yes. I have always had a job, working in an office. We went to Florida and I was working for the state of Florida. I have been very lucky and have held good jobs. Now, I am also the book-keeper for the Quick-Stop.

Moosbrugger: You are involved in the business then?

Mrs. Jimenez: Yes.

Moosbrugger: Good.

Mrs. Jimenez: My father was born in Jalisco, Mexico. My mother was born in Irapuato, Mexico. Now my mother and father are divorced. But she's still in Irapuato. My dad has since remarried and is now living in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I have one brother who is a dentist in Williamsburg, Iowa, and a sister who is married to a career Marine and they are now in North Carolina. That is my family.

Moosbrugger: Very good. Thank you.