TRANSCRIPT OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

TONY MARTINEZ

JUNE 18, 1975

INTERVIEWER: GRANT A. MOOSBRUGGER

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

Tony Martinez was born and raised in St. Paul, Minnesota. Without the advantages of influence and wealth, Mr. Martinez, at age forty three has achieved presidency and ownership of his own business, a highly technical service firm The Ortho Photo Company of St. Paul.

He is the proud father of ten children spanning an age range of twenty years. By availing himself of an education in the public schools and armed forces training programs and by virtue of his own ambitions and hard work, Tony Martinez has achieved a full and happy life here in Minnesota.

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded 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.

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INTERVIEWER: GRANT A. MOOSBRUGGER

Moosbrugger: This is Grant A. Moosbrugger interviewing Mr. Tony Martinez, the owner and manager of Ortho Photo Company in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Mr. Martinez is a life long resident of St. Paul, is that right? What

year were you born?

Martinez: I was born in October 31, 1932 at Ancher Hospital.

Moosbrugger: Ancher Hospital right here in St. Paul?

Martinez: Right.

Moosbrugger: Had your folks lived here in St. Paul for some time prior to that?

Martinez: As far as I know, they had lived here not too long, approximately five

years.

Moosbrugger: Where had they lived previously?

Martinez: My mother is originally from Kansas. In fact, she presently resides in

Kansas. My dad is now deceased. He was born in Rio Verde, Mexico.

Moosbrugger: How many brothers and sisters do you have? Are you the eldest or youngest?

Martinez: I am the youngest of three. I have one brother and one sister.

Moosbrugger: Are they still living in the area here?

Martinez: My sister lives in Fridley and my brother lives in St. Paul.

Moosbrugger: Could you recall something about your younger days; any milestones, the

schools you attended, marriages?

Martinez:

I attended Lafayette School for a short period of time, here on the West Side. Then I attended Franklin School on the East Side. I also attended Lincoln Elementary School. I went to Kindergarten in a small town near Crookston, Minnesota, called Fisher. You see, the tendency in those days was to enter school late in the fall and get the education in the winter time and then in the spring time you would be taken off to the fields again. This is why one went to so many different schools.

Moosbrugger: So as a child you did have experience working in the fields picking crops?

Martinez: Definately. I was raised with another family, other than my parents, as a migrant worker. We all were.

Moosbrugger: What was the name of that family?

Martinez: He was Santiago Cortez. He had five daughters and two sons of his own.

Moosbrugger: Are Mr. and Mrs. Cortez, or their children living in the Twin Cities area now?

Martinez: Mrs. Cortez died in the early 1950's, Mr. Cortez is still alive. The last I heard he was in Chicago. He comes and goes quite often. He is in his late 80's or early 90's by now. He was an older man when I remember him and that was many years ago.

Moosbrugger: Did any of his children settle down in the State of Minnesota?

Martinez: They all live in the State of Minnesota.

Moosbrugger: Mostly out state?

Martinez: No, they all live right in town.

Moosbrugger: Right here in the Twin Cities?

Martinez: Right. In fact all of them live in St. Paul. Except one of the sons,
Richard, was killed in a car accident in 1955.

Moosbrugger: Can you tell us something about your brother and sister. Or about your own marriage? We are interested in knowing about your marriage and your children.

Martinez: My sister married Izekiel Moreno, which was another old family from the
West Side. They presently live in Fridley. My brother is now divorced
and lives in St. Paul. I married Guadalupe Morales. We have ten children
and live in Burnsville. Mr. Morales would have been a good one to have
interviewed.

Moosbrugger: He lived in the Twin Cities area for a long time?

Martinez: Oh sure.

Moosbrugger: When did he pass away?

Martinez: He passed away approximately four years ago.

Moosbrugger: His wife isn't l_ving?

Martinez: No, she passed away six or seven years ago.

Moosbrugger: Perhaps your wife would recall some of the background or stories they used to tell.

Martinez: Right.

Moosbrugger: How old are your children and what is the age range?

Martinez: The oldest one is Russell. He is twenty-five. The youngest one is Sylvia, she is five and an a half.

Moosbrugger: Are any of them married yet?

Martinez: No, none of them are married.

Moosbrugger: They are all living in or around the Twin Cities?

Martinez: Living in or around the Twin Cities, yes.

Moosbrugger: Do you have any recollections of interesting anecdotes or little curiosities from your youth or from your childhood? Just any thing that
might be of interest about the experiences of life as a Mexican American
in Minnesota.

Martinez: One of the things I would like to put on record is: we have heard so much about this word "Chicano". It has been used as a cultural type of way to describe the present day Mexican. There have been many discussions as to where the word actually came from. I remember hearing the word when I was a young man. We would be riding in back of a truck going from our farm to the fields and we would see another group of Mexican people working in the fields. The way we would use the term was, "Hey Chicanos!" Like, what's another word...

Moosbiugger: Pizzano?

Martinez: Pizzano would be about the same comparison.

Moosbrugger: A pal.

Martinez: A pal, a fellow worker, or a fellow Mexican. We would even called them
"Chicaspatas" I am sure you have heard this same term too. Like I said,
I have heard all these discussions about how this word derived. It's
not a new word, it's quite old.

Moosbrugger: Perhaps it would have been used, you say, maybe fifteen or twenty years ago? Somebody might have used the term "Chicano" almost like saying "Hey Mano", short for "Hermano", hey brother, a kindred spirit.

Martinez: I think it probably is a derivative of Mexicano.

Moosbrugger: Going back, we kind of dropped the thread of your story at the point where we were discussing your education and how it was. We got into the aspect of travel. Going back to some of the things that led up to the type of work you are doing today. Can you fill us in a little bit on what were some of your interests or what led you in this direction?

Martinez: I think it started in high school. I had a course in mechanical drafting and I really enjoyed working with drawings.

Moosbrugger: Which high school was that?

That was at Johnson High School. In fact the governor, Wendell Anderson, Martinez: was one of my classmates. Since I enjoyed drafting, I decided that this was something I wanted to do in my mature years. I enlisted in the military service right after the Korean War started in 1950. In those days if you enlisted you had an option of the types of schools you could go to. I noticed that the Corps of Engineers had a school for drafting, which is what I signed up for. But at the completion of my basic training, as assignment to the proper schools was being made, it was found that the course was all filled up. I had to choose from among several other courses that were made available to me, such as: Surveying, printing, heavy equipment operator, heavy equipment maintainance, and they also had this course called Photo-Mapping. I asked the counselor what Photo-Mapping was, and he showed me a brochure on it. It mentioned that it was working from airial photographs and some drafting. Well, the minute I saw the word drafting I said this is for me, and this is why I landed in this profession. That was in 1950, approching 25 years ago.

Moosbrugger: Did you go into business for yourself right out of the service?

Martinez:

No. In fact, the training that I had in the service, kept me out of the front lines. At one time we were assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division in Korea as infantrymen. But, they looked at my M.O.S. and they said, we need this guy here in Tokyo. I stayed in Tolyo for two and a half years, which was rough duty! After coming back, I went to work for the Highway Department for a short time, not knowing that there was a company in Minneapolis that was doing exactly what I was trained for in the service. The minute I found out that there was such a company in Minneapolis called Mark Hurd Aireal Surveys, I contacted them and went over there to visit them on a Monday morning. They hired me right there on the spot.

Moosbrugger: What year would that have been?

Martinez:

That was in December, 1954. I remained with them for seven years. Then during late 1959 or early 1960, there was a rumor going around that the Highway Department was going to open up their own mapping section. I, having worked for the department for a short time, knew some of the people who were involved. Some contacts were made. They contacted me. In 1961 when they were ready to purchase equipment, they contacted me wanting to know if I would come and initiate their mapping department from scratch. They didn't have a person who knew anything about mapping what so ever. I left Mark Hurd and went to the Highway Department. I initiated their mapping section and trained operators as they needed them. I had been with the Highway Department for eleven years when I left to join a private firm as manager of the mapping section. Since then, I decided that I have knowledge of the whole field, having had quite a few contacts in sales and calls on clients. I thought I could make it on my own by opening up my own business and offering my own mapping services.

Moosbrugger: Maybe in layman terms, we should explain just what it is that you do.

What is Ortho-Mapping, Airial Mapping?

Martinez: Orthophotography is a relatively new process in the whole field which is called Photogramatry. This is the whole trade name and Orthography is just an arm of that field. What it really is, is that it removes all the distortion out of an airial photograph, so that you can get a true photographic map out of that photograph. It is a relatively new field that is being accepted very well. It is going to be the state of the art in the very near future.

Moosbrugger: Then you can take an airial photograph and actually see depth and be able to measure depth?

Martinez: You won't have to measure depth. It is not basically that. It is that you remove the distortions being caused by the relief in the photograph. you remove that relief out of that photograph and inadvertently, what you do is you remove the distortion. So that now you can measure any thing you want in the photograph and get a true distance on it. So it can be used for design and for measurement and so forth.

Moosbrugger: Now let's talk about what are some of the things that people can do and what, specifically, do you do that helps keep alive for you and your wife and your children, the pride and awareness of your Mexican heritage?

Cover anything you might do at home. Do you for instance have any typical, traditional Mexican dishes at home?

Martinez: The main dish of course is my wife! We have tortillas and beans. I have always told Lupe that as long as we have beans in the house you can go any where you want, any direction. You can have beans for breakfast, lunch or supper. If you have beans, you can have hamburgers and beans,

Martinez: eggs and beans, chorizo and beans, beans will go with anything, you know.

Moosbrugger: In other words, all this Hamburger Helper and everything helper isn't the real helper, the big helper is "frijoles", beans. Right?

Martinez: That's right. My wife is a notoriously good cook, an excellent cook.

She makes "Sopa de arroz" and "Caldo". We tried to make "menudo" a

few times. We can do it, but we feel that it's easier to go over to

my brother-in-law's house to have it there. Incidently, he is another

pretty strange person; his name is Reynolds. He is an Anglo, but he

speaks better Spanish than you and I. He is the one who makes the "menudo"

and he is originally from Bakersville, California. He used to be a field

boss for the "Braceros" out of Mexico. That is how he learned Spanish.

We generally share our receipes with our neighbors. Another area we used

to be involved with is music. For example, I used to play at "La Casa

Coronado" with Joe Gaona, Robert Pineda, and Roberto Del Villar for a

period of nine months.

Moosbrugger: What instrument did you play?

Martinez: I played the guitar. Joe Gaona used to be the M.C. of the group. He would start off the evening by saying, "Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Casa Coronado." Then he would present our group "First of all we have from Jalisco, Mexico el Senor Roberto Del Villar, from Guadalajara we have el Senor Robert Pineda, from Tamaulipas we have el Senor Antonio Martinez, and I am Joe Gaona from Shakopee!"

Moosbrugger: Had to do a little job on the crowed, eh?

Martinez: Right, and they usually liked it. We still have two guitars at home; and the usual amount of Mexican records.

Moosbrugger: Did you take formal guitar lessons?

Martinez: I tried it once and, there is no way in hell that they could teach formal guitar lessons on the beat of the "Huapango", "La Huaracha" or sounds like "Malaguena" that have a special beat.

Moosbrugger: How do you teach that beat from Guadalajara?

Martinez: That's a terribly fast beat. The way I learned it was from Pete Devora.

He would very patiently try to teach me these rhythms, but it's something you have to feel within. I am sure it is being taught formally, but, I think it's a lot easier to play and it sounds better if you feel it inside of yourself too.

Moosbrugger: You married a girl of Mexican American descent. Did you grow up with any strong convictions that this would be a preferable life style or something that you had a personal preference for?

Martinez: I think it's kind of a difficult question. I was living on the East Side and I sought out my friends. Tony Franco was a close friend, and Ralph Silva who is now a resident of Denver, Colorado. At one time it was Tony Franco, Ralph Silva, Tony Ruiz, Tony Gangi, myself, and there was another Tony, I don't recall his last name. We used to hang around Nick the Greek's pool room on Jackson Street. The phone would ring and we would be getting a call for "Tony" and there would be five guys standing up to get the phone. Anyway, the thing of it is even though I lived, more or less on the East Side, we still came down to the West Side and obviously we found an attraction down here. Probably without realizing it the attraction was the pretty Mexican girls. Although when you are young, you

are not looking for colors really.

Moosbrugger: Then would it be fair to say you would not be upset, if one of your sons or daughters came home with the announcement that they were going to marry somebody of a different nationality or perhaps a different race?

Martinez: The only objection I would have would be if they were going to marry someone of their own sex. Other than that everything is wide open.

That is the way I feel about it.

Moosbrugger: Well, I think we have pretty well gone into your past and your present.

We are hoping that your future will continue to be as wonderful as the outlook is or has been up to now. Are there any strong feelings that you have about your past, which you would like to share with us?

Martinez: One of them, as I mentioned earlier, was how I was raised as a migrant worker. Although I was a young man, you still served your tour of duty out in the field at a very early age. I don't think that I personally ever resented the hard work that I encountered out in the fields. What I think I resented the most, were the living conditions the farmers made us put up with. They were directly responsible for supplying us our living quarters. They were able to go into their fancy three bedroom homes after their hard day's work and take a shower, and we had to go and look for a river in which to take a bath and get that dirt out of our system. I think of one specific case in Hollandale where this farmer gave us two chicken coops to live in and we had to clean all the excrement out of it. And even as well as you can wash a chicken coop that is full of this stuff, on a hot muggy day it still seeps out of the woodwork.

Moosbrugger: How many people were expected to live in these two coops?

Martinez:

Well, there was Mr. & Mrs. Cortez, their seven children, my sister, another gentleman from Mexico, and myself. So there was a total of twelve people that had to live in two chicken coops. As you can see we had to add a wing to the dwelling and that amounted to a tent, which we used as a kitchen and as a bedroom for the gentleman from Mexico and In Southern Minnesota, the night wind storms are so strong that you would have to go looking for your tent the next morning. place we had was down by Blue Earth, a little town called Guckeen. was an abandoned farm which had a two story dwelling that was to be ours and the farmer there was a very gracious, very good person. But, again, the building itself didn't have plumbing, no wiring, nor screens. basement was flooded so it couldn't be used. However, it was the most solid structure we ever had. The farmer came out and plowed about an acre of land and disked it and let us grow our own crops. He was really a nice person. Fisher, Minnesota was a fun place, because we had an old streetcar. It still had that door that would swing open. That was really a big thrill. We used to play with that. That wasn't too bad, at least it was clean.

Moosbrugger: You have really experienced a wide variety of life styles in your short life span.

Martinez:

The last place I worked was in Fairmont. We used the facilities that the canning company, not the farmers, but the canning company, provided for their workers. At that time they were imported from Jamaica. These were barrack like places. They were clean. They were just like army barracks, you had your showers and everything else, so that wan't too bad.

Moosbrugger: That would have been approximately what year?

Martinez: That was in 1946-47.

Moosbrugger: So, far more than the hard work, you objected to the living conditions that you had to face afterwards.

Martinez: There were a lot of times, especially down in Hollandale, this was the worst area that I saw, when you would be driving down the dirt gravel road and you looked to the side and there would be a tent with a bunch of people living in it; whole familes; not a big tent either, just a little tent. It was really sad! I don't know what the conditions are now.

Moosbrugger: This history project will be looking into that next summer and we will be anxiously awaiting some information in that area. Well, thank you very much Mr. Martinez.