Rafael E. Ortega Narrator

Lorena Duarte Interviewer

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Rafael Ortega - **RO** Lorena Duarte - **LD**

LD: Today is Monday, February 28, 2011. My name is Lorena Duarte and I'm going to be conducting the interview today. I am here with Commissioner Ortega in his office in downtown Saint Paul. This interview is for the Minnesota Historical Society's Latino Oral History Project.

First of all, Commissioner, I know you're very, very busy, so, on behalf of the Historical Society, I just want to thank you for taking the time and sharing your story with us.

RO: Thank you to you and the Historical Society for choosing me.

LD: If we could first start off with your name and how to spell it...

RO: Rafael, E for Enrique, Ortega.

LD: Can you tell us your date of birth and occupation, please?

RO: January 8, 1952. I am Ramsey County Commissioner, Fifth District; representing the southern third of St. Paul, from Highland Park in the west to Dayton's Bluff in the east.

LD: If we could just start off with a little bit about you family, where you were born, and the names of your parents, and a little bit about their background.

RO: My mother's name is Josephina. Nieves is her maiden name. My dad's name was Enrique Ortega. They were both born in Puerto Rico. My mom is from Utuado, which is in the center of the island, in the mountains. She grew up on a coffee farm. At one time it was coffee and sugar, but it is basically coffee. Of course it's in the rain forest, so you have mangoes, and plátanos, and guineos of all kinds, and naranjas. Everything grows there because it's a rain forest. My dad came from Aguadilla, which is close to the ocean. I'm trying to think now; and I believe it would be the part of the island that would be facing more towards the Atlantic. My mother comes from a family of thirteen and my dad comes from a family of twelve.

My dad's parents died early and he came to New York. I'm not quite sure of the age, but he was close to being a teenager. His older brothers and sisters brought him over. He's one of the younger members of his family. My mother is actually the youngest, the baby of thirteen. She came after high school to live with her older sister, so she came when she was already nineteen or twenty years old.

LD: Where in New York?

RO: On the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

LD: Both of them?

RO: Yes, from Fourteenth Street on down. If you're familiar with the island of Manhattan, Fourteenth Street is sort where it starts narrowing down towards the tip of the island where Wall Street is, so the Lower East Side. From east to west, you have the Lower East Side, and then you go into what was in those days Little Italy. You had the Polish neighborhoods, and then you had the Village. They came to live in those areas because those were, basically, where the tenements were. That's where most of the poor people lived - in the tenements.

LD: Tell me where were you born?

RO: I was born in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in New York City.

LD: Do you have brothers and sisters?

RO: I do. I have two brothers, Luis Ortega, who is a year and a half younger than me, a sister Evangeline Ortega, who is nine years younger than me, and then my brother Mark, who is eleven years younger than me.

LD: Tell me a little bit about what you were like as a kid. Did you like sports, school? What did you like to do?

RO: Well, my mother went to Catholic schools in her hometown of Utuado, so she sent us to Catholic grammar schools and high schools. Actually, when you look at it, I went to Fordham University, which is a Jesuit university, so most of my education, except for one year, was in Catholic schools. I went to Brooklyn Technical High School for one year.

First of all, there's a big difference, at least a nine-year gap, between my brother and I and my sister and younger brother. So it's almost like growing up in two different eras. My brother Luis and I grew up very poor. My dad was a merchant marine, so he would be gone sometimes for six or nine months at a time in the 1950s. My mother worked in a sweat shop factory. At the end of the school year in June, we were shipped to Puerto Rico and didn't come back until maybe the weekend or the week before school started in September. So we spent that time in Puerto Rico with my grandfather on the farm, and

with my grandmother and with the various aunts. Roughly, in my dad's family, out of twelve people, let's say that eighty percent lived in New York. With my mother's family, let's say eighty percent lived in Puerto Rico and twenty percent in New York, so we sort of grew up with both sides of the family in two different cultures. For Luis and me, Spanish was our first language. When we went into school in those days, there were no programs, so I didn't learn English until I was maybe in the second grade. That was when I felt at least I had a command of the language and could communicate in that language. Then, if you look at my two younger sister and brother, their main language was English, even though they are also bilingual. They speak Spanish. It was just two different worlds.

LD: Sure.

RO: Technologically, we didn't get a phone in our place until I was already in grammar school. We didn't get our first TV till I was already in first or second grade, while my other brother and sister grew up with that from birth.

LD: Right.

RO: There was a difference technologically and culturally and so forth.

LD: What was it like growing up in the Lower East Side at that time?

RO: Well, you know, the Lower East Side is part of the history. It was the port of entry until recently. In the twentieth century, that's the port of entry for any immigrant. When we grew up at that time, our predecessors in that neighborhood, if you go back to the 1890s, you were talking about Irish and Italian immigrants and then you were talking about Jewish immigrants, and then after the war when Lithuanians and Polish refugees came in. Puerto Ricans were really the first group of folks to immigrate via airplane rather than boat. Because of the proximity of the island to the East Coast, the population grew very *rapidly*. I think by the time I was in high school, there were well over 1 million Puerto Ricans in New York. But we were also very mobile, going back and forth, because of the airplane. So it isn't quite the same as other immigrant groups that sort of come and stay. If they come to Minnesota, for example, they might stay here several generations. We are highly mobile in that sense compared to other groups.

LD: You went to Catholic schools throughout. When did you graduate high school?

RO: I graduated in 1970.

LD: What did you do then?

RO: Let me just follow something else up.

LD: Sure.

RO: We grew up in the tenements. These were the tenements from the 1800s. There were four of us at the time, and as we grew up it was just a cold water flat. When I was born, in the two places we lived, there was no heat. That's number one.

LD: Wow.

RO: And there was no bathroom in the apartments. We used a common bathroom for the building, for the floor. So you had to go outside. The bathtub was in the kitchen. I grew up with that all the way until I entered high school. That's when my sister was born and we needed more space, especially since she was a girl. So we became caretakers of a Jewish synagogue. All through high school, my four years of high school my dad had come home from being a merchant marine. He worked for New York State in the hospital system. Eventually, my mother did, too. We couldn't get into the housing projects, and we couldn't live in the tenements anymore, because it was just too small, too constricting. So we moved into a Jewish synagogue. That was the first time my brother and I—I was in the ninth; he was in the eighth grade—ever shared a room just the two of us. First time we had a room and the first time we had an indoor bathroom.

LD: And this was in?

RO: In New York City, in Lower Manhattan.

LD: In what year?

RO: Oh, this would have been 1966. As I was growing up until, let's say, the time that we moved to the synagogue, my brother and I - starting from the first grade - walked to school. I think in kindergarten my dad or my mom would take us to show us the way, but from pretty much the first grade on, we walked to school and back on our own. Of course, they weren't home; they were working. That was when we were in the tenement, so between the first and the eighth grade, we walked to school on our own. It was a rough neighborhood, the Lower East Side of Manhattan. If you ever go there and you go through the Tenement Museum. When I took my kids to the Tenement Museum, it was almost exactly the kind of apartment I grew up in. It wouldn't be unusual for my brother Luis and I—we lived on the fourth floor in a five-story building—to walk in the morning and find somebody lying in the hallway badly hurt. Whether he was dead or alive, we just kept walking.

LD: Wow.

RO: It wouldn't be unusual for us to walk out and there would be gang fights in front of our entrance to the tenement as we came out. So those kinds of things are different.

We lived in such a tight space. Remember, I told you we had one bedroom and what would have been the living room. It was many things for us. We all slept in one bed. The bathtub was in the kitchen, as I told you, and then there was one little bedroom in the back, if you want to call it a bedroom. I've had walk-in closets that are bigger than that.

That was it. Basically, we came home, did our homework, and we were in the streets a lot. We grew up knowing the streets in New York very well.

LD: Yes. And you grew up in a very interesting time. You graduated high school in 1970. That's right in the era of social unrest, social protests.

RO: Oh, yes.

LD: Did that impact your growing up?

RO: It impacted my growing up. It impacted my career, and I think my political views. It impacted everything.

LD: Tell me a little about that.

RO: First of all—to give you a sense of that—my brother and I went to Rice High School. Rice High School is a Christian Brothers of Ireland school, and it is located on One Hundred and Twenty-Fourth Street and Lenox. The Apollo Theatre is on One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth and Seventh, one block away. So we went to school in Harlem. We went to school in the years, if you think about it, from 1966 to 1970. Martin Luther King was assassinated. Robert Kennedy was assassinated. If you look back into the history of New York, we had the riots.

By the time of my Freshman year of high school, I was still living in the Jewish synagogue - that would be ninth grade. In tenth grade, eleventh grade, twelfth grade, we moved to the housing projects, the Baruch housing projects. Have you ever heard of Alphabet City? Alphabet City is all the housing projects in New York. If you start with the Baruch projects, really you could go on the other side of Williamsburg Bridge, all the way to Fourteenth Street, between Avenue D and the East River, there are probably—I don't think I would be far off to say this—as many people as there are in the City of Saint Paul in those housing projects, about 200,000 people.

LD: Wow.

RO: These are a lot of different projects, but the Baruch projects in themselves had to be around fifteen buildings. So we lived in the housing projects for those three years. For me, it was three years, because then I moved out to the South Bronx.

That was the time in New York City of the Young Lords. The Young Lords was the radical group of the Puerto Ricans. It was the time of the Civil Rights Movement and the unrest, and Alphabet City was one of the places where the riots took place. I was only in the ninth and tenth grade. It was where Puerto Ricans started asserting their civil rights through the Puerto Rican Young Lords.

Simultaneously, if you look at the history, that's coming from [Dr. Pedro] Albizu Campos in the 1950s, the Liberation Movement in Puerto Rico, and, of course, the

attempts in the 1950s by the Puerto Ricans and the Congress and then the ongoing underground movement from Puerto Rico. When I went to Puerto Rico for those summers, I was getting in all the stuff about the Liberation Movement and what Albizu Campos was doing, because those were the *campesinos* and that's where my mother's family comes from. Then I came back to New York and it's about the Civil Rights Movement in terms of the right to vote and those things. When I was a little kid, I remember going to the polling places with my mom and dad and they wouldn't be allowed to vote, because of the literacy exams that they had at the time.

LD: Right.

RO: My dad, being in New York at a younger age, read the papers and all that, but my mother didn't really learn English until she was in her fifties. With so many of us, there was no need to speak English in the Lower Side of New York during the 1950s and 1960s. Everybody spoke Spanish that wanted to do business. They owned a *bodega*, the different *tiendas*. You didn't need to speak English. I remember those issues as a little kid, with people having trouble to vote because of the literacy test.

That was sort of the environment which shaped my world view and my political views. In terms of the Liberation of Puerto Rico, I became more of a New Yorker. That was my world view, more of a New Yorker than anything else.

LD: When you say it influenced your world view, did you participate in any of the student movements and such when you were young?

RO: Yes.

LD: Tell me a little bit about that.

RO: A couple of things: First of all, I always did very well in school. I wasn't the first to go to college from my family. We're all close. I learned how to drive in Puerto Rico, for example. The person that took me to drive was my cousin Miriam, who was going to the University of Puerto Rico to become a teacher. She's a teacher now. I was around twelve or thirteen, but in those days, over there, everybody drove.

LD: [chuckles]

RO: But in New York, I was the first one. I think I grew up in New York with, I would estimate, about twenty or twenty-five cousins within two or three miles of each other.

As I told you before, we were in the streets, so needless to say we learned a lot about the streets of New York, everything the streets had to offer both negative and positive. We grew up in that survival mode. When the Civil Rights came through and you had the rioting and everything else, there were a lot of conflicts with the police, conflicts with everything. I, as a kid, would see the police abuse Puerto Ricans, basically because of cultural differences. In hindsight, I could see the ignorance of a police officer not

understanding, or interpreting incorrectly the actions, the body language and all of that. So I grew up in a very different mode. Because I was educated, and I did very well in school, I was offered a lot of opportunities because of that. But, on the other hand, my life was still very much the life of somebody who grew up in the street.

By the time I went to Fordham University, Fidel, Carmelo, Miguel oh, I could go on, Peter Pagan, they were dead.

LD: These were friends of yours?

RO: Yes, friends that I grew up with since kindergarten. We went to school together.

I went to school with a lot of different people, like African Americans and Italians. A lot of Italians, right after the eighth grade, went to work in their family business. [pause] It was a place where, as a kid growing up, I very much was dealing with all this. I got into fights by the time I was in the second grade. I had lived a whole life experience by the time I was in the eighth grade, with fights, being mugged, and getting my butt kicked. I had done the whole thing.

But, then, on the other hand, I did so well in school that I was offered a lot of opportunities. In high school, I was actually the top student for three years in a row. I was offered scholarships. I picked Fordham because they offered me the most money, but I also had offers from Columbia University, NYU [New York University], University of Southern California, UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles]. I didn't get turned down by anybody. But I had no support system. My parents were very poor. My parents didn't even tell any of us to go to college because they didn't think it was possible. They just wanted us to get out of high school, get a job working for the housing authority, be a bus driver, get a nice city job, do twenty years, and get a nice pension. When I filled out applications for college, they knew nothing about it. I did it on my own—although there because I did well in school, there were people - teachers and advisors - that just kept promoting me.

LD: Sure. It's what a lot of immigrant kids have to go through, because their parents aren't familiar with the system.

RO: Yes, right.

Because those high school years were very important, and I always did very well in school and got to meet a lot of folks, that's when my views started getting shaped, and I became more involved in politically.

I majored in history at Fordham and sociology, but, before that in high school, I would read the entire history book in the first week of school for the whole year. By my senior year, I used to be cutting not just history but biology and everything else. I used to be cutting out some of my history classes, and when I'd get busted by the dean of the school, the teacher said, "What am I going to do with the guy? He gets perfect grades all the

time. He knows his stuff." But history became real important to me, because it sort of empowered me.

When I got harassed by cops in high school, I would frustrate the hell out of them. A couple of times, they kicked my ass. They would come into the park and harass my buddies and even though I knew they were looking for José because José just ripped off somebody or whatever, they were harassing all of us. I'd be the first one to tell them, "You can't do that. If you've got a problem with me, come on. I'll walk to the station. You can book me." They would get *furious*. Otherwise, I'd tell them, "Get lost." I carried that on through college.

When I went to Fordham University, in my class—now remember, this is 1970—there were seventeen Latinos. I don't mean Puerto Ricans. I mean Latinos. There were Dominicans. There were Mexicans. We were all different, but the majority were Puerto Ricans because we were the majority. But it was just seventeen.

LD: Out of a class of?

RO: Oh, I don't know. What would it be? The freshman class at Fordham University? Thousands.

LD: Wow.

RO: Do you know what I mean?

LD: Sure.

RO: I don't even have a clue, but it's a big university. It's not as big as the U of M [University of Minnesota], but for a private university, it's large enough. It's a huge campus.

One of the roles I played, number one, is that I became a sort of in-house advisor, because I learned how to fill out applications. How should we say this? I learned the nuances of what information to provide for the questions.

LD: Gotcha.

[laughter]

RO: Some of my friends would come in, I remember Miss Sadie. She was a Dominican. Her dad owned a successful bodega on the Upper West Side. She said, "Oh, my God. I lost a thousand dollars because I filled out this." I said, "You filled out the application? Well, you gave them the wrong information. This is the information you should have given them." So it was that kind of thing.

LD: Sure.

RO: I had to do it because, you know, my parents didn't own a *bodega*. I needed to make sure I needed to hit the ball on first pitch. I needed to make sure that whatever I turned in was tight.

LD: There was no leeway.

RO: No. I had no room for error.

LD: Yes.

RO: For instance, I claimed myself independent right away. I moved out. When I was asked, I would say, "I don't even know where my parents are. Let's get down to the nitty gritty. I'm independent. I'm eighteen years old." That ends the discussion. History ciet

LD: Right.

RO: [laughter]

LD: I know what you mean.

RO: Then we started El Pueblo, which was our student organization. One of the things that we fought for was to start a tutoring program. It was a typical college, and they had their fraternities and people had different clubs. They had all these clubs and they got money from the budgets. Of course, we had seventeen individuals, so we started El Pueblo, and we wanted money from the school for our club budget, and we started tutoring programs. At the time that Fordham University was built, the campus sat at the time out in the boonies of New York. The Grand Concourse used to be an upper middle class place. By the time I got there, it was already a poor neighborhood. We wanted to start tutoring programs for kids in the grammar schools. So that was one of our projects.

Don't forget that the Civil Rights Movement is still going on. My first year was 1970 to 1971, and the Civil Rights Movement was a big thing.

We've got the Vietnam War, and don't forget that I turned eighteen in January of my senior year. When I went to the draft board, I went there and I said, "I'm still in school," and they gave me a 1-SH. That's a school deferment. By the time I went to Fordham, there was no longer the draft board. They had the lottery.

LD: Right.

RO: I remember in January the list would come out. Depending on what number came out, you would know if you were going in or not. It didn't make a difference if you were in school. I went to school with a lot of folks of all colors. It's one thing to get drafted after you do six months. It's another thing to be drafted after you've done three and a half years and you're in your last semester.

LD: Oh, my God.

RO: There's nothing you can do about it. You go. There's no deferments unless you cut your foot off or something. There was no draft. There was the lottery. There was the Civil Rights Movement. Then within the institution, we were fighting to become a legitimate voice.

LD: Yes.

RO: So we asked for a meeting with the dean. I was one of several folks. Of course, I had some colleagues who went to Fordham that I met at Fordham. Most of us did not grow up together. We came from different parts of the city. Dean George W. Shea, I still remember his name. One of my colleagues got over excited and took a chair and banged it over his head.

LD: [chuckles]

RO: We all got suspended. This was in my second semester. We all got suspended—well, not really suspended. We were already registered, so we didn't get suspended academically. There was about four or five of us, because we were the leaders. Even though we didn't do the act—one individual did it—we couldn't come on the campus until we had permission. They would notify the campus police and we would be charged with trespassing. We could not attend class. Teachers were told that we weren't allowed on the property so we couldn't attend classes. At that time--that's how they do it now—Fordham went on the semester system, and so it was full credits, of course. Sixteen credits is full time, and so we each had four courses, sixteen credits. We got suspended a little before halfway. My peers attended our classes and took notes.

LD: Wow.

RO: All of that got cleared up towards the end, and then when we came in, we took the exams. We studied off the notes. We missed all but the last class. We had our peers take on an extra class to cover the four of us.

LD: So you guys were really organized. Even though you were only seventeen students, it sounds like it was a very tight, well organized group.

RO: Well, you know, it had to do with quality of the seventeen people who got into Fordham University.

LD: Sure.

RO: Do you know what I mean?

LD: Yes.

RO: Seventeen people with similar backgrounds coming from poor places...

LD: You guys related to each other.

RO: Yes, we knew how to struggle. Women and men, we all grew up in tough neighborhoods. The women were just as tough as the men. They didn't take any shit. They were just as smart. There were seventeen of us, and we were organized to that point. It's funny you should say, "Organized." The next year, it grew. We got more Latinos in.

LD: Sure.

RO: I don't know what the number was, thirty-four. Maybe it doubled. Thirty or twenty-eight, whatever it was. We started and we had established El Pueblo, a student group. We got going the tutoring for the kids. The issue was to make Fordham accessible. Fordham was not accessible, which came through when I got elected Ramsey County Commissioner. One of the things I said is - one of my mantras is - "I will make county government accessible to *all* folks." It's really no different. I'm still talking the same language - just in a different place.

LD: Right.

RO: We then started building coalitions with different groups. We became part of the coalition that took over the student council. Now taking over the student council was important, because the budget was given to the student council. The student council decided how the budget was split up.

LD: This was your sophomore year?

RO: Sophomore year.

LD: What were your aims? What did you want to do with that money or with the council?

RO: What we did with the student council then is we started, first of all, it provided seed money to do fundraisers at the university.

The missing piece here now, which goes back to when I was in high school, is salsa. My mother did not grow up with salsa. Now, I'm not taking away from other countries. There's the Afro-Cuban. There's the jazz and all that. But salsa really comes from my neighborhood.

LD: Yes.

RO: Whether you're talking about Tito Puente or whether you're talking about Ricardo Rey or you're talking about you name it, all the way to Marc Anthony, you're talking about people that come from my part of New York City. When salsa first came out, I played—I don't have the records anymore—the tapes, and it's very much not Afro-American from Cuba, but African American and Latin together. That was the beginning of what we call salsa. We had the Fania All-Stars.

Anyway, what we did with that budget was to start bringing our culture into the university. That was the seed money. So now we didn't just have dances that were bringing in the Motown folks. We had dances that brought in Willie Colon.

LD: Wow.

RO: That's how we started having an influence, but it wasn't just that. At that time, Herman Badillo was the deputy mayor of New York under Ed Koch. "Here is a guy who is a lawyer and an accountant, an official, and he should be teaching at this university." We tried to say, "We want more of our folks teaching and they're qualified," that kind of stuff, very rudimentary, very basic.

LD: Right.

RO: Then, of course, eventually we really got tied into ending the war.

LD: Tell me about how you got influenced in the war protests.

RO: By the time I was a sophomore and junior at Fordham, my brother, who was a year and a half younger than me, was already in the Army.

LD: Was he drafted? Or was it the lottery?

RO: He actually was younger than me. I think he didn't want to go to school, so he joined.

He was in the service. But there were a lot of folks I grew up with that came back in wheel chairs, and they were not mentally healthy. That was kind of scary. You'd say, "Oh, let's go to the Palladium" or "Let's go to Hunts Point in the Bronx," which was a Latin nightclub. They'd seem okay. You end up in a bloody mess. Or you'd come back, even if things would go fine at the dance, you'd come back and sit down and, suddenly, they'd freak out on you. They didn't know who you were. You were the enemy. You were somebody else. So there was a lot of suffering. A lot of people didn't come back.

LD: Yes.

RO: I had a friend that was hung in a Marine camp, probably by other marines, because of the racial issues. Remember, all this stuff was still going on.

LD: Sure. Yes.

RO: Those were all the things going on at Columbia University and Fordham University. They were sort of tied together during a lot of the protests. They were the two big schools. Well, NYU was big, too. But we were the two more activist schools. So, you know, it's what you see. We were in things like Students for Democratic Action. Remember, there's more than one thing going on for us. There's the Civil Rights Movement. There's the whole movement with Puerto Ricans asserting their identity, which is separate from the Civil Rights Movement.

LD: Right.

RO: Then there's the war. I would say that in the Vietnam War Latinos were probably the biggest ethnic group.

LD: Honest, I can't even imagine that melting pot of energy. It just seems like such an incredible time to kind of be growing up and to be becoming an adult, you know.

RO: You know what? Even with my own kids, I try to infuse into them a lot of political and social activism. My daughter [Gabriela] is politically active with me, especially in my campaigns. She volunteers, and she's done wonderful things, whether it's working at food shelves for many years, not just for a little while, and working with kids that are terminally ill and teaching them until they die. She's just done a lot of things. I could keep on going. She's a middle class kid with two parents that have influence.

When I was maybe nine years old, and my mom and I and my dad and my brother Luis and my sister in the stroller would be taking a walk down the street and we, somehow, went past our boundaries and you have somebody say, "Hey, you fucking spics, you don't belong here. Get back to your side," that has an impact. It's one thing if somebody said that to me now. If my daughter would hear that, my daughter would probably say, "Hey, Dad, the poor guy doesn't know, don't do anything to him," because she perceives me as more powerful than that individual.

LD: Right.

RO: My perception was that my dad and my mom were weaker.

LD: Yes. Yes.

RO: There's a difference in the psychology. When that happens, my daughter, and even my son [Emilio], says, "Let them go, Dad. Do not go crazy."

LD: [laughter]

RO: "Let them go. Do not pick up your phone and have this person taken care of."

[laughter]

LD: Do not go Lower East Side.

RO: Yes, do not go Lower East Side, exactly. So there's a real difference in psychology. They grow empowered because they think that that's the way it is. While for me, it was a different thing.

LD: You really had to fight for it.

RO: Yes, you had to get empowered. It wasn't just there. It just didn't happen.

LD: Yes.

Tell me about the end of your college years and then what you did after that.

RO: The end of my college years the war was over, number one. Number two, I was graduating. I graduated on time. I could have graduated ahead of time if I didn't get into all this other stuff. I graduated on time. I was accepted to graduate school. First of all, I was going to teach, but then I got accepted to grad school. I started my MBA [Master of Business Administration] at Long Island University and I started working. I worked for the New York State Department of Mental Health.

That's when the Willowbrook Consent Decree in New York took place [April 30, 1975]. In New York City, we had this facility on Staten Island. Just think of the U of M campus and think of that as all hospital wards that just warehoused—at that time, they called them mentally retarded—all kinds of mentally ill and developmentally disabled people. I was working for the New York State Department of Mental Health. This Consent Decree basically meant that the courts took over. A lawsuit was filed and the Consent Decree is an agreement by all parties that this is how we're going to fix the problem. The way we're going to fix the problem is to close down this huge warehouse of inhumanity. That became the model across the country, including Minnesota, for closing down all these state hospitals and integrating the people back into the community. That's why you have group homes and you have all these other things that are so familiar to us now. But that wasn't true in 1974.

New York City is made up of five counties. I'm from Manhattan County. They put together an interdisciplinary team that included a lawyer and a psychologist. I was the community liaison. What we had to do was to go into that state hospital. So I worked on Staten Island.

I've worked in all five boroughs in New York on one job or another, and when I was in Fordham, I lived in the South Bronx. That was a whole different culture that I learned there, because even though there were Puerto Ricans it was still different. It was different people and different ethnic mixes from different areas.

Down at the Willowbrook State Hospital we identified everybody. If Rafael Ortega is born in Manhattan, that comes to our case load. Then, we had to assess them and do psychological evaluation, and an IQ [intelligence quotient] test, the whole works. The first thing was to identify them. Well, while we were doing this, there were a lot of Latinos whose IQ was higher than mine.

But they were put there because they had behavioral problems, they didn't speak English, they acted out, and all that. And it was not just Latinos – there were African Americans, white people, Jewish people, Italian people. That's how it was done in those days. But there were a lot of Latinos there. They were not developmentally delayed. Their IQ was normal or above normal. They had become *functionally* retarded. In other words, they'd been there since they were seven and eight years old.

LD: Oh, my God.

RO: And now they were nineteen and twenty and twenty-two and twenty-three and twenty-four, and they'd been locked up all their lives. Then, after we identified all these people, the job was done. That took about a year or a year and a half. The job was done, but now what? The court says, "Now all these people have to go to their counties. They're going to be responsible within their counties, because we're closing down. It's not the state." Okay, where do they go? There's nothing there.

Then I was hired by the community services and I went out into the communities and started developing services, getting contracts with people to set up group homes. A lot of these people not only became institutionally retarded, but also physically, because, after while, a lot of them didn't do anything. They didn't have a regimen of exercise. So we had to hire recreation therapists, physical therapists, speech therapists. Some of them were developmentally disabled, so some of them needed to go into group homes. Some of them couldn't feed themselves, so those would go into smaller institutions. They really needed what you call high-skilled nursing. There would be a skilled facility, intermediate facility, and then a community facility. With supportive services, they could be like you and me. They could be dishwashers at a restaurant.

LD: Right. Functional.

RO: Functional. So I did that for about a year and a half, and I developed services in Manhattan to deal with these folks. I did that until 1977 or 1978.

LD: And what did you do then?

RO: Then I came to grad school here.

LD: Ah, to the U of M?

RO: Yes.

LD: And why did you come here and for what program?

RO: I did my master's in social work and public health.

LD: At the Humphrey Institute?

RO: No, at the School of Social Work and Public Health.

LD: Why Minnesota?

RO: Because they recruited me, and they paid the whole bill, to be quite frank.

LD: You had never traveled out here before?

RO: No.

LD: What was your first impression of Minnesota?

RO: Well, I came here at the wrong time. I froze to death. I came to visit first and it was really, really cold. The one thing I remember is my Achilles heel was always my feet. Now, even below zero doesn't bother me as long as my feet are warm. I have a high tolerance except I can remember my feet always being cold, I mean really cold. That's all I can remember.

LD: [laughter]

RO: I don't care where I was. I could be in this office and my feet would be cold. It was like right up front. I didn't even really enjoy anything a hundred percent, not a good meal or anything, because my feet were always freezing.

LD: [laughter]

RO: In New York, I probably had little thin socks. It didn't register. [laughter]

LD: So you came in 1978?

RO: Yes.

LD: You started your program. When did you finish that?

RO: I finished in 1981.

LD: What was that time like while you were studying and getting your master's? Where did you live, first of all?

RO: My brother was here already. My brother Luis was teaching at Humboldt High School in Saint Paul.

LD: Oh.

RO: When I first came, I moved to the West Side [Saint Paul].

LD: Why had he come here?

RO: Oh! that's a missing piece of the picture. My brother entered Fordham. He was a freshman when I was a senior. He had done his years in the service. He got discharged and used his V.A. [Veterans Administration] benefits to go to Fordham. He had his V.A. benefits paying, because he was a Vietnam Era veteran. He was a freshman.

So if you fast forward, he graduated and that was the year that New York City went broke. Remember? It was all over the papers. The Federal Government had to bail out New York.

LD: Yes.

RO: That was the year that New York literally went broke. In other words, it was bankrupt. It wasn't about a budget deficit; it was bankrupt, and it needed a bailout from the Federal Government. There were no jobs. *I* went to Fordham University with David Rivera, who is now a lawyer and wanted my brother to work for the state attorney general here in Minnesota. There were other people that we knew that had come through here, had lived here, and moved back.

In any event—my dad had died in 1977—I told my brother, Luis, "You're not going to get a job here in New York." So he came here. Then I came in 1978, but I really didn't come so much to stay, quite frankly, even though the Dean of the University of Minnesota Graduate Programs, Dr. Helen Yessner, was really hounding me to come to school here. I went to an interview. Even at the interview, she said, "Well, you know, your grades aren't as good as they should be." I said, "You know, if you'd been involved in all the social action stuff that I've been involved in, your grades wouldn't be good either." I told her, "You probably have some other student that's done much better in college than I have, so I suggest you take them." And I got up to leave.

LD: [laughter]

RO: She said, "Wait a minute. Slow down." I wasn't that anxious to stay, you know. She kept hounding me. I literally walked into the U of M grad program two weeks before it started.

My brother Luis and I were in our car heading back home – and remember, I had a leave of absence from my job. I was a permanent employee at the state. I had a leave of absence. My bosses liked me. They were paying for my grad school - my MBA at Long

Island University. I had no real sense of direction. I knew I was going to finish school one way or the other, so that was a done deal. Politically, I was always active, and I was always active in New York City. As a matter of fact, when I ran for office, most of my friends said, "You should have stayed home. You could have run. You would have been elected from here. Why go all the way over there?" [to Minnesota] That's nowhere from their perspective. That's a cow town.

LD: [chuckles]

RO: When I came here, I said, "What the hell? Let me knock it off." So what I did, to be honest with you. In my two-year focus, I went into the school of social work. I did eighteen credits a quarter—at that time, it was the thing—even though I had money for the two full years. Again, coming from where I come from in the streets, I don't trust anybody. My brother Mark, my youngest brother, who was in the Marine Corps eleven years, worked for the L.A. [Los Angeles, California] police, the Imperial County Sheriff's Department, and an ambulance chauffer. I tell somebody, "I don't trust cops, not even my brother."

LD: [laughter]

RO: I mean that's how I grew up. Cops were not my friends.

LD: Right.

RO: By the same token, it's very similar with the school. Even though it was a two-year program, I hedged my bets by doing two year's work in four quarters.

LD: Wow.

RO: So then I had money left over, and I went into the School of Public Health. But I already had a bird in the hand. I already had one master's.

Talking about how it influences you, that's what poverty does. That's how you think.

LD: You finished one program. You went into the next with the idea that when you're done, you're planning to return?

RO: Well, yes, because I still had a job in New York. With the leave of absence, they just kept renewing it. People liked me. I got away with murder. They hated and loved me, you know.

LD: [chuckles]

RO: Remember when I told you I was in community service and I went to develop programs?

LD: Yes.

RO: Well, I did a really good job. Sometimes, I took more than an hour for lunch. They would come in and my boss would write me up. If you get written up three times you're in trouble. But I had done such a good job in developing all these services, my boss would many times tell me, "I'm going to have to write you up, and that means you're on probation, and you could get fired." I said, "Don't worry about it. That's okay. Write me up. I want you to protect you. You protect your job. You've got a family and kids." He was a psychologist, Doctor Rocco Menta. He used to tell me, "You can't be a jack-of-all trades. You're not going to be successful that way, Rafael. You've got to be an expert in something. You can't be a jack-of-all-trades." I didn't buy into that either, because I think being a jack-of-all trades has served me well. Anyway, the point is that I had developed good relationships and they kept fixing the paperwork. They said, "Great. You've got a graduate degree, even better. Come back."

Oh! I've got to tell you something. I'm sorry. I said I'd focus on grad school and I took eighteen credits, and that is actually true. But, during grad school—I don't know how this happened, because I was brand new—people were organizing CLUES [Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio], and they asked me to come to a meeting. I showed up at the first meeting and these are people I didn't know very often. I think the best person I knew there were people like Marilyn Vigil and Roy Garza. Maybe I'd met them two or three times, but all of a sudden I was on the first board of CLUES while I was in grad school. I did put so much energy into my graduate studies to get out. That always was in the forefront, but I did spend a lot of time organizing CLUES.

LD: Wow.

RO: CLUES started out initially about advocacy, education, and training. We were about mental health services in the Hispanic community brought from an advocacy perspective. In other words, we've got to get Ramsey County and Hennepin County to do it.

LD: Right.

RO: The issue slightly turned while I was in grad school because they weren't doing it. So then we started an organization to deliver the services and advocate for the contracts. When I got out of grad school, I did have intentions of going back. But I had invested two years of my life in starting CLUES, incorporating it, starting it and getting it going. In the beginning we did advocacy. We met with the Ramsey county commissioners. We did a lot of education and training. For example, Ramsey County and Hennepin County would pay the organization—that's me—to do in-service training. Don't forget, we were graduate students. Marilyn was much older. She was already a professor. She was Human Rights commissioner and everything else. When I came out of grad school, there weren't too many MSW's [Master of Social Work]. While I was still in grad school I was on the board of CLUES. It had rented space and started opening its doors, but it got into trouble because it couldn't find anybody to work for them. So I became one of the first counselors.

LD: Wow.

RO: I did that for a year, and, then, I said, "Okay, guys." They had hired an executive director, a secretary, and two graduate-level counselors, of which I was one. But I had no intentions of staying long term. I just wanted to get the organization going. I started saying, "We've got to look for somebody to replace me," and we did. I said, "Fine." "What are you going to do?" They said, "I don't know."

Then I went to work for the Minnesota Council of Churches, which is another story. Folks asked me to apply for the job. At that time, it was Hispanic Ministries for the Minnesota Council of Churches. I went to the job interview, and there was the bishop of the Lutheran Church, the Presbytery Executive of the Presbyterians, and then Anne Kanten, who was the commissioner of agriculture for the state of Minnesota for Governor Rudy Perpich at that time. I didn't know who she was. Anyway, they started interviewing, and they brought in a guy from the East Coast, a guy from the West Coast, and then me from here as the final three. In the final interview—I know because this is what Anne Kanten told me, and also the Presbyterian. They said, "You've got the job." They asked two questions — "What do I think about confrontation and chaos?" Then I said, "I love confrontation and I embrace chaos." They said, "Why do you embrace chaos?" I said, "Because without chaos, we'll never change anything. And if you're not confrontational, then what good is chaos?" They said, "That sold us. We didn't want the typical stuff." I did that until 1985.

In 1985, CLUES was in trouble again. The person they hired to be executive director left. So they interviewed and they asked me to take the job. I just wanted to keep it alive. I had invested a lot, and I was kind of proud. Here's something I started in Minnesota.

LD: Sure.

RO: When I came to CLUES, they had a \$80,000 budget and they had four people working there. When I left, we're talking about millions of dollars in budget – three or four million dollars, and we had a quarter of a million dollars in reserves. I had offers. I had close to fifteen people working in Minneapolis and twenty-five working in the programs for the seniors, and in chemical dependency programs. We started with the mental health that was there, but the next thing I started was the education and employment, and I got the corporate sector to buy into that. I tried to unite all the other Hispanic organizations, and the way I did that was that I told them, "I won't touch any of your funding." Basically, our education program became so big that what we know now as the Minnesota Literacy Program, if you look at the history, they existed back when I was executive. Then, they went bankrupt. We literally were the biggest literacy organization.

LD: CLUES was?

RO: Yes, at that time.

LD: Wow.

RO: We started the education, the employment, the chemical dependency, and started a CETA program [Comprehensive Employment and Training Act]. I was director from 1985 to 1995 when I got elected and came here.

Then, there were the people. Gloria Perez, who is now executive director of the Jeremiah Program. She worked for me. Oh, my God, I think there must be like seven or eight people that worked for me that now are executive directors of organizations.

I'm also an independent licensed clinical social worker, which means that anybody that wants to be a licensed social worker, everything all the way, I don't need to be supervised. Everything comes under me. So while I was there, I probably licensed fifteen people.

LD: As mental health workers?

RO: As licensed clinical workers, which is important because, believe me, in today's world of insurance and third party payments like Medicaid, you cannot get reimbursement unless you are licensed.

LD: Right.

What made you stay? I know that you had made that commitment and you had invested a lot of time into starting this organization, CLUES. But was there something else that made you stay? There are needs in New York just like there are needs in Minnesota.

RO: *I know* and, believe me, it was not only that. New York is still where I'm from. Even when I take my kids now, I feel like I come from New York. It's never left. It's still my town. It's the psychology of the thing. It's not just because I grew up there. A lot of people grow up there. It's because at the time I grew up, I owned those streets. After a certain point, I wasn't fearful of anything. Nobody hurt me. I earned my respect at a very basic neighborhood level, and then I went to work.

Like I told you, I wasn't fearful of losing my job. I would say, "Hey, cover your butt. Write me up." I felt confident. I could go to work in a million places. This is New York. I've been working since I was in ninth grade. [sigh] I've had a lot of jobs. I've been a bank teller. I worked for a clothing store. While in high school, I was wearing very expensive suits because I worked in this store. It was a high-buck store. The owners liked me. I was well dressed. I used to work for Metropolitan Life Insurance while I was in high school. I used to, literally, call up Chemical Bank. They would say, "Sure, Rafael, come on back." I would jump—if you look at my work history—from Barney's (Men's Clothing Store) to Metropolitan Life Insurance to Chemical Bank. I'd rotate them. They'd call; they'd take me back in a minute.

LD: You were confident, yes.

RO: I had that confidence.

LD: Was there anything that made you go from the streets like a fish in water to Minnesota?

RO: You know what? I'll tell you what it was. I know the time, but I don't know why. I was coming from New York and I was flying in. I see the metro area. I see the city. Something clicked and I said, "I'm going to stay here." I don't know if I got that comfort level equivalent to back home where I said, "You know what? These are my streets, too."

LD: Yes.

RO: I can't explain why. There was no factor, no single factor. I just remember flying in here in that plane and having sort of this sense of comfort, "You don't need that struggle anymore."

LD: In those ten years at CLUES, obviously you saw the beginnings of what would be a huge spike in the Latino community.

RO: Yes.

LD: You mentioned that by the time you left, there was a clinic in Minneapolis. When my family first came to Minnesota, there were no Latinos in Minneapolis. So tell me a little bit about that, about the growth and the changes that you started to see in the Latino community.

RO: I can tell you stories about the Minnesota Council of Churches and my three years there, and the changes there and the battles I had there. They fired everybody, including my two bosses, and the director of finance. They kept me. As a matter of fact, when I went to CLUES, the Minnesota Council said, "We'll make you Associate Executive director of the Council." They had already given me every year a month's vacation and a month sabbatical, so I was only working ten months a year if I wanted to. I had an expense account with their credit card and they were willing to pay for my doctorate studies. I turned that down to go to CLUES.

When I went to CLUES, my boss came and took me to Forepaugh's [Restaurant, Saint Paul] to eat. He walked into CLUES and said, "Come back. What are you doing here? This is going nowhere. You don't need to be here. Come back to the Council. You can do more under the Council." I remember telling Lowell Sims, "Lowell, the Minnesota Council of Churches is already set into being controlled and influenced by you. This little agency, I'm going to build from scratch and make it the number one." It's all about advocacy. Now, I needed skills. I was good at finances. I was good at fundraising. I'm good at financing and accounting. I understand how things work. We've got a million-

dollar budget. I know, quite frankly, and I'm very good at it. The role is the same. I've been an advocate from Fordham all the way. To be a driving force is to be an advocate.

LD: Right.

RO: But I use different tools. I've got to be a good manager, a good politician, a good finance person, and a good fundraiser, but that's not the goal in itself.

LD: Right, right.

RO: I'm advocating for something.

But to get to your question about the growth of the community. During those ten years, you've got to understand that I managed a good organization and put in the underpinnings of good management and salary structures. When I first started at CLUES, I was the chief clinician, the director of finance, the supervisor, the executive director. All of those things became separate jobs that I hired people to do.

I put the underpinnings in place. The first four years, I worked hard to build that structure. But since they were *mine*, I understood the books better than the guy that was director of finance. He was an MBA accountant. I was a clinician, so I knew, but I was free to advocate. It was very simple. The senior's program at Our Lady of Guadalupe [Catholic Church] went broke, so I took that over.

LD: Yes.

RO: When I took that over, I started enhancing the services around it and providing transportation for the seniors, bought them new vans, new buses, and had a full time driver. I had two buses at one time. I started enhancing that piece, and built education and employment service because they were needed. Then—don't ask me to operate a computer today; I can get to my email and all of that—but I understood that technology was going to be important. Every worker had a desktop computer. After a while, a very short while, within the first year of me putting a computer on everybody's desk, I connected into a network. Remember, this is like 1989 and 1990. This is at the very beginning. *Very* few organizations were there with me. *No* Latino organization was there, and most white organizations were not there.

So what started happening? I asked my education people, my employment people, my community development people, my mental health people, my Zero to Five people, my AIDS people, to use it, and the data became centralized. We started reading the data. I had in the first year, 800 people from Minneapolis, not repeats, not number of visits, but 800 individual people coming. Interesting. The second year, it was 2,000 people. I don't want to put anybody down, but they were coming to us because we provided good services.

LD: Sure.

RO: That means there were Minneapolis people taking the bus all the way to the West Side of Saint Paul. They were coming consistently, and they were coming in for multiple services. So if someone is coming because they have a chemical dependency problem, then they're dealing with the kids and family therapy. So now those are multiple services even though it includes some of the same individuals. That's when I needed to go to Minneapolis and say, "I'm serving these folks." Even the United Way told me, "You don't belong here. Stay on your side of the river." The corporate sector really backed me up.

Now, don't forget, simultaneously, because I was a good advocate on the service side, I also was sought after by political figures. It became evident that CLUES was a powerful organization in terms of serving people. So I could advise, "You could go and talk to Judge [Salvador] Rosas. I'll tell you where to start."

I was there in my office at CLUES, and it had to be 1989 - it could have been 1988. I was the chair of the Spanish Speaking Affairs Council for a few years. All of these things overlap the same period, which is why I don't talk about them in a time line.

Anyway, the Spanish Speaking Affairs was going through a lot of problems. That was the time when people were seriously considering cutting it. Well, Governor Perpich asked me to help make it functional. I told him, "Under certain conditions." Well, I did that. I was the chair for a few years and really made it functional. As a matter of fact, with same budget, we stopped driving and taking days to get places. We flew to places instead. We had retreats to do strategic planning. I was already the executive director at CLUES for four or five years.

From that, the Governor then asked me to help start the Torture Center. As a matter of fact—I don't have it here but I have it somewhere in a box—he gave me an award for helping start the Center for Victims of Torture.

LD: Yes, wow.

RO: So I helped Perpich then. That was a pet project of his.

I had resources because, simultaneously, I sat on the Board of the Minneapolis Foundation. I was a trustee of the Minneapolis Foundation for five or six years, and of the Minnesota Foundation. A lot of it happened, you know, because one influences the other and I had built up CLUES in a very short time, in four years. So I wasn't even halfway into my ten-year tenure when I was knocking on doors. I literally was negotiating all the contracts for Ramsey and Hennepin Counties saying, "You're not paying us for the service we do. I could close all my doors by March, and I would have more than fulfilled my contract. So stop treating us like third-class citizens. If not, I don't want anymore." With United Way, I wrote them out a check. They said, "Keep it." I said, "I don't want to be a United Way agency unless you start paying. I had the corporate sector really supporting me. I'd tell them, "I'm going into battle with the United Way. I'm going to do

this and I need backup. I'm going into Minneapolis." Honeywell and the McKnight Foundation said, "One hundred thousand for three years. Get it going," literally, on my word, before I even wrote a proposal. They said, "Make it for \$100,000 each year for three years, \$300,000." And I delivered. So every time I delivered, it was just a matter of being smart, making sure I kept my word, and providing credible services. They had ways of telling. But, anyway, because of all of this I got on foundation boards. Politicians wanted to make sure that CLUES had input into how the world should run.

So after those things, I started pressuring Perpich for more Latinos to be appointed. I was being a real pain in the ass about it. He put me on the Appointment Commission, but I wasn't getting anywhere with that. I met a lot of good friends, but, you know, the pie had been cut up and I was the new kid. I had enough of words. I didn't give a hoot about that stuff. Anyway, I pissed off Perpich one time and he said, "If you care so much about your people, meet me in my office at the State Capitol at twelve o'clock midnight."

LD: [chuckles] A little ominous.

RO: I was there at twelve o'clock. I walked out of there at three o'clock with twenty appointments.

Two weeks later, my secretary said to me, "The Governor is here and wants to see you." I thought she was joking with me. I said, "Tell him to wait. I'm busy!"

LD: [chuckles]

RO: She said, "No. Rafael, it is the Governor" I said, "Yes, I know. The Governor, tell him to wait." There was a knock on the door, and it opened, and Governor Perpich is there. He comes into my office at CLUES on the West Side and he said, "You wanted a judge? Pick your judge. I have an opening for Ramsey County." And that was Sal Rosas.

LD: Yes, yes.

RO: Sal was the executive director of Centro Legal at that time.

LD: Right.

RO: I called and I said, "Sal, come on over to my office. The Governor is here. You're going to be appointed a judge." I won't tell you what he said.

LD: [chuckles]

RO: I said, "Sal, if you're not here in ten minutes, I'm going to go to the next name." I said something like that. I said, "I'm going to go to somebody else and you're going to blow it." He said, "Are you serious? Man, I was playing tennis, like I'm in my shorts and all sweaty. I'm going to go home and change." I said, "No. If you're not here in ten minutes, I've got to have somebody else. He's not going to wait for you to take a shower

and put on perfume." So he showed up to my office. The Governor said, "I want to talk to him." He kicks me out of my office. Ten minutes later, he comes out and he said, "Rafael, meet your new judge."

LD: Wow.

RO: Sal Rosas got appointed in my office, and never went through any screening or anything.

Then Irene Gomez got appointed in Minneapolis. So I got two judges out of Perpich.

LD: This is all kind of in the middle of your tenure at CLUES.

RO: It had to be 1988 or 1989, so I was at CLUES only three and a half years, maybe.

LD: Let's kind of fast forward just a little bit. You're there at CLUES. You've built it up. You're coming up on...

RO: I haven't even built up CLUES to what it was six year later. I'm halfway there. [laughter]

LD: You're halfway there. Let's say you've been at CLUES for a while. I'm just interested in the transition that led you to come here and be an elected official. What was that transition about? I don't know if we have to fill in the gap in there.

RO: Well, first of all, remember I told you that all kinds of politicians were now courting me for a couple of reasons. Not only did I bring CLUES into the mainstream, but it wasn't just a Hispanic agency...

That's the other thing that I think runs through all this from the time when I was in high school. I grew up in such a multicultural and diverse community that I didn't concentrate on developing my leadership among Puerto Ricans. I was trying to be everybody's leader. The Italian, the Jew, the Polish, the Lithuanian, they all said, "You know what? Rafael knows." I got respect from all of them in the streets. I got respect from all of them in the classroom. So I never saw myself as a Puerto Rican leader in New York or a Hispanic leader in Minnesota. Now, did I have an affinity for my community? I want to help it. But it wasn't intending to be a leader only of the Hispanic community.

LD: Right, right.

RO: You know what? I'm going to put it very simply. When I was growing up, my mother always thought that after we did school, we would move to Puerto Rico. I said, "Why would we move to Puerto?" especially after my dad died. "We're New Yorkers." My mother said, "Ah, but over there, you could do this. You could do that." I said to her, "But, Mom, you know what? I'm not a Puerto Rican. I'm really a New Yorker. Why do I want to be the governor of Puerto Rico instead of the governor of New York?"

[laughter]

LD: Yes.

RO: Okay?

LD: Yes, yes.

RO: It's the same.

LD: Sure.

RO: Why do I want to leave? I never joined the Young Lords. I had an affinity with them. I helped them with their lunch programs. But I always felt, "No, no! Give me a bigger group."

LD: Yes, the broader issue, the broader understanding.

RO: Yes, yes, give me a bigger group. It's the same thing over here, you know.

You asked me. I'm going to get to your question.

Now, it's 1988, 1989. City Council Member Jim Scheibel is running for mayor of Saint Paul. He asked me for help. (Now State Senator) Sandy Pappas is running for state representative. She asked me for help, because now I'm not just the head of CLUES. If we could get there, I could take you to the bars in Chisholm [Minnesota] today—I'm not exaggerating—and people would know who I am on the Iron Range.

RO: I could walk in there, and I'm willing to bet you they'd buy me a drink, because I never let anybody pigeonhole me. So with Perpich, I got to learn a lot of the Iron Range relationships that I've kept till today, and now that I'm County Commissioner, even more so because I get to travel all around the state.

I'm on the Board of Directors of the Association of Minnesota Counties. I'm walking the streets all over this state, and people know me. Again, nobody is going to mug me in a political sense or any other sense.

Now, you say, how did I make the transition? Mayor Schiebel got elected and guess what? Bill Finney, who is on the Saint Paul School Board, and who is a police captain, is a candidate for police chief. A couple other people on the committee have a very close relationship, and they help pick the chief. So I advocated for Finney for police chief. Well, the police chief [Mr. Finney] then came to me and said, "I would like you to take my place on the school board." I said, "I don't think so, Bill." He said, "I think the board would vote you in very easily." He left in the middle of his term, so the board appoints a successor. I said, "No. I'm not interested in that." You know, I've always been a very

focused person. At CLUES, even though it was doing great in three and a half years, I already had plans for the next two years. I knew the pieces I wanted to add on, because I knew the needs, and I was sitting in the right places, on foundation boards. I had the corporate credibility. So I said, "No."

Then, two years later, State Representative Pappas became State Senator Pappas. She came to me and she said, "How about you taking my place as state representative?" I said, "No, I'm not interested." That's when I asked José Santos or Carlos Mariani if they were interested. José Santos said, "No." Carlos Mariani said, "Yes." He became a state rep.

LD: Right.

RO: That was 1990, and from there I built the political machinery.

LD: In the sense of political allies or?

RO: In the sense of political allies and in terms of the political machinery.

LD: This is four years or five years, perhaps, into your tenure...

RO: Now it's 1990.

LD: Yes.

RO: One of the reasons why I didn't want to do those things was because I didn't think my business was done at CLUES, and the other reason goes back to what I said before: if I went on the school board, I was to be the Hispanic member of the school board.

LD: Yes.

RO: Or I was to be the state representative representing the West Side.

LD: Yes.

RO: But being a county commissioner means representing Highland Park, Mac-Grove [Macalester-Groveland], downtown Saint Paul, all of West Seventh, the West Side, Mounds Park, Dayton's Bluff, the State Capitol, and the neighborhood north of the State Capitol. That's more my playground.

LD: So how did you get there? How did you make that decision?

RO: I can tell you exactly when I made the decision. I was in Boulder, Colorado, visiting family. It was 1992. It was Christmas. I was there for vacation. I had my little girl, Gabriela, who was two years old. I knew that the seat for the Fifth District might come

open in 1995, but the election would take place in 1994. During that week—I'm serious—I decided that in two years I would run for the office.

LD: Why?

RO: Because I had been at CLUES in Saint Paul already for eight years, and the Minneapolis CLUES was already two or three years old. Everything was done. I put money in the reserves every year. I was advocating on the big picture. I didn't want to be the head of CLUES for all my life. First of all, remember that I said way back that accessibility and access were very important. That's my mantra. It's how I came here. Everybody here, all these organizations need access. All kinds of people call me. They're not just Hispanics. Give everybody access! 'You have access. I have problems.' The opportunity to run the organization needs to be for other people, too. If I hold it for thirty years, there could be only two or three people that get that experience.

LD: Right. Right.

RO: So it's part of my stuff. It's part of what I'm about.LD: Is to pass that on?RO: Yes!

LD: To pass that opportunity on?

RO: Yes. The organization is a vehicle. Look, there were only two licensed independent clinical social workers in this state when I began - Marilyn Vigil and myself.

LD: Latinos?

RO: Latinos.

LD: That's crazy

RO: In the next three, four, five years, I don't know now. I've lost track. The people I've licensed, how many people have they licensed?

LD: Right.

RO: For five years, Marilyn and I could claim to a hundred percent all the licensed Latinos in that field. There were only two in the whole state. To me, that's part of my job. It's not just being the president of CLUES. It's also making sure that I get people licensed so they can move on.

LD: So you're in Boulder. You're on vacation.

RO: And I just said, "Two years from now, I have my plans. I'm going to run, I swear to God"

I remember in 1992, my baby was only two years old. By the time I ran, she's a pro. Gabby's done everything. Gabby could run a campaign. I don't have pictures here, but I have them at home. She's done everything. She's made speeches. You know when I went for the endorsement for mayor, which I lost by twelve or fourteen votes, the DFL [Democratic Farmer Labor] endorsement, I called on a Friday night before the convention. Everybody said, "Well, you know what? We think it'd be good if your daughter and your boy make a speech." I said, "Well, my boy could come, but he's too young. He's eleven." Gabby was sixteen. I called her up and I said, "Honey, we want you to make the nominating speech." This was Friday night. She said, "No problem, Dad. You better have somebody write it up, because I'm too busy."

LD: [laughter] That's a pro.

RO: No fear. No nothing. She has less fear—I am very serious—to get in front of 800 or 1,000 people and make a speech than I do.

LD: [chuckles]

RO: Let me tell you, I am basically an extrovert, but I am also a shy person. English wasn't my first language, and I was intimidated in the beginning. I had a lot to overcome in my mind. She doesn't have those barriers. She grew up with it.

LD: Before we jump completely into the political career, tell me a little about your family. Tell me about how many kids you have.

RO: I have Gabriela, who is twenty-one, and a junior at Saint Thomas [University in Saint Paul], and Emilio, who is sixteen and a sophomore at Central High School in Saint Paul. He plays soccer. He's in the IBE Program [Integrated Business and Engineering Honors Program].

LD: IBE? I was IBE, too.

RO: My kids have been low maintenance. I got divorced in 2001. Gabby is my girl. She's always been my girl. We're very close. Gabby does everything, but Emilio has picked up. I just got reelected this past November. Emilio goes lit [literature] dropping with me. He's taking my daughter's place. He sits down and does 1,000 mailings. He licks stamps. He folds paper. Gabby, the first time I ran in 1994, was five years old. She went with me pounding signs. In those times, we had the big iron bars and she helped pound them in. The second time I ran, she was nine years old. By the time she was nine, she didn't want to go door knocking with me. She used to go with me, but just showing her independence, she would go on her own with a volunteer. That volunteer came and told me this story. She said, "Your daughter is awesome. Your daughter is going to beat you if she runs against you."

LD: [laughter]

RO: She's nine years old. If you've done knocking, you know that one person takes one side of the street and the other one takes the other and you try and cover the turf. The volunteer, who is a friend of mine, said, "I'm keeping an eye on her to make sure nothing happens and she doesn't have a bad experience." My opponent is knocking. So my daughter notices - she knows my opponents better than anybody else. To this day, she does. So the opponent is there saying, "I'm running. We think Ortega did this wrong and that wrong." The volunteer said, "Your daughter is so smart." Every brochure I have, and every card, has my kids' pictures on it. So my daughter flips the piece of literature so *her* picture shows.

LD: [laughter]

RO: As the opponent walks out, she says, "I'm here for my dad. My name is Gabriela. I want you to vote for him."

Now, during that same election, I'm home. She walks in and she's angry. She's saying, "Dad! So and so has your opponent's sign." It's a girl that goes to school with her. "I want you to go there right now and make them take it down." I said, "Honey, they've got to a right to choose who they want to support." "No, Dad. Have you talked to her dad?" I said, "I don't think so." She said, "I want you to go there and talk to them right *now*." I went. I talked to the gentleman. I actually told him the story. I said, "You know what? I'm here because my daughter goes to school with your daughter. She's really upset that you have my opponent's sign. I understand that your politics are different from mine, and you have a right to choose, but I'm wondering if you have any questions." When we ended, the guy took down the guy's sign and put mine up. I said, "Thank you, Gabby."

LD: [laughter]

RO: Gabriela, she would get on the phone and call people. She could run a campaign. And she's been in every election ever since.

LD: You decided in 1992, in 1994, I'm going to run. In 1994, you ran. What was that experience like?

RO: Well, quite frankly, the field was quite large, because Ruby Hunt had decided not to run. Ruby Hunt is a legend, one of the first women on the city council. She wasn't the first on the county board, but she was maybe number three or four. She was a women's libber type, you know, supporting women in government and breaking the glass ceiling. She preferred to support a woman to take her place. There were about nine of us running. There was one Republican, Tom Conlon, who was on the Saint Paul School Board. The rest were Democrats, quite an array of Democrats. One individual was co-chair of [President Bill] Clinton's state campaign – remember that Clinton got elected in 1992. Another person was chair of [George] Latimer's election campaign for mayor of Saint

Paul, and so forth. Most people said, "A Latino from the West Side? No way they're going to win in Highland Park," back in 1994.

LD: Right.

RO: "No way that they're going to win."

I made the decision at Christmas 1992, and then, in 1993, I slowly started. It's all Anumber one and it sounds very funny, but I used to have a mustache and everything. I said, "I need to get away from the stereotype some people would have." So, first, you begin with that.

Then I started letting people in my community know, the Hispanic community. Let me tell you something. Not many people in the Hispanic community took it seriously, but I let it go, let folks think, let it soak in.

Then I went to my network, which was very diverse. It included everything from foundations to business people. In that way, I was not the typical, liberal Democrat who basically represents a liberal community. My diversity helped me. I have the most diverse district out of all the commissions in terms of income, ethnicity, language, you name it - the richest and the poorest in the city.

I started very slowly by letting it soak in. I didn't get a lot of traction in the beginning—except for my political allies. But, you know, you've got to keep making the circle bigger. I kept working on it slowly, and kept meeting with folks, keep expanding that circle, meeting with more folks.

In 1993 on Thanksgiving Day - the election is in 1994 - I got a phone call at home and Ruby Hunt said—she hadn't officially announced—"I am going to announce that I'm not running anymore." I said, "Okay, great." That means it is open. Now, remember, if she was going to run again, there was no way I was going to beat her. Just no way. Nobody was. I would have been left all alone to run against her to lose. There was no way to win. She says, "I've decided that I'm not going to run." There was a pause. Then she said, "And I've decided that I'm going to endorse you."

LD: Wow.

RO: She knew about me, and she was impressed with me.

There had been white people who had come to the county board—unbeknownst to me; I didn't put them up—to testify. I don't know what the occasion was. Maybe they were on the Advisory Committee for Human Service, whatever. But, they came and they said, "My son has had chemical dependency problems, and he's been referred to this organization, that organization, and you know what? He's been going to CLUES and it's the best thing." The point was that CLUES shouldn't be just for Hispanic people, and this

person wanted to make sure that they didn't move her son out of CLUES because he's not Hispanic.

LD: Wow.

RO: When I came to talk to Ruby, that's when she told me, "You know what? You're an excellent candidate, but I want to support a woman." Then, she said, "I'd really like a woman like a who is the vice president of United Way, a friend of mine." And she mentioned three other women. I said, "Ruby, if they ran, I wouldn't run, but they're not running." She said, "How do you know?" "Because they're supporting me."

LD: [chuckles]

RO: They were all supporting me. She said, "Well, I have to think about it." Then on Thanksgiving, she called me and said, "I'm supporting you."

In the winter of 1994 I also had some surgery on my foot, so I was bleeding through my shoes walking. In the winter of 1994 when it was freezing cold, my campaign manager and I started setting up coffee parties in Highland. Not many people showed up. This was for the DFL endorsement. So we sent it out to, let's say, fifty or a hundred Democrats and only three would show. They all got a postcard that I was in their precinct to talk to them. The three I talked to were usually impressed with me.

So it came to the endorsement at the convention. There were seven of us, and I won the endorsement in the first or second round. Everybody is just flabbergasted. *All* those Democrats, except for one, are just blown away. They think this is a losing one. Conlon is the Republican. He's already on the school board, well identified, and helped Norm Coleman run for mayor. Norm Coleman was supporting him, the mayor of Saint Paul at the time. All these Democrats didn't honor the endorsement and ran against me in the primary. I won the primary. I came in first.

Then the newspapers were saying, and my opponent, the Republican, was saying, "He's not going to win because everybody who has supported all those other candidates are going to vote for me, not for him. A Latino from the West Side is not going to take Highland, and you can't win without Highland."

So I door knocked the hell out of Highland. I literally door knocked Highland that summer, the summer of 1994, starting in May and June. State Representative Howard Orenstein went with me. There was this condition: we would go till sunset, till it got dark. We would start like at five thirty and go until sunset. When we got to November, there was less light and less time. I started knocking four or five days a week in Highland.

LD: Wow.

RO: I'll tell you there were doors that I knocked on where people would open the door, and slam it shut. I didn't get to talk to them. There were other experiences which I wouldn't want. It's just the way it was. It's a neighborhood that I now win.

LD: You win the endorsement. You win the primary. You're door knocking.

RO: Yes, I go door knocking, and I'm out there. Let's fast forward to the night before election. That Monday night it was snowing, with a lot of wind. The snow is whipping. ? I need to keep thanking the volunteers - I always do. I had about six or seven volunteers. We're in Highland. I'm door knocking in the bitter, bitter cold. My face is getting frozen. I'm knocking on doors. People are opening their doors. Now, this is the same neighborhood that people wouldn't even open their doors before, and they're saying, "Mr. Ortega. I think you've done more than enough door knocking."

LD: [laughter]

RO: "It is too cold for you being out here. I'm sure you're going to do well. I think you should go home and get to someplace warm." I just kept going. I remember being on Ford Parkway, knocking on doors, and a car stops. The guy says, "Mr. Ortega, I'm a Republican. The first time you came to my door, I saw you but I was on the way out to my garage and I didn't bother talking to you. This is the second time you've come to door. I still haven't seen your opponent"—who was a Republican. He says, "I'm voting for you."

LD: Oh, wow. Wow!

RO: On election night I had a big event at a place down on West Seventh Street where the United Family Clinic is now. I have a band. I have Latinos. I have some music going. I have the city TV channels there. The cameras are rolling. All kinds of politicians are coming in, state reps, state senators. They all came. I have a tape of it. They're interviewing people. I'm the first Latino in the history of the state running for county commissioner. You know this is really about the Latino from the West Side. The West Side has always been represented by somebody from Highland, not the other way around.

LD: Right.

RO: That was really the issue.

One short story to just reflect. Nativity Catholic parish is pro-life and I'm pro-choice. My opponent, Tom Conlon, lives in Nativity Parish. So I'm walking down to Nativity. I'm door knocking in Nativity parish. I talk to people, and I feel I'm getting through to people. As I was walking down down the street, a lady I had talked to maybe eight houses down came up to me and said, "Oh! I forgot to ask you something, Mr. Ortega." I said, "What?" She said, "Are you pro-life or pro-choice?" I said, "I'm pro-choice." She says, "I think you're the perfect candidate, but I can't vote for you because you're pro-

choice. I'm so sorry." I said, "That's understandable. I understand. I know it's tough. I'm a Catholic. I've got a beautiful daughter and one on the way. I know where I would make my choice. But, you know, I'm not going to decide for a woman. I believe that's their choice, not mine." She said, "But I can't vote for you." Now keep this in mind. It's really important.

It comes to election night. Of course, everything is there and the race is going on. The results are coming in, but it is 1994, and it's not as quick as it is now. They're literally brought in by hand. The machine totals are brought to each camp and to the reporters and everything else. They're brought in by hand. I'm ahead by a little bit, not a lot, less than a hundred votes, but there are five precincts that are not in yet. All five are in Highland Park, and one of them is Nativity.

I remember Representative [Andrew] Dawkins coming up and he said, "You know, Rafael, you came so close. You came so close. You should be really proud. It is quite remarkable. This is going to be a race won by a hundred votes one way or the other. It's remarkable, especially with Highland and Mac-Grove."

People are starting to give me their regrets. Reporters called me and said, "Quite frankly, it doesn't look good for you. You're ahead now by eighty votes or a hundred votes, but with the five precincts in Highland, the odds are that you've lost this election." I said, "Well, we might as well wait." Everybody pretty much figured I'd lost. People started to leave. But...it had to have been within the hour, I got a call from a reporter who said, "Congratulations. You've just won the election." I said, "Are you serious?" And he said, "Yes. You won Nativity parish."

LD: Wow. [laughter] What was that moment like?

RO: Well, don't forget that I was the head of CLUES. It's not like I'm landing in a good spot. Do you know what I mean?

LD: Yes, yes.

RO: I gave it a shot.

I even tell my kids this now. I said, "I don't care if you lose or win, but you deserve the right to fight, to compete. That's what you deserve. That's your right. You should have the chance to compete. Whether you win or lose, that's neither here nor there."

Anyway, what it was like? First of all, I was already set to think that I lost, so it was a bit of a shock, because I wasn't prepared. I was preparing myself more to give a concession speech than a victory speech. So I was really taken off track on one hand. On the other hand, you just keep trying. I think door knocking right to the very end in the dead of the winter tells people something. That gets around. I still believe that that was an important part.

Winning that race was a great moment – especially because I would now be in a great role to help all the people of Ramsey County. I have no complaints about my life. I wish I would have been smarter about a lot of things, but those are my faults. I've had a lot of bumps in the road. I've won victories. You ask for pictures of me, like ones that would show me getting an award. I don't have many pictures of awards or with important people. I have pictures with my kids. I have pictures of my friends and family. I've got pictures of President Clinton; they're somewhere in a drawer. Man, I don't care about that stuff. That's not what makes you powerful. [laughter]

What makes a person powerful is *doing* things and empowering a team. I'm incredibly proud of my work as a County Commissioner and I don't think I'm done. We will complete the renovation of the Union Depot and the Central Corridor light rail line in the next couple of years. We built a state of the art, energy-efficient library in Roseville last year and I have continued to stay in touch with providers and clients to make sure we're delivering services to people who need them even in these very difficult budget times. At Fordham we worked as a team, at CLUES we worked as a team, and at the County Board we definitively work as a team with my colleagues on the board and with my colleagues in Congress, in state government, in labor and in business.

LD: Yes.

RO: It's the same thing, I'll go very quickly and we'll end it. Four years later, everybody thought I wasn't going to win my reelection. You know why? Because I was pushing the LRT, the light rail transit.

LD: Right.

RO: I was doing the Alternatives Analysis for light rail transit. I had—I'll tell you quickly—two meetings. Now, these were public, official meetings, public hearings, one in Highland and one on West Seventh. Over 200 people showed up each time. There's a court stenographer there, because everything - name, address, and comments are taken. On West Seventh, five people were for it. About 200 opposed it. In the other meeting it was the same story. Over 200 opposed it. Not only that, I had the city council person and the MET [Metropolitan] Council representative [Peter Bell], at the time, against me in Highland. Everybody told me, "Give it up. You're going to lose your reelection." This was the year I was running - 1998. "You're going to lose your reelection. Give up the transit stuff. It isn't worth it." I had all kinds of people telling me that, but I said, "No. It's the right thing." You know what? I'm not really being stubborn—I know all these people say they don't want it. It's a solution for a problem that doesn't exist, all the slogans. I said, "No, no, no. I'm going to stick to it." Everybody says, "You're not going to win the reelection."

Well, I won that reelection fifty-eight to around forty-two percent? I was disappointed then. I thought I did such a good job my first four years that I thought I'd get more than fifty-eight percent.

Every election since then, I've won by sixty-six percent or better. I do well throughout the district, even in Highland. I have Republicans that put out my lawn signs and I have Democrats that put out my lawn signs. I have Democrats who vote against me and I have Republicans that vote for me, but I get sixty-six percent of the votes across the board from one corner to the other. In this last election, my opponent [Andy Noble] spent a lot of money. He's a business guy, and in the last week he spent about \$20,000, just being negative, negative, negative, about everything. Everybody kept saying, "Rafael, this doesn't look good. Spend. You've got to spend more money." I said, "I'm not spending more money." The numbers were exactly the same. I won sixty-seven percent in the primary and sixty-seven percent in general election.

I know you've been reading that I am championing the Vikings football stadium coming to Arden Hills. I'm one of the people negotiating that. I just got elected in November. I was at the 2nd Ward City Council Convention last Wednesday and everybody was saying, "We're worried. I think you'll lose your seat over the Viking stadium."

LD: So we shall see, huh?

[laughter]

LD: I know we have to wrap up, but just one last question in two parts. As you look forward for yourself, where do you see yourself in two, five, ten, fifteen years - and I don't mean necessarily if you'll still be in office or whatever, but more broadly, perhaps.

RO: Well, you know what? Again, I am blessed, I've got to tell you, especially with something like this Viking stadium. I am blessed that at my age it's not just that I am physically healthy. A lot of people are physically healthy. But that I have the energy and the passion.

LD: Yes.

RO: It amazes me that with people from *all* walks of life coming from *all* different places, that's one thing they associate with me, including people younger than I am by ten or fifteen years. I just called the vice president of Ecolab about something. He was on vacation and I left a message on his cell phone. He called me back right away and he said, "I was worried." It happened I was sick two weekends ago. I was in bed, and I was concerned. I said, "Something's got to be wrong. There is no energy." So I thank God that I have energy matched up still with passion. When I go after something, I still go after it. I don't slow down to buy an ice cream. I've still got that fire. I hope I die before that goes away. I want to die with that. A lot of folks in their mind say, "You've got a lot of time because of the energy, the passion." I don't physically look old to them. Quite frankly, I don't see barriers in front of me. Whatever opportunities shall come up, they will just come. I taught at Metro [Metropolitan] State University for fifteen years part time while at CLUES and while here. I do less of it now, because I'm involved with so many things. There are so many things I could do. If there's a cause, I'm in a good place

whether in office or out of office. I know a lot of people. I'm tied into a lot of stuff. If I was going to retire, I think I would die. And I don't want to die. [laughter]

LD: My dad [Mario Duarte] is that way.

RO: Yes. I just don't want to die. Dying scares me. So as long as I can keep going, I don't want to collect a Social Security check if I don't have to. I don't want to collect my pension. I just want to keep going at almost anything I mean anything. I can't think of something that I cannot get involved with. I've thought about a lot of crazy things. My kids are doing fine. I've even thought, "How old do you have to be before you can't adopt somebody?" I would love to take somebody that's down and out, some kid that really is in trouble, and just change the world for them. It's wide open. I never charted my life. It's taken me to good places. I've done dumb things. I don't always do the right thing, maybe, but I always have the right intentions.

LD: So that's you personally. As this project is focusing on the Latino community, where do you see Minnesota's Latino community in the next two, five, ten, twenty, fifty years, and what do you hope for it?

RO: Let me tell you what I hope for it. I always said this, and back in the 1980s you could project this stuff. You could look at the demographics and you knew. We are going to become the most influential community in terms of numbers. But still, as I've told you, I don't think of myself as a Puerto Rican. I don't think of myself as a Latino. I'm the commissioner.

All kinds of people walk in here, not just Latino, and this is the guy that can help you. It isn't because he's Hispanic. It's because he's good at what he does. He's a good guy and he has power, and maybe he could help you.

The community has got to understand that we are going to be in charge. We're going to be in charge of the whole deal. [chuckles] Not just the Latino piece. That's got to be our mindset.

LD: Yes.

RO: We need to prepare our kids - not to forget they're Latinos, because I worry about that. They become so acculturated, so blended. With my kids, my daughter has a strong identity as a Puerto Rican. My ex-wife, Lupe Cervantes, comes from a venerable Mexican family on the West Side and my boy has a strong identity as a Mexican. I don't give a hoot! But the point is that you've got to know where you came from. You can't forget that. But you can't let that stymie you.

LD: Right.

RO: It isn't us against them. It's about *we* and you're going to be in charge of the *we*. Why are you taking half a banana? Take the whole banana. Do you know what I mean?

LD: Yes. Absolutely.

RO: That's what I see for the Hispanic community. I think we're doing great. Do we have a lot of issues? Yes. You know what? I could dissect this country for every ethnic group there is, and I would find that they're all having issues.

LD: Right.

RO: Our issues are big because we're big.

LD: That's a very good way of putting it. Yes.

RO: We're the largest, fastest growing, and pretty soon we're going to be close to fifty percent of this country no matter what color you are. That's why the problems get magnified. That's the negative we need to erase. But the other side of the coin is that we're going to be in charge, so we've got to learn how to make the world run for everybody.

LD: There we go. Is there anything else you like to share or say?

RO: There would be a hundred stories I've got from all different parts of my career that I'm particularly proud of. They're not about getting awards or numbers, but they're about overcoming, changing people's minds, whether it's getting kicked out of a West Seventh Street bar because they don't want a spic in there. Now, the bar owner says, "Give me your literature," and buys me a beer and tells everybody, "This is the guy you vote for or don't come back in here." That's the same man that kicked me out sixteen years ago.

LD: Wow.

RO: That's overcoming, changing somebody. They did it to me. They did it to any Latino that came in.

LD: Yes.

RO: But the moment I changed his mind, he's not doing it to every Latino anymore.

LD: Right, right.

RO: It's much bigger than holding an office. You don't influence from here. You influence by getting there.

LD: Right, the journey.

RO: The journey.

LD: Absolutely.

Well, I want to thank you so much. I know how busy you are, so on behalf of the Historical Society, I really want to...

RO: My pleasure. Well, thank you for taking the time to hear my story.

ety. much, m **LD**: It's a really valuable story that will be available at the Historical Society. It will also be available at schools, libraries, for researchers. So thank you very much,