

Eduardo Martinez-Yrizar
Narrator

Lorena Duarte
Interviewer

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Saint Cloud, Minnesota

Eduardo Martinez-Yrozar - **EM**
Lorena Duarte - **LD**

LD: Good morning.

EM: Good morning, Lorena.

LD: My name is Lorena Duarte. It is Saturday, February 12, 2011. I'm here with Eduardo Martinez at the Saint Cloud Public Library. I'm conducting this interview for the Latino Oral History Project for the Minnesota Historical Society.

First of all, thank you, Eduardo, for taking the time.

EM: You're welcome. It's my pleasure.

LD: I know you're very busy, so thank you for taking your Saturday morning to do this.

First of all, before we get started, could I, please, get your name and how to spell it?

EM: Lorena, actually I kept my Latino name, which is composed by your father's last name and your mother's last name.

LD: Yes.

EM: My name is Eduardo Martinez Yrizar.

LD: Can you give us your date of birth, please?

EM: I was born on August 12, 1950.

LD: What is your occupation?

EM: I am a business owner here in Saint Cloud.

LD: And you're married?

EM: I'm married, yes.

LD: Excellent.

To start off, could you just tell us a little bit about where you were born and a little bit about your family?

EM: I was born in a small town in northern Mexico called Matehuala, in the state of San Luis Potosi. When I was very young—frankly, I don't remember this—my father was looking for a better opportunity and decided to move to Mexico City. Basically, I was raised and I lived a big portion of my life in Mexico City.

I am one of nine children. I have two older brothers, so I'm number three, and then we have six younger sisters. I was very fortunate, and it was a blessing, that I was born and raised in a family with means. It's not that I deserve it. It's not that I am special. I'm not different from anybody else, but it just happened to be, and it was a blessing that I was raised in a family with means. Dad was an industrial man. He worked really hard all his life, and he was able to provide us, all of his nine children, with an education in the private schools.

I'm very proud to tell you that all my brothers and sisters had a college education, all graduates, some to a certain level, and some others to a higher level. For instance, one of my sisters has a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in England. The sister that has the Ph.D. from Cambridge is a well-known ecologist in Mexico now. She's a biologist and she has publications all over journals in Mexico and the United States. I have another sister that is a psychologist. Another one is an archaeologist. One is a special education teacher. I have another sister that is a chemist and she's also a lawyer. Let me see. Who am I missing? I have another sister that is a teacher, as well. So that's six of my sisters. Then, my oldest brother, that unfortunately has passed, was a chemist. He had a master's degree in business administration from Stanford University in California. Then, my second brother is an engineer and has a master's degree in business administration from the University of Mexico. I've got a degree in veterinary medicine from the University of Mexico, and I have a master's degree from the University of Minnesota.

LD: Wow!

EM: Yes.

LD: A very well educated family.

EM: We are very, very lucky. Like I said, we're not different from anybody. We are not better than anybody else. We just happened to be blessed with two loving parents whose main concerns were their children and who put a big emphasis on our education.

LD: Tell me a little bit about growing up in Mexico City. What kind of a kid were you? Did you like school? Did you like sports?

EM: For my parents, like I said, it was very important that we would do well in school. It was probably not only that education was important for them, but also that my father was paying for all private schools, so he wanted the kids to get the best out of it. It's a little bit embarrassing to say that I was a poor little rich kid. I was a little bit rebellious when I was young. I had my share of experiences, you know. However, I managed to do okay and to finish my degree in Mexico. Yes, I liked sports. I used to like to do racquet ball and soccer. What Mexican kid doesn't play soccer? I did some baseball, as well, just the normal growing up, in the big city. Then, it comes time when hormones start hitting and then you start looking at girls. I had my girlfriends and all that, just a normal kid growing up—I think.

LD: [chuckles] Where did you graduate high school from?

EM: I graduated from Universidad La Salle in Mexico City. Although, it's Universidad La Salle, it's also has a high school program for grades ten, eleven, and twelve. And, then also there is the college in the same facility.

LD: Is that where you got your college degree?

EM: No. When I finished high school, then I went to the University of Mexico, the national university of Mexico. It's called UNAM - Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, the main university in Mexico. The reason I went there is that Universidad La Salle did not offer the veterinary medicine degree.

LD: What made you interested in being a vet?

EM: Since I was a young kid, I was an animal lover. I always had dogs, cats. Through some of my years, I got into carrier pigeons.

LD: Oh!

EM: Yes. I used to raise carrier pigeons. It's a very unique hobby with a special breed of pigeons that have the instinct to come back to where they were born. You can go and drop them a hundred miles away and then they will come back to their nest. I did that for several years. I was really inclined to animals.

However, I graduated from the University of Mexico in 1974, and I joined a research station facility run by the Mexican government, a large farm. I think, at that time, we had 600 dairy cows. They had a section where they were raising pigs and there was another section that had birds and goats. It was a very large facility. But more than a production facility, it was a research station. I began getting involved in the research part of my field, but I was also doing clinics. I was in charge of the dairy cattle herd. We had, like I said, about 600 cows. It was about 300 miles north of Mexico City in a town called Queretaro.

I lived there for five years. Basically, it was a life on the ranch and the farm. I was single and I was living there.

There, I found the director of that research station, who was a Panamanian doctor, Doctor Ruiz, had graduated from Purdue University. He saw, I guess, potential in me and began insisting that I should go and get a master's degree in animal reproduction in the United States. After checking out different universities, he knew that the University of Minnesota offers one of the most comprehensive programs in that field, animal reproduction, particularly focusing on dairy cattle. So I have to thank Doctor Ruiz. He was like an advisor, a mentor for me.

I applied to the University of Minnesota, and I was accepted.

LD: So that's how you came to Minnesota.

EM: That's how I ended in Minnesota, yes.

LD: When did you come?

EM: I came on December 27, 1977.

LD: I bet you thought, wow! What was your first impression?

EM: I want to tell you that it was a very interesting situation. One of my brothers, my oldest brother when he was still alive, was living in California for a few years doing his master's degree. He said, "Mom, Minnesota is really cold. This kid is going to freeze over there." So Mom, like a good old mom, went to the store and bought me a Levi jeans little jacket, one of those corduroy jackets with a little bit of fuzzy inside and three snapping buttons in front, thinking that that was going to do it.

LD: [laughter]

EM: Mother was a very unique lady. She used to do a lot of knitting. She knitted me some gloves. There I am coming with my little corduroy jacket and little gloves that Mom had made for me. Against my wish, she managed to stick some long johns in my suitcase without my knowing. I found them later on. She was worried about how cold it was going to be here.

I left Mexico City on December 27, 1977, and it was maybe sixty-five degrees at nine o'clock in the morning when I went to the airport. The plane landed in Minnesota about four in the afternoon. I got out of the plane, and I was walking through the long hallways over there in the airport. When I was getting ready to go down stairs to where they have the luggage area, there was a flashing thermometer that said twelve below. I looked at that thing and I thought, "that's got to be broken."

LD: [laughter]

EM: That has to be broken! It just cannot be that cold. I went and picked up my things. I put on my little gloves and snapped my jacket. I was supposed to take a taxi to me to the International Student Office. They were going to help me try to get situated and find whether I wanted to be in the dorms or whether I wanted to rent my own apartment. They were going to help. So my first goal was to get to the International Student Office. As soon as I picked up my two pieces of luggage and I went towards the exit, and those automatic doors open and I felt that cold hitting my face, I said, “Uh, uh, I can’t do this.” So I turned around and went back into the terminal. It was so cold. I waited there for five minutes to see if I could catch a taxi, and it was so cold. I never felt that cold in my life. I turned around and I called the International Student Office and I said, “”Listen, my name is such and such. I just got to Minnesota. I’m supposed to start class at school in three days, but I’m not leaving the airport.”

[laughter]

EM: “It’s really cold.”

Like everywhere, there are some volunteers and what have you. There was a family (the Melitich’s) that had their name on the volunteer list to help foreign students. He was a professor at the University of Minnesota. They called him, and they asked me to wait maybe for an hour or an hour and a half over there and somebody will come and pick me up. It was the Melitich’s family. Unfortunately, I haven’t ever seen them since then. I talked to them a couple times, but that was it. They took me to their house for three day, and helped me go to a Target, or whatever the store it was. She recommended I should buy a parka, some Canadian boots, some snow pants, and real gloves. I said that I would prefer to live in my own apartment. So they helped me find a little basement apartment. It was more like a dungeon.

[laughter]

EM: There was a lady over that rented her homes’ basement there next to the University – the part that is called the farm campus in Saint Paul. It was over there by the Minnesota State Fairgrounds.

LD: Sure.

EM: I lived on the other side of Snelling Avenue, about three blocks away, in a little basement apartment in an old house. It had one bedroom, a little bathroom, and just like a little kitchenette. That was my first house here in Minnesota. It was quite shocking. I never expected that cold would feel that cold. That’s how I got to Minnesota. I was accepted to come and get my master’s degree and I just came as a foreign student with two suitcases and a little bit of money.

LD: This was 1977. That’s when you started school?

EM: Yes. I started to start in the winter quarter of 1978, which was January the 3rd, I think. I had just three days to try to get situated.

Those first walks in the early mornings of January, across the fairgrounds from my apartment and then all the way through the fairground to the farm campus, were brutal.

LD: I bet.

EM: But, like everything, you've get used to it. They were three difficult years.

LD: The program was three years?

EM: Well, it depends. You can do two or three depending on your ability, you know. I did two and a half years.

The funny thing is that I had taken some courses in English, and I had taken the test of English as a Second Language as is required by the University when you are a foreign student. I passed it with the minimum. I think it was just borderline. I thought, oh, okay, now I know English. Now, I'm going to be able to go school. So the first day that I sat in that classroom, I sat and stared at the professor, and I could not understand a thing.

LD: Ohhh.

EM: What I decided to do that first day was to go and buy myself a little recorder, so I could sit in front of the class and record the lecture. I asked for permission if it was okay for me to record and, then, I would attempt to go home and transcribe my notes.

LD: My gosh.

EM: Little did I know that a class that would be, maybe, fifty minutes, when I went to do my notes at home, it was a challenge of four or five hours.

LD: Wow.

EM: I was just trying different things and different alternatives on how to do it, you know. But, I managed to get my master's degree at the University of Minnesota.

LD: When did you graduate? Nineteen eighty?

EM: Let me think. It was May of 1980 that when I graduated.

LD: By then, how did you feel about your English? I'm sure it was improved and you felt more confident?

EM: It was improving. I felt a little more comfortable, and I was also embracing and respecting what this culture, the American culture, has to offer. I was very open to that. I also always kept my deep roots, my Mexican roots which to this day I still cherish.

I think for any migrant to a different country, what that person needs to do is to embrace the good and to put aside the not so good. You need to accept it. That's very important. You need to accept that you are now in a different country, and that you need to adapt or do what everybody does. I think, as an immigrant, you can always be Mexican. It might be that other people have a different opinion, but I think you need to embrace the positives, and if you disagree with some of the customs, you can push them aside without criticizing. Then, everything is going to be okay.

LD: What did you do after you graduated?

EM: Let me tell you something very important in my life that happened before I graduated. When I was a grad student at the University of Minnesota in the department of Animal Reproduction, I was assigned a little cubicle where I could get together, and get organized, have my books, study, do my papers, and my readings and stuff. Across the hall was one of the labs from the college, and in that lab, there was a young girl, a beautiful young girl, who was a sophomore and was doing some work study. She was completely in a different school. I think she was doing political science on the Minneapolis campus. She would take the bus to come to the farm campus because she had found some work study that she could do for a few hours at that lab. She was the girl that would clean and wash all the little tubes and the beakers.

LD: Sure, sure.

EM: She was in charge of that. I looked at her a couple times, and I'd walk away and do my thing. One day, she was walking in a hallway this way and I was going that way, and when we met, I noticed that she had a t-shirt that said, "I speak Spanish. Do you?"

LD: [laughter]

EM: Little did I know, her sister was a high school teacher, and it's very common that they take a group of kids and go to Mexico for like a week or two weeks as part of the school curriculum.

LD: Sure.

EM: She had gone to Mexico with her sister and spent a couple of weeks in Mexico City. They had gone to Cuernavaca, which is a very touristic city, maybe seventy miles south of Mexico City, where she had bought that t-shirt there. It had the name of a resort, Cocoyoc. It said, "I speak Spanish. Do you?" I stopped her and I said, "Hey, I speak Spanish. Do you want to practice your Spanish?" And, we have been married thirty-two years.

LD: That's wonderful.

EM: Yes. We have been married thirty-two years.

LD: What is her name?

EM: Her name is Julia Denise. However, she goes by Jill. There's kind of a cute story behind why she's Jill. Everybody knows her as Jill, but her name is Julia. She's the youngest daughter of a family of fourteen here in Central Minnesota. In fact, very close to here there is a little town called Clear Lake. She was born and raised in this area. In fact, she was born here in the Saint Cloud Hospital, but grew up in Clear Lake, Minnesota. Her mother is from one of the original English families that settled that town in the early 1800s, and her father is from a German family that came from Fergus Falls. They settled in Fergus Falls, but later they moved to Clear Lake.

They had run out of names, I guess, so when she presented the girl to the priest, at the Catholic Church—I'm talking about back in the 1950s, when things were a little different—she said, "I want to name this girl Jill Denise." The priest turned around and said, "That's not a Catholic name. You need to come up with a saint's name."

LD: Right.

EM: So right on the spot, they said, "Julia." That's just on the papers. Her parents, her brothers, her sisters, everybody call her Jill. In fact, today at school—she's a teacher—she's Jill, but legally she's Julia.

LD: So you met her and you have been married thirty-two years.

EM: We began kind of romancing the stone, if you wish. We got married on, gosh, she's going to kill me if I get it wrong.

[chuckles]

EM: June 30, 1979.

LD: So before you finished school, you guys got married.

EM: Yes.

LD: You got married here in Minnesota?

EM: We got married here in Minnesota. That's a really interesting thing, too, the foreign guy, the Mexican guy that comes and marries the youngest daughter of a large family. I was scared to death to meet her parents, her brothers and sisters, you know. But they were very, very nice and they opened up their arms and, to this day, we have a wonderful

relationship. I just love all my brother-in-laws and sister-in-laws. We must have done something good, because we've been married for thirty-two years.

LD: You got married. You graduated shortly thereafter, probably about a year after. Then, what did you do?

EM: What happened—I should have mentioned this to you—is that when I came to Minnesota, I had a grant from the Mexican government to come and do my studies, like on a scholarship type of thing. However, in my country you participate in one of those kinds of programs, you are required when you finish to go back and work for the Mexican government. You have two options. You can either be a teacher at that university or you can do research in one of those research stations. There's an institute called the National Institute of Animal Husbandry to make the translation.

LD: Yes.

EM: Since I had the background and had worked for that institute, I decided that if I was going to go back, I was going to go into the research field. For each year that you work earning your salary, whatever, they would allocate a certain amount off your loan. So, basically, if you worked for so many years, the loan could be cleared.

LD: Right.

EM: When I finished, I didn't have any more monies coming to me. With a student visa, I could not work because. You don't have permission to hold a job. That's, perhaps, one of the only things that I regret in my life: She was starting her senior year and we had to go back to Mexico. I had that commitment to go back, so she did not finish her degree from the University of Minnesota. She did make arrangements to do some sort of extended studies from abroad, to be in contact with the professors, and possibly finish. But, to be honest with you, once we moved over there, there was the cultural shock, and then she got pregnant with our first baby. So things were difficult for her. She was dealing with the cultural shock. Can you imagine, this young girl from Central Minnesota moving into one of the largest cities in the world? We moved back to Mexico City. I also have to say that I'm a little bit older than her. I'm nine years her senior, so being a little more mature, I could adapt easily, but she was a very young girl, you know. Actually, we got married two days after she turned twenty. Then, a few months later, we went back to Mexico. It was quite a cultural shock for her.

LD: Sure.

EM: She had taken some Spanish in high school. She thought that she knew Spanish, but when she got there, it was just like what I felt here. What is this? I can't speak the language. The first couple of years were difficult for her. We had the goal that she would finish writing papers and such things through extension courses, but she was never able to do it. So I regret that. But I don't regret having married the most wonderful person in

the world. We are together and although we are a mixed marriage, and things have worked out.

I began working in research, but about a year into it, it just didn't work out for us. We were dealing with a lot of bureaucracy. My checks were not getting on time, and I was getting a little frustrated. We had had the baby. When we left, Jill was maybe seven months pregnant. So we had a baby at home, and all that, and I was getting frustrated. I decided that I was not going to work for the Mexican government anymore. What that meant is that I had to pay...

LD: Your loan back.

EM: Pay my loan back, one hundred percent. So they just allocated that year that I had worked for them, they took off some but the rest, I had to pay back.

I found myself a job in the pharmaceutical industry. I went to work for the private sector. I was hired to be a product manager in a pharmaceutical company on their animal division. I think that was a good move for us. That was my first experience in the corporate world, you know. I was in a middle management position, if you wish. They provided us with a company car and all these things. It was good for us to have made that move.

In the meantime, Jill was a stay-at-home mom, taking care of the babies, struggling with having to go to the market, the open markets in Mexico, and deal with all the Mexican Don Juans, you know - calling out "Mamacita," and all that stuff, and learning Spanish.

Immediately, my relatives embraced her like another member of the family, so we were very fortunate in that respect. She felt really welcomed in the family. At least she had someone to look out for her, you know. However, she missed Minnesota, or the United States, tremendously. But she's a toughie. We lived there for six and a half years.

Back in 1985, there was a horrible earthquake in Mexico...

LD: Right.

EM: That tore down hundreds of buildings and killed thousands of people. We were living right there then. She experienced it. We used to live in an apartment building on the fourth floor, and by that time we already had our second child. She got really frightened.

Also, we had been living a few years in Mexico City, one of the largest cities in the world, as I mentioned before, with all the problems that are involved - over population, problems with air pollution, crime, lack of civil awareness, people throwing garbage in the streets - and one day we decided that, perhaps, it was not the best environment to raise our kids. By that time, we had been able to pay my student loan back, so I closed that chapter in my life. I paid everything that I owed to the Mexican government for my

studies, and we decided to come back to Minnesota. It was a tough decision. I was going to leave my family that I love dearly. I was going to leave my culture, my life, but it wasn't fair for me to say, "No," when she had done the same.

LD: Right.

EM: By this time, she was fluent in Spanish. She had embraced the culture. She loves the Mexican culture. She had learned already how to make *mole* and *carnitas*. She had learned how to eat some of the strange stuff that we eat, like [wee-clah-coh-chez] and all that. I think it was a good experience for her, as well. Now she also treasures some of those memories. She's fully bilingual, and she has embraced also the Mexican culture. We are a bi-cultural family, and we still carry a lot of our traditions in the American culture and a lot of our traditions in the Mexican culture.

I'll also mention that by that time I had two little boys that by law were Mexicans and they were Americans. By being born to an American woman abroad, they were American citizens.

LD: Yes.

EM: By the fact that they were born in Mexico from a Mexican father, they were considered Mexican citizens. So my two oldest boys have both an American birth certificate and a Mexican birth certificate. For the American certificate, you just go to the American Embassy and you register them.

But nothing changed. I was Mexican, and so in order for me to come back, I needed to apply for a resident visa.

LD: Yes.

EM: We went through the whole process. It took us about eleven months of endless trips to downtown Mexico City to go to the American Embassy, to ask for the applications, and to do it the right way.

Here is where I want to make a note. Maybe my case is a little unfair, as far as why and how I made it here. I had the means. I had the education. I had everything...

LD: And you had an American wife.

EM: I had an American wife. I was able to pay for the fees that needed to be paid. I was able to get the police background checks and I knew how to get it. So I was just very fortunate.

LD: Yes.

EM: What makes my situation unique is that I had to start from zero again and I will explain that.

LD: So you both made the decision to come back to Minnesota, and when was that?

EM: In 1985, we made the decision, but, like I say, it took us about a year to get all the paperwork. It's not only the paperwork. The American government required that somebody here would sponsor us, so that we wouldn't become a burden, you know.

LD: Yes.

EM: One of my sister-in-laws sent all her tax returns and everything signed. In the case that we would be needing assistance, she would take care of us rather than us going to public assistance, whatever. That's a normal process for everybody that applies abroad to come here

LD: Right.

EM: When we decided to come back to Minnesota, I thought, you know what? I'm a veterinarian. I have a master's degree from the University of Mexico. I sort of speak English. I'm going to go there and I'm going to eat at least the biggest piece of the cake. So no problem. Let's go, Sweetie. Let's go back to Minnesota. We got really excited. Several months later, about nine months later, I got the green card. We sold everything that we had over there that we had put together throughout six years. Unfortunately, in 1986, it was around the time when Mexico was falling to the costs of oil.

LD: The economy.

EM: The economy. If you remember in those days the exchange rate was 12 pesos for a dollar. In a matter of a few days, it went from 12 to 24 to 48 to 72 to 120 to 340. When we bought dollars, I bought them 710 pesos for a dollar.

LD: Wow.

EM: In those years, it went up to 3,000. In Mexico City, we had bills for 20,000 pesos, 50,000 pesos, and it was crazy. We had inflation rates of 100 percent a month.

LD: Oh, my gosh.

EM: We sold our cars and we sold our household goods. We put everything in boxes. We had, I think, forty-five boxes that I put in a crate and sent to Minnesota. That was all our household goods - forty-five boxes with clothes and books and some toys for the kids, only the minimum necessary to start all over again.

LD: Right.

EM: The money that I had gathered in Mexican pesos after selling all my things, turned into a handful of dollars, because I bought them at 750. I think we had \$12,000. I said, “Let’s go. When I get there, I’m going to find a job and I’m going to be a veterinarian and everything is going to be fine.”

So we came here.

LD: To Saint Cloud?

EM: No, we came back to Saint Paul. We had a sister-in-law who was a single mom, a home owner. She was a nurse, a very hardworking individual, but the little girl would have to go to daycare at six o’clock in the morning, and then she would be picked up at seven o’clock at night. It was just a little bit too much for that little girl. It worked really well, because Sue said, “Why don’t you guys come and live with me until you get on your feet. That way, if Jill’s going to be a stay-at-home mom and Eduardo’s going to be looking for a job, why don’t you come back here and take care of Jennie, take care of the house.” We made the arrangement that we would pay for the food. We would go to the grocery store. That was our way to pay rent. It worked really well for maybe about eight months.

That’s when reality hit me. The first thing that I did is that I contacted the Veterinary Medicine Association to see what I needed to do to be a licensed veterinarian. I found that the requirements were very expensive. I needed to take another 800 hours internship in large clinics, 800 hours internship in small clinics. I needed to take a national board examination. I needed to take a state board examination. When I put my numbers together, it was going to take me maybe another year of going back to school to take those exams. When you take a national board, it doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re going to pass.

LD: Yes.

EM: I know people here that have taken national boards in different areas five, six, or seven times and, they still haven’t passed. It didn’t mean that if I would take the exam that I was going to pass it. Those exams are usually just given once or twice a year. So if you don’t pass it right now, you have to wait another six months. Once you pass the national board, then you have to take the state board to be able to be licensed in Minnesota.

LD: Yes.

EM: At that point, we had a five-year-old boy and a one-year-old boy in diapers at home with doctors’ visits and vaccinations and food on the table. That was, perhaps, one of the things that hurts me the most out of all of this - that I was not able to get back into my field, the field that I went to school for. It was a reality check. Hey, you know what? It was not that easy.

So I began looking for a job in my field, in commerce. I began looking at the pharmaceuticals. I began looking into different areas like artificial insemination. The no-thank-you letters—"Your background is impressive, but, at this point, we regret to inform you that we don't have a position available for you"—began piling up. That was my job every day. I remember, for several months I would get up in the morning, get to the typewriter, one those old mechanical typewriters, you know?

LD: Yes.

EM: It would take me three hours to do one page. You had to be very careful because there was no way to delete anything. If you made a mistake, you had to start all over.

The worst part was for me was when I opened the newspaper one day, and they were looking for a veterinary technician. That's a fancy word for the guy that holds the puppies when the vet gives them the shots, the one that has to do the dirty job of cleaning the cages. I thought that might be a way to open the door for me in my field. I received the letter, "We regret to inform you that you are over qualified."

LD: Oh, my gosh.

EM: Yes. We got here in May of 1986, so it was May, June, July, August, September, October and I think it was already November, and we were paying for food in the house and gas and doctors and all this and all that, and I had nothing. My \$12,000 turned into \$800 in our account. I said, "Jill, I have to find a job in whatever." That's when reality hit so hard. I said, "You know what? I'm going to start my life all over again." That's what I was telling you: I had all the means. I had an education. I had all that and I had the ability to move myself in a society in which it was easy for me to go and get the visa and all that, but what I was facing in reality was that nobody wanted to hire this guy that never had had a job in the United States, that spoke broken English, and had no work references. I was a high risk employee. I don't even blame those guys. I don't blame the people that sent me all those letters. I was a high risk employee. This guy? Who's this guy? He's never worked anyplace. What's he doing here?

One of my sisters-in-law called me one day and said, "You know what? I have a friend that knows this head hunter. They are looking for a Hispanic male that wants to work. Do you want to go and visit with these people?" I said, "Yes, sure. Why not?" So I went to that interview, and I came back that day, and I remember Jill and my sister-in-law, Sue, were at the kitchen and they were all excited when I came back and I said, "I have a job." "Oh, really? Tell us all about it." I said, "I signed with a fast food restaurant." I'm going to avoid the name here, one of the most important burger makers in the world. "I have an entry-level salary and I'm starting next week." They almost fell down. They said, "You what?" I said, "It's a job. They told me if everything goes well in ninety days, we're going to have medical insurance, and I'm going to start bringing a check every two weeks, even if it's a small check." I started at the lowest, the entry level. That's when I hit a low in my life, to be honest with you.

LD: Sure.

EM: I was tending the fryers. I was flipping burgers on those hot grills, grease just hitting me in the face. I'm age thirty-six with a college education, a master's degree—but I had a job.

It was hard to accept. It was very difficult for me but, you know what, I had to swallow my pride and work. I began working the worst shifts available, five in the morning to three o'clock in the afternoon, and tomorrow you need to come back from five p.m. to three in the morning, and then the next day, you're going to work eleven in the morning to seven or eight at night, all these swinging shifts that they put you on because you are the entry level. Basically, they wanted to develop me to be a manager. The food industry was something new to me - I had no idea what it was like. But I worked, I worked, I worked, I worked. When you were on the Fourth of July having a good time in the park on a picnic, I was working at this place flipping hamburgers and answering the drive through. "Welcome to such and such. Can I take your order?" It was hard. It was very, very, very hard.

When I was at that company, we were robbed once at gunpoint. I was the manager in charge at that time. By that time, I already had worked for two years, I think, with this company and I was already an assistant manager. We were robbed at gunpoint. I was cleaning the dining room when one of the employees comes to me. I gave her the keys and said, "Go and lock the doors, please. It's time to go home." All of a sudden she comes white as she could be and says, "Ed, you better come." By that time my name Eduardo became Ed. Everybody knows me as Ed now. When I turned around the corner, there's a guy with a gun pointing at me and he says, "Open the safe." I got just really scared. I said, "I will do it. Don't hurt anybody. I will do it. I will do whatever you want, just don't hurt anybody." There were three young kids in there and myself. So he took me to the office, and I began spinning the dial thing. I got really nervous, and I couldn't open the safe the first try. Then he began to get really nervous and started screaming at me and swearing at me. "Open this." I failed a second time, and he shot through the wall and he said, "The next one goes through your head. Open that safe." The third try, I opened it, and he pushed me to the side, pushed me in the corner behind the safe door, right behind the safe door. He began just taking everything that he could, put it in a plastic bag and he ran away.

LD: Oh, my gosh.

EM: The interesting thing is that I was suspended with no pay, because I had to turn the money in.

LD: Ohhh...

EM: I wanted to avoid the name of that company because I didn't want to say bad things about that, but I thought that was not the right place for me to stay.

LD: Yes, yes, no kidding.

EM: I had met a friend, a good friend, and I went to work for another company, a company that makes and sells tacos in Minnesota, one of the largest companies in the United States for that product, so you can deduct the name, if you wish.

LD: Yes.

EM: I began working with those people again in the restaurant industry. Why? Because that's what I had done before. That was the only experience that I had, you know. Was that my dream come true? Absolutely not. Was I having mixed feelings about it? Absolutely. Again, I started with this company from the bottom, being assistant manager, working the night shift, the Saturdays and Sundays, the holidays. I can't tell you how many times I had to work on holidays when my family was on picnics and stuff, and I was working. But I never stopped. I never stopped; I kept on working and working and working and working because I was raising my family. We didn't have the means then. Jill was staying home and we were on one salary. We just had the necessary things.

LD: Did you stay in Saint Paul?

EM: For several years, yes.

LD: You had the two boys and you...

EM: We're living in Saint Paul. When I got the first job, I thought it was time for us to get started on our own, so we rented just a teeny tiny apartment in the Highland area in Saint Paul, and that's where we started our life as a family independently.

LD: Did you have any more kids?

EM: Yes. We have a third boy that was born in the United States.

LD: What are your kids' names?

EM: Daniel is the oldest boy; he's thirty. Dan goes by Danny. Andres goes by Andy. Andy's age is twenty-five. Then, my youngest boy is twenty-one now and his name is Ricardo. He goes by Ricky.

LD: You were working in the food industry. How long did you stay in that industry?

EM: To this day.

LD: To this day. [chuckles] How long did you stay in the Twin Cities?

EM: It was an interesting thing. I became half way successful. I became a store manager in one of these places, still struggling internally with this. Gosh, I have all this education,

and I'm just a restaurant manager, but it was an honest job, and it was providing for my family a certain security with medical insurance and all of that.

By 1992 I'd worked already a few years with this other company, the company that sells a lot of tacos in Minnesota and all over the United States. There was a district manager at that time that came to me and said, "Ed, for the first time, our company is going to expand from the Twin Cities and we are going to open the first remote location in Saint Cloud. We know that your wife is from Saint Cloud, and we have spotted that you have a really good work ethic, and we want you to go there and open that restaurant. It's going to be in such and such a place. Go to that place and here are some papers." This company had planning documents that say, "In ninety days prior to opening, you need to do this and this and that. At eighty days, you need to do this, this, and that." They go step by step. You need to hire the people and arrange for their training. So I had to arrange for their training in the Twin Cities, rent buses, and bus them to the Twin Cities. They needed to train somewhere before we were going to open that restaurant. I came to that corner here in Saint Cloud, and it was just an empty lot. I began working on the list of things to do, and I opened that restaurant successfully. It was a very successful restaurant. It is still a very successful restaurant in that organization. They asked me to go and do the same thing in Monticello. I was still the general manager in St. Cloud and I was the general manager at Monticello, so I became what they call a multi-unit manager. It's a really nice way to say, "We are going to squeeze you to the last drop for the same kind of salary."

LD: [chuckles]

EM: Not only that, the following year, they asked me to go and do exactly the same thing in Hutchinson. So now I was store manager in three different restaurants. I had responsibilities here, and I had responsibilities in Hutchinson, and I had responsibilities in Monticello, but not as a district manager. I was just a restaurant manager. So, I had to figure out who was going to work the shifts here, who was going to work the shifts there, what's going on here, what's going on over there and so forth, and I was able to manage it.

LD: Wait. Can I just stop you real quick?

EM: Yes.

LD: What did your family think? So you all moved to Saint Cloud?

EM: Yes.

LD: Your family was happy with that, I'm sure, your wife?

EM: Jill was happy. Danny, my oldest boy, was already in sixth grade. So I think he's the one that suffered the most with the change. He changed from one school there and he

came here to a smaller community. Everybody knows everybody and he was the outsider...

LD: Sure.

EM: The outsider with a Hispanic last name.

LD: Yes, yes.

EM: So, needless to say, our house was egged a couple times and my kids were harassed many times and so forth.

LD: That's actually something that I want to get into is the Latino community here and the changes you've seen in it, etcetera. But, let's finish how you got into your own business.

EM: Okay. Let me go back a little bit.

LD: Sure.

EM: When we were in the Twin Cities, one day there was a problem because of the last name thing, in spite of the fact that my boys don't look Mexican. They have green eyes and are big boys, but they have the last name Martinez. When Dan was like in fourth grade, he was harassed on the bus. He didn't want to say anything. One day he came home and said, "I don't want to go to school tomorrow." "Why not?" After some digging, we found out that he was being bullied on the bus—very common.

LD: Yes.

EM: Jill went really upset to the school bus and had a conversation with the bus driver and so forth, but the bullying didn't stop.

LD: Yes.

EM: Dan began having a little hard time dealing with his identity. So we made a decision that has been the best decision that I could ever have made with my three boys. By that time, we had already bought a little house in Saint Paul. It was the worst house on the block. It was a rental property. They had rented the house for twenty years. It was falling to pieces but we bought it. That's what we could afford at the time. It was in a half way nice neighborhood near Como Park, over there by the Como Zoo.

LD: Sure.

EM: It was a nice neighborhood, but it the worst house, most beat up house on the block. So we were living there already. That's where the boys began experiencing the first bullying because of being minority. Oh! I hate to say that, but because of their last name.

Three blocks from our house, there was a community center and in that community center, they offered little community programs. One of the programs was karate.

LD: Karate?

EM: Yes. We decided to start the kids in karate. We started Dan first. Soon he began regaining a little of his confidence. The style of karate that we put our kids in is a very unique, very traditional karate that is based on seven principles of respect, respect to others, respect to yourself, respect to your elders. You don't go and fight people. This is for defense. It's a very nice philosophy that they have. Like I say, it's based on seven moral principles that they follow closely. I think we are in our twenty-some years of karate. Here is where a proud dad is going to jump. My three boys are black belts. I have a second degree black belt, third degree black belt, and first degree black belt. Ricky, the youngest one is not as competitive. He's a really good athlete, but he's not as competitive as his brothers. He didn't care much for the karate thing. All that I said was, "Rick, you get me a black belt. After that, you can do whatever you want. If you don't want to go back anymore, that's fine." He finished his black belt, but he did not pursue the martial arts; whereas, my two oldest boys are competitive as they can be and, to this day they compete at the national level.

LD: Wow.

EM: Dan is seven times a national champion and Andy is six times a national champion.

LD: Wow!

EM: How can they be national champions at the same time? Because Dan is a little slimmer and taller, so he competes as a lightweight. Andy is a little huskier—eventually, he was a football player—and a little heavier, so he was a heavyweight. So they don't compete against each other. The two boys, in fact, established a record in the State of Minnesota fighting on the Minnesota team. On the national level, they won the competition six years in a row.

LD: Wow!

EM: Dan was the captain of the team. Andy was part of the team. It's a team of five members, four males and one female, that compete against other states once a year at the national level. To this point, they still practice their martial arts.

LD: Congratulations!

EM: That's one of my biggest prides. I have others, and I will tell you when the time comes.

That's how the bullying ended because they became so self-assured of who they were regardless of their last name. In that particular style of karate it's forbidden for you to

fight in the streets, but it gives you the self-assurance that says, “You know what? I don’t have time for you. Don’t bother me. I know what I can do to you, so you are not bothering me anymore.”

That changed the lives of my boys, and that’s the best thing I could ever have done for my kids.

LD: Let’s go back. You’re now in Saint Cloud. You’re managing three restaurants. Then what happened?

EM: Then what happened? One day, I’m in Monticello doing my thing, just running my restaurant. “Welcome to such and such. Can I take your order?” I was just making sure the customers were taken care of. If the dining room was dirty, just go and clean it, all the things a store manager does. I noticed that somebody was in the dining room, a gentleman, and he was observing. I thought, “What’s with that guy?” I turned around and he was gone. I thought maybe it was one of those secret shoppers. Those companies hire other companies to do secret shopping. They come and take notes and everything and they give you a score. It’s called the secret shopper. It’s very common. So I said, “Maybe it was one of those secret shoppers.” I forgot about it. A couple of weeks later, I turned around and there is that guy again! This time, right away, I went to the dining room and said—I’m not shy at all—“Hey, my name is Ed Martinez” or Eduardo Martinez. I don’t know what I said. “Who are you?” I shook his hand. He said, “My name is Bahman Anvary. I own a restaurant in Saint Cloud. I want you to come and work for me.”

So I sat with him and we began talking. He said, “I know that you are at work, and this is not appropriate, so why don’t we make an appointment? You live in Saint Cloud, right?” I said, “How do you know?” He said, “I know.”

LD: [chuckles]

EM: He said, “Why don’t we meet in Saint Cloud in my restaurant, and we’ll have lunch together, and we’ll talk.” It happened that way. He owned the Mexican Village Restaurants in Saint Cloud. There are two restaurants: one in downtown [Mexican Village Restaurant] and one over there [Mexican Village Too Restaurant] on Twenty-Fifth Avenue South. This person is a very nice person. He’s from Iran and, funny thing, he owns a Mexican restaurant.

LD: [chuckles]

EM: That’s one of those success stories. These guys came as a young family from Iran when the revolution happened, and began working as dishwashers for these restaurants. Then they became the owners of the restaurants. Bah-man, also known as Bob here in the Saint Cloud area, began saying, “Ed come and work for me. Come and work for me.” But let me go back a little bit. When that happened, I was no longer a multi-unit manager. I had already been promoted to district manager. So I was no longer doing what is called

running the floor. I was just going from restaurant to restaurant to make sure that things were done according to company policy.

LD: Yes.

EM: I had a large territory. They had assigned me a territory that went all the way from Elk River on that end, to Hutchinson, Alexandria, and Bemidji. All the restaurants - which included Elk River, Monticello, Little Falls, Brainerd, Bemidji, Alexandria, and the two in Saint Cloud - were my restaurants. It was my district, so I was already a district manager.

Bahman or Bob kept insisting, "Ed, you need to come and work for me. At my restaurant on Twenty-fifth Avenue South, I need a manager to run it, and I love the way you interact with your customers, and the way that you do it. I want you to come and work for me." I said, "Okay. What are you offering? How much are you going to pay?" He told me and I just laughed. At that time, I'm talking about the late 1990s. It was several years that I was already working with restaurants and that I had made my way up from assistant manager to store manager to multi-unit manager to district manager. Then I was making a decent salary. I had a company car. I had maybe \$10-million in sales, and was responsible for a large group of stores. In each store, there were 30 employees, so my team was almost 300 large. I had a lot of responsibilities. I was even attached to a cell phone and to a pager trying to put out fires either in Hutchinson or Bemidji - all the things that happen every day when you are running restaurants. I was making good money. So I laughed when Bahman made me an offer I said, "No, Bahman, I'm not going to take more than half cut in pay to come and work for you." We became friends. We used to go out for lunch and he'd insist, "Come and work for me. Come and work for me. Come and work for me." I was getting a little tired of it.

One day, in the year 2000, I said, "Listen, Bob, I'll tell you what. If you want to sell your restaurant, call me. I'll buy it from you. But I cannot come and work for you taking the salary you'll pay." I was telling him that because I just wanted to close that chapter saying, "You know what? I'm not going to come and work for you unless you can sell it to me." To my surprise, four months later, I got a phone call from Bahman and he said, "Ed, do you want to buy my restaurant?"

LD: [chuckles]

EM: I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, me and my wife are thinking that we've worked over thirty years in this business and we're ready to semi-retire. We're going to be moving to Florida. I might sell you the business. I own the property, so I'll lease it to you. I'll rent it to you. So you're going to be my tenant. You pay me x amount of dollars a month, but the business is yours. Don't worry about it. I'll help you with what you have." At that point, I had already bought a house here in Saint Cloud, so I already had some equity in my house. I went and talked to Jill. She was a little skeptical about the whole thing, especially that we were going to get all the equity out of the house to invest in this business. I didn't have the kind of money that he wanted for the business. The bank

required a down payment, money that I got from my house. To make a long story short, I bought the Mexican Village Too Restaurant in Saint Cloud, Minnesota. I bought the blue sky. They call it the blue sky. What that means is that you buy everything that is inside of the restaurant, the recipes, the right to do business under that name, and the customer base.

LD: But not the building itself?

EM: Not the building itself. Some people call it blue sky. I don't know why they use that term.

LD: What year was this?

EM: That was 2001.

Then, being a half way smart guy that I am, I began juggling my numbers and thought, "You know what? I'm paying Bahman enough money in rent every month that if I get a loan to buy his building, my mortgage is going to be what I'm paying him for rent.

LD: Right.

EM: So then it was my turn to bug him every other week. [laughter] "Bahman, sell me the property. Sell me the property. I know I can do it. Sell me the property." He said, "Oh, no, Ed. I don't know if I want to do that. It's my retirement, dah, dah, dah." I was very anxious - I wanted to buy the property because I was paying enough rent for me to pay a mortgage. When he was in Florida, it was just the right time, the right place, and things aligned together. He was offered an ice cream business in Florida, so he needed cash.

LD: Ah!

EM: One day, he called me and said, "Okay, Ed, I'll sell you the restaurant." So we went to the bank. Again, I didn't have the kind of money that you need to buy a half million dollar, or whatever, property. We went to the bank, and since I already had a three year's record of paying my bills on time, the bank helped me to buy the property. So right now, I'm a full owner of the Mexican Village Too, both the business and the property.

LD: So a full owner since?

EM: It was 2003. I've been running successfully that restaurant for ten years, basically.

LD: This is a great time to kind of talk about what is it like to be Latino in Saint Cloud for you, and what is the Latino community here like?

EM: Okay. Lorena, that's a very good question and a very difficult question to answer, a question that we can talk and talk for hours about. The majority, *not all of them*, of the

Latinos in this area are immigrants that have come here in the last ten years. They are people from the smaller villages in Mexico, people that were peasants, people that were working in the fields over there, sometimes their own, sometimes hired by others making the equivalent of seven dollars a day working from early in the morning to late at night. They are people that had it really, really hard over there, and they came here looking for a better opportunity.

LD: Yes.

EM: They have taken tremendous risks. They have been subject to abuse, to mistreatment, but they're here. They finally made it here. They've found jobs and they're usually working in the lower paying jobs. There are a lot of undocumented workers that are working in this area. There are a lot of dairy cows, a lot of dairy farms. They work in *la lecherias*, they call it. A lot of them work in the fields. They work the hard work of roofing, construction, and some in restaurants, at lower paying jobs.

LD: Yes.

EM: They're always being subject to people that are running ICE [United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement], of people making judgments, people making assumptions, people making statements such as, "They come to get our jobs," people saying, "They should learn how to drive and they should learn how to speak English." It is not a very welcoming environment, to be honest with you. I don't know in the Twin Cities—I've been away from the Twin Cities for the last twenty-some years—if it's the same over there, but that's what I perceive here. The majority—I'm saying not 100 percent—are like that.

However, there are a few educated people, like myself, that have been able to make their way a little further. Just like I found myself working at that burger job, right now I know of a woman who is a physician, a doctor. She graduated from the University of Puebla [Universidad de las Américas Puebla] as a physician. She practiced in Mexico for a few years. When things didn't go well over there, she decided to come here. Right now, I know for a fact, she works at a fast food restaurant taking care of customers.

There are others that do the same. However, I also know Latinos who are business owners. I have a good friend that owns a computer repair shop. I have a very humble friend, that now owns a Mexican grocery store here in town. I think it pretty much depends what are your goals, and how much you want it.

LD: Let's talk a little bit more about that. What do you think that Latinos have contributed to Saint Cloud or Central Minnesota?

EM: We have two areas. We have the Latinos that have made a contribution at a higher level, you know. For instance, there is a guy named Heladio "Lalo" Zavala.

LD: He's one of the people we interviewed.

EM: He's worked with UMOs [United Migrant Opportunities Services]. He's a great man that has participated in the community tremendously. He's an advocate for immigrants. There's another guy by the name of Jaime Villalaz that works now with a group in the Twin Cities that is helping Latinos that want to open their own businesses. Apparently, there's a group in the Mercado Central over there in the Twin Cities. I can't remember what the name of the group is. It's a nonprofit organization.

LD: Latino Economic Development Center?

EM: There you go.

LD: LEDC, Ramón León.

EM: Yes, Ramón León.

LD: He's also one of our interviewees.

EM: My friend Jaime Villalaz works for Ramón León, and he has all these areas. He's helping people, like the young man that opened that grocery store. Jaime helped him.

LD: I see. So economic development?

EM: Economic development and economic support to these folks. Also, there are Latinos that need help in very basic areas.

LD: Yes.

EM: They don't know how to go and apply for their driver's license. They are afraid of it. They don't feel comfortable with that. For myself, I help anybody that comes to me and says, "Hey, can you help me fill out this form?" "Sure. Let's sit down." I've done it so many times. So our contributions to the community have been more geared to helping others to stay afloat. My friend Nicolas Zermenio came from an entry level job, too, and now he owns his own business, but he also helps with the Latino community. There was a horrible accident a few years ago where a house burned and there was a Latino guy that died. Nicolas was an advocate and he helped on how to bring him back home to Mexico. He was fundamental for the whole process, took time out of his life to do that. Sometimes, we do that. We take time out of our business lives to help others, those that are not so lucky, to try to solve their issues or get ahead, a little bit ahead.

Now, what that is often said about the Latino community – that "They come to take our jobs" is a ridiculous statement.

LD: Yes.

EM: Because they don't want to take those jobs.

LD: Right.

EM: You tell me what high school or college student wants to work in a dairy farm milking cows at four o'clock in the morning...

LD: Right.

EM: And cleaning all the area, the manure, and all that.

LD: [chuckles] Yes, yes.

EM: Tell me one of those kids that want to go and be working at the Jennie-O turkey facility at thirty-two degrees cutting chickens open, thousands on a shift. Cutting them open, gutting them out, and cutting them into pieces when it's thirty-two degrees. Tell me what college student or what housewife wants to go and work in the beet fields to pick up beets or potatoes—or doing dishes in my restaurant. It simply is not true that they're coming and taking our jobs. It doesn't work. They're covering a lot of jobs that are fundamental for the economy, so that we can continue growing. They are jobs that other people really don't want.

LD: Right.

EM: I'm not saying that everybody is not going to do it. You might find one lady working as a maid at the Holiday Inn. But for the most part, are those undocumented or immigrants that are doing those—quote/unquote—dirty jobs? That's a true reality. So do they bring something to the community? Absolutely.

Did you ever watch that movie *A Day without Mexicans*?

LD: I've never seen it.

EM: Have you heard about it?

LD: I heard about it.

EM: It's really interesting. What would happen right now if, all of a sudden, tomorrow I had a little magic wand and said, "All Latinos in Central Minnesota, Saint Cloud, and all the surrounding communities, are going to disappear for forty-eight hours or for three days? Blink. There would be chaos.

LD: Yes, yes, yes.

EM: The cows wouldn't be milked. Dishes wouldn't be washed in the restaurants. Beds would not be made in the hotels.

LD: No roofs would be put on. [laughter]

EM: No roofs would be put on and no potatoes would be picked up.

LD: Yes. Absolutely.

EM: I don't know if I explain myself well.

LD: Yes, you explain this very well!

As we begin to wrap up, as a Latino man, as a Latino business owner in an environment that can be challenging, etcetera, and with everything that you've gone through in your life, tell me what are some of the things that you are really proud of. I know you are proud of your sons.

EM: My kids, yes. [sigh] Let me...

LD: It's not an easy question.

EM: It hasn't been a walk in the park.

LD: Sure.

EM: As you can tell, even if I've been in the United States thirty-some years of my life, as soon as I open my mouth there is a red flag. Oh! this guy is a foreigner. Even here, I'm not that well known, but I'm known member of the community. I'm on the radio and this and that and people know my restaurant. So people know me and people recognize me when I go in places. Over many years in that place, I've had thousands and thousands of customers come and see me. They recognize me. They put a name to my face, and, sometimes, when people say, "Hey. Hi Ed," I don't even know who these people are. I cannot know everybody that comes to my restaurant. If I stop at the grocery stores and everything, I've been well accepted. However, on certain occasions, as soon as you open your mouth, there's like, "Hey, wait a second. You're not part of us." It's been difficult. However, again, it's not fair for me to make a statement that way, because of my education, and because of who I am. I'm a very self-confident man. If you put a barrier in front of me, I'll find a way to jump over it.

Example: Right now if I say, "Cows"

LD: Chaos?

EM: No, I say cows.

LD: Cows! [laughter]

EM: Meaning cattle.

LD: Yes, yes, yes.

EM: You understood it because you are Hispanic.

LD: And I speak Spanish.

EM: And you speak Spanish. But, if I would have said that word to an Anglo person that has no idea what I am talking about, he would say, “Huh? What? Huh? Huh?” And roll his eyes because he doesn’t understand. Do you know what I would do? I will spell, “C-o-w-s,” or whatever the spelling is. Those are the ways that I learn how to jump the hurdles and to never let anybody put me down for who I am. But it’s unfair. I have the tools. I have the weapons to do it. I’m very self-assured, very self-confident. But a lot of my Latino or Hispanic brothers and sisters, they can’t do that.

LD: Right.

EM: They feel rejection. They feel rejected. They feel afraid. They’re shy about going places. They don’t know how to apply for this. They don’t know how to apply for that, or to go to the doctor, or simple things like how to make an appointment to go to the dentist - very simple things. I found that there’s a great need for people advocating to help in those areas, just with simple things. Forget about loans, it is just simple things, like how to open a checking account, or how to open a savings account at the bank. They can’t, because they go to the bank and they just stare. Now, what do I do?

LD: Yes.

EM: Going back to your question, what am I so proud of? I think I’m very proud of what I have accomplished in my life here, in my last thirty years. I accomplished it myself with hard work. Let me tell you, and I want to repeat it again, all those years that I spent in those restaurants working in the drive through, working in the kitchen, they were hard years. Those companies are very demanding. If you give them one, they want two. If you give them two, they want three. If you give them three, they say, “Now is it a possibility you can bring me four?” That’s the way it is. They squeeze you to the last drop. That’s corporate America. So my accomplishment is that I did it by myself working really, really hard, and never saying, “No.”

I remember when I was in the first job and someone would say, “Hey, Ed, somebody messed in the bathroom. Can you clean it?” “I’ll clean it.” “I need somebody to come at five o’clock in the morning tomorrow.” “I’ll be here.” “But you are going to have to close.” “I’ll stay all day.” That kind of stuff, that is what opened the door - hard work and responsibility. Never in the least bit did I ever complain about it. It’s tough. It’s hard. I have accomplished. Yes, I have accomplished. I’m a business owner. I’m independent. I have accomplished that.

LD: And it seems like you’ve had a very strong family life.

EM: Oh! I have a *wonderful* family. That's another thing that I'm so proud of, my wife. Maybe we don't have all the toys. Maybe I don't have the cabin on the lake. Maybe I don't have the boats and those kinds of things, a lot of typical Minnesotan toys. You hear that comment, you know, "Their toys."

LD: Sure.

EM: Maybe I don't have those toys, because Jill decided to be a stay-at-home mom. That was the best thing we could ever have done, but we lived on one skimpy salary for the first few years when I began my career. But we were able to raise three fine young men.

Here's where I'm going to sound like a peacock and I'm going to tell you that my son, Dan, has two master's degrees from the University of Arizona, one in Chicano Studies and one in sociology. He has a Ph.D. degree from the University of Arizona. He is currently a professor in Arizona, but he lives in South Bend, Indiana, at the University of Notre Dame, because his wife, my loving daughter-in-law Jessica, has a Ph.D. degree in sociology and she was hired by the University of Notre Dame. But Dan was able to continuing being a teacher, a professor online.

LD: Oh, wow. Good.

EM: Recently, he was asked to teach at Notre Dame. In the next fall semester, he's going to become an associate professor at the University of Notre Dame, which is a very prestigious university.

LD: Absolutely.

EM: Dan has become an authority, I would say, on immigration issues. He has done studies, as part of his master's degree and his Ph.D. degree, that now are being used even by the White House on immigration issues. He did very interesting research. The first one that he was involved with in Arizona was in Pima County. He went and researched the last twenty years in all the records that they have of people that have lost their lives crossing the desert. He found data on gender, age, the area where they came from, what they died of, how were they found, whether the families were notified, were they able to be identified. He has presented his research in several universities all over the United States and in Mexico. Now, they're calling him from Mexico to come to the northern states, you know, like Sonora and Chihuahua. He's been invited to be a guest speaker.

LD: Wow.

EM: That was one. Then the second one is a very large research project.

You know that when immigrants get deported, they pick you up today right here and they don't care. They pick you where you are, like in a cornfield. They pick you up whether

you have your ID [identification] or whatever you have with you. They take you to a detention center, and from there they deport you. So you might find yourself with absolutely no ID, no money, no nothing - sometimes even without shoes. There are places that are called Casa del Migrante. These people help them for three days. I think they give them seventy-two hours and for those seventy-two hours, they give them a roof and some meals. But, within those seventy-two hours, the deal is that they need contact their families in Mexico for them to send money for them to do whatever they want to do, like go back to Mexico to where they came from.

What they were doing for research is visiting these Casas del Migrante...

LD: This is what your son's research is?

EM: Yes, it's one of his research projects. He is reporting on the ways in which basic human rights were violated from the time that they were picked up to the time that they were dropped at the border. There are several events. They don't pick you up and then put you on the other side of the border. They bring you to an initial detention center and then they send you to, basically, a concentration camp for some time, and then finally - once they have 200 or 300 people - they load a bus full of people and then they take them. During all those events, there were opportunities where your human rights could have been violated.

LD: Right.

EM: Whether you were thirsty and you were naked, they neglected to give you water or if you were hungry and they didn't feed you, whether you were sick and they didn't take care of you. He already has all the research, and now he's just writing papers. He writes for journals. He's a scholar.

LD: Wow.

EM: That's my oldest boy, Daniel.

Andy went to Saint Cloud State University. Once he finished his four years, he graduated with a bachelor of arts degree, but at that point he was not sure what he wanted to do. So he went back a second time, and now he's become a high school teacher. He's already a coach here in that high school [Saint Cloud Technical High School] across the street for the football team. He's the one that I told you was a little huskier. He played varsity, and now he's assistant coach at one of the lower teams. He also coaches in the speech program

LD: Oh. I was in speech.

EM: Yes? Were you in speech?

LD: That's great.

EM: He's a speech coach. He's almost done with his teaching degree, so he wants to follow his mother's steps.

LD: Because your wife- we didn't talk about that. Your wife is a teacher?

EM: I'll tell you in a second.

I'll just finish with Ricky. Ricky, out of my three boys, he's the biggest mouth, He's an awesome kid, but he's sarcastic. He's caustic at times, but he's very, very smart. When he came out of high school, he already had credit for one year of college. When he went to Saint Cloud State, he skipped the freshman year and began as a sophomore. Right now he works over there in the research center. He also works at the restaurant. So does Andy, and Andy's wife, too. She has also become a teacher. They work at the restaurant. They're hard working, responsible, good students, very athletic. I'm very, very proud of my kids. Ricky right now is a senior here at Saint Cloud State, and he's applying to go graduate school. He wants to go somewhere else, he thinks.

LD: What does he want to?

EM: He's also in sociology with applied psychology.

LD: Mmmm.

EM: He wants to do something with that. Then, he wants to get a master's degree in psychology. He wants to be a psychologist. He's a very witty kid – a very smart young kid. They are all very independent. They live on their own. They're very loving. They come very often to the house to watch football with dad, and to mom's cooking. They come home very often and they're very, very loving kids. I love my three boys. I'm very proud of them.

Jill, the love of my life, she sacrificed many, many years of her life after, selfishly, I took her back to Mexico without thinking, oh, maybe I can stay here. Maybe I can find a job. I said, "No, I need to go back. I need to go back," and we moved back. She didn't finish her education at the University of Minnesota. When we came back here and when Ricky was old enough to go to kindergarten, she went back to school. She graduated with a teaching degree and she is an ESL English teacher.

LD: Okay.

EM: English as a Second Language, or now they call it ELL - English Language Learners. She's worked several years. Ricky is twenty-two, so she's worked fourteen years in the school district. Now she's a tenured teacher. She works at one of the high schools here in town. Even when she was working, she made a very special effort taking night classes and got her master's degree in education.

Needless to say—you asked me what I'm proud of—the most thing that I'm proud of is my family, my wife and my three boys.

LD: Let's take this last question in two parts.

EM: Okay, sure.

LD: Personally, where do you see yourself in the next two years, five years, ten years?

EM: Well, recently I received an offer from someone to buy me out of my restaurant but they don't want the restaurant. There's a large company that is buying a whole block. We've been dealing with this for a couple of years. Those large projects take a lot of time. So I'm facing a decisive moment in my life in which I can sell my property and, then, try to do something else. Right now, I'm at a crossroad in my life, a very important crossroad in my life.

I have several projects. One of them is that I developed over the years a Mexican salsa that is delicious and it's very well liked. I have marketed that in all the grocery stores in Saint Cloud for the last ten years under my label. I own the trademark and the patent for my recipe. I did that myself. I went to a lawyer and it was going to cost me thousands and thousands of dollars and I said, "Oh no, I can do this myself." I went to the Internet and I found out step one, step two, step three, and I was able to get a patent and a trademark. It's a product that I have, and a large company in the Twin Cities found it on the shelves and said, "Who is making this salsa?" They bought some salsa, opened it up, and tasted it, and said, "This is awesome. We want to distribute this." Right now, I'm working with two large distributors in the Twin Cities to distribute my salsa all over the State of Minnesota.

LD: Fantastic!

EM: So I'm very proud of that. Right now in Saint Cloud, I sell maybe twenty cases a week. Now, we're talking about hundreds, perhaps, thousands of cases of salsa. I'm very proud because that's a product that I developed. When I got the restaurant, they already had a salsa. My lawyer very smartly said, "You need to be careful. There are other Mexican Villages." This family, a whole bunch of brothers, had several, two in Fargo, two in Saint Cloud, and in the Twin Cities. They're no longer there, but, there's one in Mankato. So my lawyer said, "You need to be careful with this, Ed." I asked my lawyer what he wanted me to do. He said, "They can come back and say, 'Hey, you're using our name.'"

LD: Yes.

EM: "You're using our recipe." So I changed the recipe. I developed my own recipe. I have a Mexican lady, a beautiful woman internally—I call her my sister; she calls me brother—who is from Veracruz, Mexico. She became documented and through the years, I've helped her. We supported her and we were able to get legal status for her and all her

family. She's very loyal to me. She's worked for me since I opened my restaurant, and before that in that old taco place. I met her family in the Twin Cities. I've been helping them throughout the years, and she's helped me develop the salsa. We did a lot of trials. No, I don't like this. No, I don't like that. Finally, we came with my own recipe. That's the one that I patented.

LD: What is it called?

EM: Mexican Village Too Salsa. Right now, if you go in any grocery store here in Saint Cloud—there's eleven grocery stores - Coborns, Cub, Cash Wise, and Byerlys - it's on the shelves.

LD: That's wonderful.

EM: Now, this can be huge. Obviously, I cannot make thousands of cases. So what I did was that I sourced a company that is going to make it for me. They are called private labels. They make private labels, and they're going to market it for me, and they're going to distribute it for me. They're going to do everything for me. All that I'm going to do is sit and look pretty and get a check every month.

LD: [laughter] That's pretty good.

EM: [laughter] So that is one project that I have.

Another project that I have is to help. I don't know to what extent, but I want to help my Latino brothers, *mis hermanos* Latinos, to try to help them through all those hurdles that we discussed, filling out forms, helping them with their little business when they start one, helping them with the Secretary of State, registering the name, getting a federal ID number, and getting a state tax number. I can also help with filling out an application to get a driver's license, getting an application to get a passport, or an application to ask for medical assistance, all that that they can't do. That's one of the projects that I have. I don't know if I can afford to do it just as a philanthropist yet. I wish I could. I'm thinking about the fact that in the company I already have a website and all that. Another thing that I forgot to mention throughout this is that one of my hobbies is to design websites. I understand how to host them, how to get the domain names. I understand the Internet very well. So I can help them do that, and somehow pay back and help them.

LD: Yes.

EM: That's one of my projects. If I sell my restaurant, everything is in there. Jill is a very wise woman and she said, "It's not done until it's done and we have a check in your pocket and that check clears the bank. Then it's a done deal. In the meantime, don't dream about anything and keep on working."

*If this happens and if the salsa business goes real well in the way I think it's going—I think we're going to start in March with the first production—and if I can semi-retire in a comfortable way, I think I'm going to volunteer my time to help my *hermanos* Latinos as much as I can with their legal issues, with their accounting issues, with their business issues, with simple things such as filling out applications.*

LD: That's wonderful.

EM: That's one of the things that I have in mind. I don't know yet if it's just going to be a free service—I need to consult about that—or if I'm charging them a nominal, minimum fee so that they feel they are buying something. Do you know what I'm saying?

LD: Yes.

EM: Just ten pesos or five dollars or ten dollars, without charging what a translator or an interpreter would charge you to prepare a document, you know. I have a lot of dreams, a lot of projects. Another thing is that I became a member of the American Translation Association. I found out that in the State of Minnesota you can be a translator and an interpreter, and you don't have to be certified as long as you belong to an association. If you are a member, you can offer those services. I have spotted here in the community that there are a lot of people, my Latino *hermanos* and *hermanas*, that go to the doctor and they don't understand what's going on.

LD: Right.

EM: So that's another thing that I can also help with, in the medical field. Saint Cloud is growing in the medical field tremendously. It's just growing tremendously here, and we now have many clinics and specialists for this and for that and so forth.

LD: So that's you and where you see yourself going.

What about the Latino community here in Central Minnesota? Where do you see the Latino community in the next few years, in ten years, in twenty years?

EM: I think that if everything goes well, the Latino community is going to have a big impact not only in Central Minnesota, and not only in the State of Minnesota, but all over the United States. All that they need is an opportunity. All that they need is a drive to open their little business, their little window cleaning business, maid service by the hour, a little restaurant, *taquería*, a little grocery store, a little mechanical shop. I'm pretty sure there's *hermanos* Latinos that worked as mechanics in Mexico. They knew trades. They knew how to be carpenters and roofers. They can become a driving force if they're given the opportunity. Unfortunately, especially with what is going on in Arizona and some of those states in the last year, right now they are a little scared and a little under the water. Now they're talking about their kids not getting their American citizenship because they were undocumented. There are a lot of fears. They're kind of an underground force right now, but if they're given the opportunity I believe that eventually that's going to happen.

I think that we are going to integrate ourselves into the American society and be a driving force. Well, just see what's happening over there in the Mercado Central in downtown Minneapolis, you know. There's hundreds of Latinos that are business owners now.

LD: Yes.

EM: They just need to have the drive and have the opportunity given to them. They need guidance, the help from somebody Ramón León and his group, like Lalo Zavala and his group, like Eduardo Martinez and what he wants to do. They just need someone to guide them how to do something, and to lose that fear.

LD: Yes.

EM: It's not going to be an easy ride. There are going to be a lot of challenges. There's going to be a lot of envy. There's going to be a lot of rejection. There's going to be a lot of comments. There's going to be a lot of people rolling their eyes. But I think that we have all the tools to become a very strong group and a driving force for the economy in Central Minnesota, in the State of Minnesota, in the State of Wisconsin, and in the United States. We will! Mark my words. [laughter]

LD: We will! Exactly. That's exactly what we're doing: we're writing it down. [laughter]

Is there anything else?

EM: I just want to make sure again that I repeat this. I don't feel that I am a success story. I don't feel that I'm special, any different than anybody else, any better than anybody else. I just want to make sure that it's clear that I was very fortunate. I was very blessed. Perhaps I was just able to seize the opportunity.

LD: Well, once again, I just want to thank you for this amazing interview. Your story is really, really inspiring. I'm glad that you were able to share it with the Historical Society.

EM: You know, Lorena, you're very kind. You're very kind with your words, again. Inspiring story, I don't know to what extent. Like I say, I had *so much* that many of my brothers and sisters from the Hispanic community just don't have. They didn't have those opportunities. They didn't have the education. They didn't have those things that I had.

But I think the most important thing that happened—in my conversation with you, I told you—the hardest part for me, is that I had to start all over again. When I came back and I was frying hamburgers and the grease was hitting my face at one o'clock in the morning and I was dealing with racist customers, seriously, that was tough. It was hard for me. Oh, my God, I'm starting all over again from the ground up.

LD: Yes.

EM: *That credit I will take, that I started all over again.*

LD: And that is inspiring. You're right. Your story is very different than many members of the Latino community, but we all have individual stories. One of the things about this project is that by looking at one person's story, it's the larger story of a community, and whether you're exactly like someone else or not, it's still a very important story to tell. So it's really wonderful to be able to interview you.

EM: I hope the doctor, that physician woman I mentioned, that she knows that there's hope, that she won't always be working at the fast food restaurant, and that perhaps one day, she will be able to become a doctor.

LD: Absolutely.

EM: And she will if she seizes the opportunity.

LD: Well, once again, thank you very much.

On behalf of the Minnesota Historical Society and me personally, I thank you. I know you're very busy and I really, really appreciate you sharing your story.

EM: Thank you very much.

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