

José H. Trejo
Narrator

Lorena Duarte
Interviewer

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José H. Trejo - **JT**
Lorena Duarte - **LD**

LD: This is Lorena Duarte. I am interviewing José Trejo. Today is Wednesday, April 7, 2010. We are at the Minnesota Historical Society.

First of all, José, thank you so much for taking time out to do this interview.

JT: Well, thank you for asking me to participate in this project.

LD: We are very honored to include you.

Can you, please tell us your name and spell it?

JT: My name is José Trejo, J-o-s-é. My last name is T-r-e-j-o...middle initial is H.

LD: What's your date of birth?

JT: January 13, 1942

LD: I know you're retired?

JT: Yes, I'm retired.

LD: What was your occupation before you retired?

JT: I worked as an organizational management consultant.

LD: Where was your last position?

JT: I had different positions. My last actual job was with an organization called Breaking Free. Breaking Free is an organization that helps women and girls get out of prostitution and violent lifestyles. It is an organization that was founded by Vednita Carter, a black woman. The primary purpose of the organization is to help black women leave prostitution and violent lifestyles.

I was director of women's programs for the organization, and I, also served in several other capacities. The important thing was the fact that we were trying to help women and girls to get out of prostitution and violent lifestyles.

LD: We were chatting before, and I learned that you're retired, but you actually do have a post right now.

JT: Right now, I'm Town Supervisor for the Town of Eureka in Polk County, Wisconsin. I have served in this position three years so far. I was re-elected for a second two-year term a year ago. I have one more year to go. This position is an elected position. What is really interesting is that Eureka Township tends to be politically conservative. Most residents are farmers. We have some transplants from Minnesota, like myself, but for the most part they are native born, rural community folks, conservative in their attitude. I found it interesting that even though I'm more liberal they would elect me, twice, as a Supervisor to represent them in the township.

LD: That's great.

JT: I thought it was fascinating to be working with them and trying to bring about some changes.

LD: I definitely want to hear more about that. But first, I want to start off with where you were born and where you grew up.

JT: I was born in northern Mexico in a city called Nueva Rosita, in the state of Coahuila. I went to school there until I was in the sixth grade. Then in 1953, my parents emigrated to the United States. From December 1953 to April 1954, we lived in Texas. While in Texas we lived in two cities. One was Eagle Pass, Texas. The other one was Crystal City, Texas.

While in Texas my dad found work as an agricultural worker. He had been a steel worker in Mexico for many years before coming to the United States. My mother was an elementary school principal. She had been a principal for quite a few years.

At the time we left for the United States, there was a lot of unrest in Mexico. The government went against labor unions, in favor of foreign companies. My father had been involved in a major strike against Mexican Zinc Company, a subsidiary of the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) of New York and a global leader in the production of non-ferrous metals. This unprecedented strike precipitated strong retaliation from the government, which had been bought by the company. The workers who were on strike decided to go on a hunger march to Mexico City on January 20, 1951. I remember vividly, the marchers, over 3,000 of them, started walking to Mexico City around 9:00 in the morning. In the middle of the afternoon, the Mexican army moved in and took over the town. The government declared martial law. We lost our civil liberties. Then the government declared that the town was in a state of insurrection. We were called communists. At the time I didn't know what a communist was.

LD: How old were you?

JT: I was nine years old in 1951. I didn't know what a communist was, so I asked a neighbor lady, "What's a communist". She replied, I really don't know. It must be some kind of Protestant religion.

LD: [Laughter]

JT: Here we are being called communists and I didn't even know what it meant.

LD: A nine year old communist.

JT: We were pretty much under martial law for almost two years. All our civil rights had been taken away. We couldn't go to church, the right of assembly was taken away. You know, you couldn't gather in crowds, no more than three people at a time. If more than three people congregated, the army would beat up or jail the people. Many places were closed, like movie theaters and newspaper offices, for a while. Later on they were re-opened. Then in addition to that, this is very interesting, here is a town that has been declared in a state of insurrection and almost four thousand of its men are marching to Mexico City. So the women, children and the elderly, plus some men that were company sympathizers, were left behind. The town's people not only had to support themselves, but they also had to support the marchers. So it was quite a task for a town that was in the state of insurrection. The military controlled everything. Food and medical services were denied and many children died of malnutrition. Nevertheless, the town had to be able to feed itself and, at the same time feed over 3,000 striking workers on the march.

LD: Right

JT: Some towns in Mexico refused the marchers permission to enter the town because of the fear of being labeled sympathizers to communism. Some towns opened their doors to the marchers, but, for the most part, our town and the marchers were pretty much on our own for almost two years.

LD: This was the town of Nueva Rosita?

JT: Yes, Nueva Rosita. About three weeks later, my father got a severe eye infection, while on the march and went blind.

LD: Oh, wow.

JT: Every day, some people from the town would drive or take buses, taking supplies to where the marchers were at the time. Other people would come back to the town after visiting the marchers. This is how we kept in communication with the marchers. My mother was informed that my father was blind and that he refused to leave the march. He wanted to march all the way to Mexico City. My mother went to where the marchers were and brought my father back. I don't remember how she got to where the marchers were or how she convinced him to come home. She did it anyway.

At the time, you know, things were in an uproar. My parents felt that maybe we should go to the United States. We traveled to the American Consulate in the City of Monterrey. I still have a vivid picture of this visit to the consulate, because when we walked in, there was a long hallway, painted white. On the walls, there were photographs. Above the photos was an inscription that stated, "*La Vida Cotidiana en Estados Unidos*", (Everyday Life in the United States). As I looked at the pictures, I noticed that all the people were white. The boys wore shorts and short-sleeved shirts and the girls ruffled dresses and beautifully combed hair. There was a picture of a farmer on a brand new tractor, with clean overalls that looked new, and wearing a bowtie. There also was a picture of a housewife. She had on a beautiful dress, a ruffled apron, a pearl necklace and high heels while she swept the floor. You know, "A Leave It To Beaver" fantasy.

LD: [Laughter]

JH: I kept looking at the picture and it looked so different than what I had experienced in Mexico. I thought, wow, this must be like paradise, the way everything looks. I was dumbfounded about how clean and sweet everything looked. Everyone in the pictures was so smiley and all of them were very well dressed. I saw a milkman wearing a white uniform, a cap and a tie while delivering milk. I was fascinated by the housewife in her cute little apron, her high heels and her pearl necklace. I thought this is really something. I was, you know, eleven years old at the time.

Well, we crossed the border to the United States on December 23, 1953, the day before Christmas Eve. As I looked around, I realized it wasn't like the pictures I had seen before. I had seen all the beautiful panorama that had been portrayed and it was just not reality whatsoever. The streets were not paved in gold and farmers didn't wear bowties when plowing the fields

LD: [Chuckles]

JT: So it was quite a shock. I as a child had expected one thing and came into another reality. We lived in a border town, Eagle Pass, Texas and my father was able to find jobs in the surrounding area doing fieldwork. But the jobs were very competitive. There were maybe a hundred people for every ten jobs and people just fought each other to get work. Trucks would come over to pick you up on the street corner and people would just pile in the trucks. You'd get taken out to the field and within two or three hours the work was done and that's all the work you got for the day. The pay was minimal. My dad was getting twenty to twenty-five cents per hour, and you could only work two or three hours a day. So no matter how hard you tried, you couldn't make it. The competition was so severe.

LD: May I just stop you really quick?

JT: Sure

LD: Did you have siblings that came over?

JT: My brother Francisco came with me. He was eight years old at the time.

LD: So there were two of you and your parents?

JT: Yes. From Eagle Pass, we moved to Crystal City, Texas, where my mom had a cousin. We stayed at his place for a couple of weeks, and then we kept hearing about this land of milk and honey in the northern reaches of the country. People kept talking about it. "Oh yes, you've got to go to Minnesota. Minnesota is the place to go." This is what we were told at the time.

LD: What did they say about it?

JT: Well, there's a lot of jobs up there and you can get good work. You can work all summer. There are Mexicans up there. So why don't you go up north? That's what they were saying, go north. One thing what we were not told was to take warm coats with us.

At this time, another one of my mother's cousins had moved from South Dakota to Albert Lea, Minnesota. So he, also suggested that we come up north. My parents hired a truck to bring us north. I think that at the time it was twenty dollars per person, or something like that. We traveled in this big truck that had side railings, wood slats, covered with a canvas top.

LD: Yes, yes.

JT: Okay. They had all their furniture in the truck because the family was moving north for the summer. There were three men, two drivers and a teenage boy in the cab of the truck, and there was a young woman and the four of us in the back. The only room we had was a twin bed mattress in the very back of the box. The rest was filled with furniture. The five of us shared this twin mattress.

LD: Oh, my gosh. How long did it take?

JT: Five days.

LD: Wow

JT: Well, of course there were no freeways at the time, and the truck broke down a couple of times. It was a difficult long trip. The things that were most difficult for me was the rumbling of the truck constantly day after day, the flapping of the canvas on the slats and the crowded conditions. We were five people sitting on a twin bed mattress. It was difficult to sleep, we had to take turns sleeping. But fortunately we finally made it to Minnesota. This was in early April, 1954.

LD: What's your first memory of Minnesota?

JT: To me, it was cold at the time. We had come from an area that is very hot in Mexico. The average summer temperature is around 110 degrees, so coming to a place when it was in the 30's and 40's in April was quite a difference.

LD: Yes

JT: The thing that is interesting about this is that my parents really had no idea how big the country was and how far Minnesota was. To us, it was someplace up north. North meant San Antonio, Texas. That is as far as we knew about the geography of the United States.

LD: Oh, my goodness.

JT: So we thought maybe it's a couple of hours north of San Antonio, that's Minnesota. But it turned out to be a lot more than a couple of hours north of San Antonio. So when we finally got here, my mother's first comment was, "What have we done? It's like going to the end of the world".

We were well received by my mom's cousin and his family. We stayed with them for about two months. His name was Jose Guevara.

LD: In what city?

JT: Albert Lea, Minnesota. He was an older cousin of my mom's. We lived with his family for about two months. Then we found a house to rent. We felt the cold in April, but had no idea of the severity of the coming winter. The house was not a winter home. It was not insulated.

LD: And you are eleven?

JT: I was twelve. I had turned twelve in January.

LD: Did you start going to school?

JT: Yes, Francisco and I went to school. We went to school right away. In fact, my parents were very adamant about us going to school. What's interesting in school was the fact that when Francisco and I arrived there, they didn't have any of the programs we now have for foreign students. For the first year or so, I was put in the back of the classroom and given coloring books to color. I learned English by osmosis, basically by listening to the other children.

LD: Sure.

JT: I learned a lot from the other kids, I mean far more than from the teachers. One classmate, Helen Nelson, took it upon herself to teach me in English and I taught her Spanish. The teachers were not prepared to deal with a student who did not speak English. My brother and I went through the same thing.

JT: We had been in school for about two weeks, and I was in my classroom when a man, who I found out later, was the school's coach, came to the room and motioned for

me to follow him. This was in the beginning of May, before school was out. Also in the classroom there were two American Indian students, a boy and a girl. The man asked them to follow him also. We started walking down the hall, following the man and we stopped at my brother Francisco's classroom. He was also motioned to follow the man. An American Indian student was also in Francisco's classroom and he was asked to come along.

All five of us were walking quietly down the hall, following this guy. I was wondering what was going on and where was he taking us. We were taken to the middle of school gym and we were lined up. Two nurses had been standing there, and without saying a word, they began to spray us with DDT.

LD: [Gasps]

JT: So there we are standing in line, the five of us, three American Indians, my brother and I getting sprayed with DDT.

LD: Oh, my god.

JT: I had no idea why they were doing it, what was happening. When we went home my parents were irate at the school, but there was nothing they could do.

LD: Did they tell you after why it was...?

JT: We were not told anything. We were just sprayed and escorted back to our classrooms. Of course when you got back to the room, your hair was all white.

LD: Oh.

JT: I thought maybe they want us to become white. Of course, the other kids started laughing at us. It was very embarrassing.

LD: How confusing. How terrible.

JT: That was one of things that happened. The other thing that happened was that we had come from a different culture, and so many times we had different beliefs, and we were criticized by the teachers for what we believed. Let me give you an example. During my second school year, Christmas came around. I had started school in April and this was December of the following school year. The teacher said to us, "Your assignment is to draw a Christmas scene." So everybody was supposed to draw a Christmas scene. So I drew the Nativity and I put grass and palm trees and all of that. The teacher looks at my drawing and says, "Where's the snow? There's no snow in your picture". I said "What snow?" "For the Nativity, where is the snow?" the teacher asked again. I couldn't understand why there had to be snow in the picture. All the Nativity scenes I had ever seen did not have snow.

LD: Right.

JT: I kept thinking, “Why would God be born in the snow?” “Why would there be shepherds out in the fields when there is snow on the ground?” “Why won’t they be home?” I was very confused. So I got a failing grade because my picture did not fit the idea the teacher had about Christmas.

Another thing that happened that was very interesting was that when we arrived in Minnesota, it was a week before Easter Sunday. The day before Easter, my mother said to me, “Why don’t you go and see if you can find a Catholic Church so we can go to Easter Mass?” So I went to look for a church. As I was walking, I ran into some children that were running around their house looking for something. Then I saw them pick up colored eggs. I had never seen eggs like that, so I was fascinated. “What are they doing?” “Why are they running around picking up colored eggs on the yard?” I stood there watching them, and one of the boys came to talk to me. He asked me, “What do you want?” I couldn’t understand what he was saying so I pointed to the eggs. He said “The Easter Bunny brought them”. Well, by that time I knew what the word bunny meant, a rabbit. I thought to myself, “a bunny?” “eggs?” That sounded strange.

LD: [Laughter]

JT: So I said to him, “Bunny, no eggs”. You know, trying to explain that rabbits didn’t lay eggs, at least from where I had come from. He said, “Yes, yes, the Easter bunny brought the eggs, the Easter bunny”. Rabbits don’t lay eggs. I was very dumbfounded. I couldn’t understand what was going on and why they were gathering these colored eggs. I had never seen eggs that color. So I said again, “No, bunny, no eggs”. “Oh you’re stupid”, the boy shouted and he pushed me. I understood “stupid”, so I pushed him back. The other children came running to see what was going on. Once again he pushed me, and I pushed him back hard and knocked him down, so he started crying. Then around the corner of the house, comes this man. He starts shouting and running toward me. By the tone of his voice I knew he wasn’t saying, “Happy Easter”, so I ran.

LD: Right, you knew.

JT: He was wearing these rabbit ears.

LD: Oh, my gosh.

JT: Here I’m running down the street with this guy with long rabbit ears chasing me. I wondered what is the world coming to.

LD: [Laughter]

LD: I can’t even imagine how strange that was.

JT: So I took off running and went home.

LD: [Laughter] I can’t even imagine...

JT: That's what happened when we came. Then we had our first real winter.

LD: Yes.

JT: Right before winter started, we were preparing to go back to Texas. My dad couldn't find a permanent job. Our mother was anxious to go back, because she never realized she was going to be this far away from her family. She missed them dearly. So we were getting ready to return to Texas. This was in October 1954. Everything was packed and ready to go. Dad had hired a truck to take us back. My father came home from looking for jobs and said, "We're not leaving." We said, "What do you mean, we're not leaving?" "No, we're not leaving, I found a job at the local foundry." He had worked in a steel mill in Mexico. So my mother started crying because she really wanted to go back. But dad said, "No, we're staying. We're not going to migrate back and forth. I want the kids to stay so they can continue with school. So we stayed. By this time, people were telling us "If you're going to stay, you better prepare for the winter. You got to do this and to do that, store potatoes, put up canned goods. We had no idea about all the winter preparations needed. Storing food was not something we were used to doing. In Mexico you went to the market every day and got what you needed.

LD: Right.

JT: So this idea of storing food like the squirrels didn't quite fit with our way of thinking. [Chuckles] The other Mexican people that were living in the area were very helpful to us.

LD: Was there a large Mexican population there?

JT: There were about twenty families at the time. They were very helpful to us and the women would come over to the house and show mom how to can, how to set up food preserves and how to prepare for the winter. Of course people helped us with coats and stuff like that. Still, we really didn't have any idea how severe and long winters could be.

Winter started. Of course at first it wasn't too bad, you know. It's always exciting to see snow for the first time and you jump up and down, run outside and stick your tongue out to catch the flakes. "Wow, this is great", you think. A little more snow, "This is terrific", and a little more snow. Then it got colder. Well, as you can imagine, the house was not insulated. There was a kerosene heater in the basement. There were no other heaters. There was no indoor toilet or shower. We had an outdoor toilet, an outhouse. The one faucet in the house froze every day, and we had to light a fire in the sink to thaw it out. Also, the water pump in the basement kept freezing. We became quite proficient at melting ice.

During the 1955-56 winter season, we were still living in the same house, under pretty much the same conditions. In the beginning of January, 1956, our sister Aurora was born.

LD: Oh, my goodness.

JT: She was born on January 10th.

LD: Your poor mother.

JT: Getting back to our first winter, by January, it was incredibly cold in the house. At night nobody wanted to sleep against the wall, because ice would form on the inside of the walls, and the blankets stuck to it, then you had to peel it off in the morning. There was no heater on the main floor, so every time we took a bath, we had to light the oven in the gas stove, heat water and pour it into a tin tub, that was in front of the stove and open the oven door. When you took a bath, you had to rotate, like in a rotisserie, because one side was too hot and the other too cold. So it was a challenge.

LD: [Laughter]

JT: Water seeped in through the basement window and there was about a four-inch layer of ice on the floor, so we had an indoor ice skating rink. Not many people had that. The kerosene heater was a hassle to keep working. You had to go to a nearby store to buy kerosene. It was put on five-gallon cans, then we dragged it home on a sled through the snow. Get home, go down the rickety stairs, slip and slide dragging the can and fill the heater. Light it, and then slip and slide on the way out. My mother cried almost every day, because she thought we would not make it. My father was very stoic, he would say, "Don't worry about it, we'll make it" In those days, the windows were not insulated, they had just a single pane of glass.

LD: Yes.

JT: The heat in the house formed frost on the windows. Well, the frost kept growing and growing on the window all winter, so by the middle of the winter, the whole window was covered with frost. You couldn't see outside. All you could do is just scrape a little hole in the middle of the glass, and that's how you could see out. We had an outhouse, and going to the bathroom in the winter was quite a challenge. It seemed like we were freezing in this house for months on end. It seemed like winter was never going to be over. Then it ended! Spring came. It was a glorious time for us, because we never expected to see spring again. So that was our first year in Minnesota. I graduated from Albert Lea High School in 1961.

LD: So your family stayed the whole time.

JT: Yes, we stayed the whole time. It was a wise decision that my father made. To get settled and stay in school instead of migrating back and forth. When I graduated from high school, I was in the fifteenth percentile of the class. Out of 320 students, I came in at 70 from the top, when I graduated. It wasn't the top 10 percent, but for coming to the country with no English whatsoever seven years before....

LD: Seven years? Wow.

JT: Yes, 1954 to 1961. Like I said, I graduated in the top 15 percent of the class. The thing that was really sad about the whole experience, is that I had done very well in high

school, better than I had expected—I had become vice president of the science club and was active in other things—but when it came time for me to take the college entrance exams, I was not allowed to take them.

LD: Why not?

JT: When it was announced that the class would be taking their ACT (American College Testing) exams to go to college, I went with the others to take it. All the tests were passed out to the students, but I didn't get one. So I went to ask, "Why don't I get a test?" The assistant principal said, "Well you don't need to take the test. You can go to a vocational school, they don't need a test for that or you can join the military". One of the counselors, by the name of Anderson, found out that I wasn't being allowed to take the test, and he became irate. He demanded that I be given the test. So I took my college entrance exam, in a classroom, by myself, with four monitors present to make sure I would not cheat.

LD: Oh my gosh!

JT: I passed with a score of 96 percentile in English and a 92 percentile in Math, which were the important scores.

LD: Yes.

In the fall of 1961, I went to Austin Community College in Austin, Minnesota. The first year, I lived with Russell Harding, a science teacher, and his wife.

While I was there, at the college, for me personally, it was a time of personal growth. In the two years that I was there, I was elected the vice president of the sophomore class, co-chairperson of the World University Service Chapter, an organization to help students in foreign countries, by raising funds at the college. In fact, we had the highest fundraising ever in the history of the college up to that time. Also, I was elected President of the Student Christian Association. Even though I was Catholic at the time and the Student Christian Association was pretty much a protestant organization, I still was elected. And the student body elected me as Winter Carnival King during my sophomore year.

LD: [Laughter] From your first winter nearly freezing to death to Winter Carnival king.

JT: Yes.

LD: That's pretty good.

JT: I was very surprised. When I graduated from Austin Community College, I received fourteen awards.

LD: Wow. Congratulations.

JT: The highest one was called the Dean's Super A Award, or the "Leadership Award". It was the highest and most coveted award given to a student by the faculty. It was awarded to the student that made the most progress in leadership development during the

first two years in college. Another award I received was a scholarship. It was called the Faculty Scholarship, where the teachers got together, made a contribution and voted on one student to get this scholarship. I got another scholarship from a Catholic organization, called the Benedict Hett Scholarship. So by the time I went to my next college, which was Mankato State University, I had scholarships to help me through.

LD: Let me ask you, what did you study, what did you focus on at Austin Community?

JT: Biology. That what I was working towards, a degree in biology.

LD: What did you hope to do with that degree?

JT: I was hoping to teach science.

LD: So then you went to Mankato State.

JT: When I got to Mankato State in 1963, I was informed that there were not enough biology courses in the two years that I was going to be there in order to graduate with a degree in biology. I didn't want to stay longer in school, because I didn't have the money. So in my junior year I changed my major to Spanish.

LD: Yes?

JT: Well, here's an interesting thing that happened to me while I was at Mankato State. English was my second language, Spanish was my primary language. When I went to apply to change my major to Spanish, I was informed that I had to have two years of high school Spanish before I could be accepted. I said, "What do you mean? I didn't need to take Spanish in high school. I was taking courses in English. I didn't need to take Spanish, that's my native language. The response was, "The requirement says you have to have two years of high school Spanish". I couldn't believe it. I ended up having to take beginning Spanish.

LD: At Mankato State?

JT: Yes. So my first hour was fourth year Spanish Classical Literature. My second hour was Beginning Spanish. I thought it was the most ridiculous thing ever, but at the time schools were not very flexible. I was told, "You have to have this, You have to have that. It can't be changed." So I ended up taking courses in beginning Spanish.

LD: Your first hour is fourth year Classical Spanish Literature?

JT: Yes, and the second hour was Beginning Spanish. Needless to say, I ended up teaching some of the Spanish courses at Mankato.

LD: [Chuckles]

JT: My Spanish professor at the time was doing his dissertation and he asked me if I'd be willing to take the beginning Spanish classes. Which I did. I was able to do four years of Spanish studies in two years. I graduated in 1965.

LD: At that time were there a lot of Latino students there?

JT: No.

LD: Were you kind of the only one?

JT: I think there were only three of us out of about four thousand students. They may have been foreign students, but we didn't have the same classes. There were very few of us at the time.

LD: So you graduated in 1965 with a degree in Spanish Studies.

JT: Yes, and a minor in biology.

LD: What did you do from there?

JT: I graduated with a major in Spanish and a minor in biology, and I started looking for a teaching job. I applied to the Saint Paul Public Schools.

LD: So you had a license to teach?

JT: Yes, I had a license to teach. I got a teaching license from the state. When I applied to the Saint Paul School system, I didn't even receive the courtesy of a response to my application from the school system. They never responded.

LD: Oh.

JT: So applied to other places, and I got three job offers. One was from a little town called Black Duck, Minnesota, way up north. I had not heard of it at the time. Another was from a town in southern Minnesota called Preston. A third offer was from Red Wing Minnesota. I accepted the one in Red Wing, which I felt was closer to where I was living than the other two towns. So that where I started teaching. I taught in Red Wing High School for four years.

LD: What did you teach?

JT: I taught Spanish. When I started teaching Spanish there, I only had four Spanish classes and two study halls. By the time I left, I didn't teach any study halls, and we went from first and second year Spanish to third and fourth year Spanish. I was now teaching four levels of Spanish. That was done in four years.

LD: Why the increase? Just more students interested?

JT: More students began to enroll in Spanish classes over the four years. I achieved 100% retention rate. Students came back every year. Another thing that was interesting at that time in Red Wing was that I found out that no student with a C or below grade, was not allowed to take a language course. You had to have A's and B's before you could take a language course. I felt that was ridiculous, and I argued against the policy, but the director of the language department was very adamant that only the cream of the crop could take a language class. So I was very upset about it and worked very hard to try and change that.

I finally came up with the idea that if I can take some special needs students—we had a Spanish needs class in the school—and teach them the language, perhaps the school will change the policy. So I had a talk with the teacher of the special needs students and I said, “You know this is the situation”. She was aware of the policy. “And I would like to volunteer to teach one of your classes Spanish”. Eight students agreed to come. I started teaching spoken Spanish and about three months later they knew a lot of phrases. Then I talked with the assistant principal. I called her in and I said, “I want to show you something.” She saw students whom she knew were special needs students speaking in Spanish. She said, “I can't believe it”. I responded, “Well I've been saying all along that you don't need to limit language studies to certain students. Learning a language is a skill. It's not an academic subject”. So from there on, the policy was dropped and any student now could take language classes. But it took almost three years to change the policy.

LD: They changed it.

JT: It was changed.

LD: That is wonderful. I'm curious. Were there many Latino students that you had?

JT: No, none.

LD: None in the four years?

JT: In the four years that I taught in Red Wing there was not a single Latino student. There were some American Indian students, but no Latino students. My first wife, Frances, whom I married after graduating from college, was French/German. So I was the only Latino in town, and my oldest son, Francisco, was the only half-Latino in town. So there were one and a half Latinos living in Red Wing at the time. My second son, Juan, was born in Saint Paul in 1972. Then Frances and I divorced in 1979. I married Ana in 1984. Her daughter Lucita and her sister Xiomara and Juan made up our new blended household. Francisco was in the Navy at the time. Well now, getting back to Red Wing...

LD: You were there four years and, then?

JT: After four years, I felt that I was being restricted with too many administrative duties. I was spending too much time in administering; too much time just doing routine work instead of teaching. I wanted to teach. I didn't want to be a babysitter. So I felt that I was

not doing what I wanted to do. I wanted to teach. For example, we were required to write lesson plans. It took a while to write the lesson plans, but we were just following the textbook. We had to spend Friday afternoons writing lesson plans for the next week. One time I was going to be absent for a week. I was going to Mexico. I needed to write my lesson plans ahead of time. So, I wrote them in Spanish.

LD: [Laughter]

JT: I wrote all the lesson plans in Spanish, and I handed them to the principal and he looks at it and says, “Nobody can understand this” I said if the substitute teacher can’t understand this....”

LD: They shouldn’t be teaching.

JT: Yes, they shouldn’t be teaching Spanish. He wanted me to write them in English. I said no, I’m not going to write them in English. If the teacher that is taking my place can’t understand them, the teacher can babysit. He said “Okay” and let it go at that. I felt that administrative things where you were taken away from actual teaching and you had to be a disciplinarian and you had to be a babysitter, you had to do other things that were taking you away from the quality of time you could spend with your students.

LD: Right.

JT: I felt frustrated and I left, and for the first time since I was twelve years old I had no job.

LD: That was in, what, 1969.

JT: 1969, yes.

So I started looking for a job. I couldn’t find a job anyplace. Again, I applied to the Saint Paul Public Schools. With four years of teaching, I felt I had a better chance. But I didn’t receive the courtesy of a reply for the second time. I could not get a teaching job. I looked for a job from March until August.

Then in August, I went to the Saint Paul Area Chamber of commerce to see if they had any jobs. They had no jobs. Amos Martin, the vice president of the chambers said, “We don’t have anything. We can’t help you. But tell me about yourself anyway.” So I told him what I had done, gave him my resume and phone number. He said, “If anything comes up we will give you a call.” I thanked him and left.

Three days later, he called me. He said, “I want you to come in and talk to me” I went back and we talked. He said, “We don’t have a position right now, but with your experience we may be able to hire you anyway.”

At that time, civil unrest was beginning in Saint Paul. The fall before there had been riots at a place called Stem Hall. They were called the Stem Hall riots. It was in what is the

Saint Paul Civic Center now. The blacks had rioted and there was a lot of controversy and concern about that.

LD: Sure, it was right around that time.

JT: Mr. Martin said to me, “Here is how it is. We represent the business community, and we want you to tell us what you can do to help us with these issues we’re not accustomed to dealing with.” He said, “Why don’t you go over to that empty desk over there and write your ideas down?” I sat down and after some thought started writing my ideas as what I thought could be done to have the business community and the minority community become more communicative. At the time, there was a lot of hatred towards business and the police. You know, sentiments like, “Kill the pig” and “Profit is a four letter word”. There was a lot of strong anger. There was a lot of rhetoric, but no solutions. People were screaming in the streets, holding demonstrations, rioting and all of that, but no viable solutions were being discussed. Business people didn’t know what to do because they didn’t have any experience with this, and the people that were rioting were angry and couldn’t stop long enough to say, “What we need is this or that”.

So I was put in a very unique position to be working for the business community. To represent the business community and at the same time, serve as a liaison to the different minority and ethnic groups. I wrote that what the chamber and the business community needed to do was to start developing programs that were beneficial to the different communities in the area, that these programs had to show substance, not rhetoric. You know create partnerships with the minorities. I was hired. A whole department was created. It was called the Human Resources Development Department and I became its director.

LD: You kind of wrote your own job description.

JT: Yes I did.

LD: That’s wonderful.

JT: Then I began to implement what I thought were positive and viable ideas. One of the first ideas was that we needed to have more involvement between the business community and the educational system. We needed more involvement between the police, law enforcement people, and the minorities. We needed to demonstrate to the minority communities that the business people were willing and able and desired to train and educate and hire people from these different groups. Then we needed to educate the business community as to the value, the contributions of the different groups, blacks, Latinos, American Indians. There were a few Asians at the time, not as many as the ones that came later. We needed to reach a point of understanding of what the business and the minorities could do for each other.

Here, I was in the middle of all this turmoil going on. On the one hand I had business people who were very angry because they didn’t understand why some people were angry at them. On the other hand, I had minorities who were very angry saying, “Those

blankety, blank people downtown don't understand us. They don't care for us." So I proceeded to develop programs. Slowly at first and to create rapport by bringing the two groups together. For example, we had a major working seminar that lasted thirty-two hours, spread over a period of two months, between Saint Paul school teachers and the political and business leadership of Saint Paul.

We established a police relations initiative that was unofficial, not part of the city or the police department. It was a citizens group, with police and minority representatives to discuss the issues. One of the ideas that came out of these get-togethers, which was later implemented by the police department, was to begin foot patrols.

LD: Foot patrols?

JT: Yes foot patrols. For police officers to patrol on foot instead of only on cars.

LD: Oh

JT: Yes, foot patrols to be able to get to know the community by walking around.

LD: I see.

JT: The other idea that came out of this citizens' group was the establishment of neighborhood precincts. For example, there would be a precinct in the Selby-Dale area, another one on Saint Paul's West Side, and so on. Police officers would work out of these precincts. The idea was for the police officers and neighborhood residents to relate better to each other. This idea was implemented also. I'm not taking credit for the ideas. These came from the citizens and the police. What I did was to facilitate the process and get people to work together to improve the working relationship between police and community.

We got involved in the criminal justice system and rehabilitation programs for people that were released from prison. We were able to recruit about thirty companies willing to provide training programs for people coming out of prison. Some received training inside the prison to be ready to get employment upon release.

LD: To look forward to.

JT: Something to look forward to, yes.

The other thing that we did while I was at the chamber is that we developed a consumer education program for high school students. High school students at the time were not really taught personal finance. They were taught economics, but it was theoretical. They were not taught how to keep a checkbook. They were not taught about the credit score. They were not taught about borrowing money and the problems with it. They were not taught about credit agreements and so on. All these things were just foreign to them, especially the minority students. So we recruited a group of business people, mostly bankers, to volunteer to go into the schools and present a seminar to students on credit, on checking, on insurance, on savings. All of those things so the students were able to truly

understand about personal economics. What was really is that the program was featured in the *Christian Science Monitor* as a national model.

LD: It became a national model?

JT: It was featured as a national model for other schools to consider. Now this was in 1973. Then we also developed another program that was called “Summer Youth Employment”. Here’s the interesting concept of this program. Students got together and worked with a trainer through the chamber of commerce in April of the year. Usually during Easter break. The training session taught them how to go out and solicit summer jobs and how to write a resume. How to go and talk to employers about summer jobs. We had personnel directors who came in from major companies and sat down with the students and said, “This is what you do.” “This is what impresses us” We had a lot of students in the program. One year 52 students volunteered. Most of them came from Humboldt High School.

The students were trained how to go out and talk to people at companies to get summer jobs for students. After the training, the group was divided into teams of two students. These teams went out to a company, met with the personnel director and talked to the director about a job for the summer. If a company was able to provide a summer job, that was great. If they were not able to provide a summer job, then the students were to ask the company for a scholarship. The scholarship would go to a non-profit organization, so that the non-profit could provide a job for the students. The amount of a scholarship was \$ 250.00. The team was told, “Don’t walk out without a commitment from the company. Walk out with a job or a scholarship.”

LD: Wow.

JT: Nobody, up to that time had thought to do that. They thought, “I want to get a job. Give me a job”. Well, the employer may not have any jobs. If that happened, then the students had been instructed to request money for a scholarship and explain how the scholarship program worked. We became very successful. One year we had 106 students that got a summer job, either at a company or a non-profit. That year we were able to raise \$ 92,000 in scholarships, so that students could work for non-profits.

LD: And get experience.

JT: And get experience.

LD: That’s 1970-something.

JT: 1973.

LD: So, \$92,000 in 1973 was a lot of money.

JT: That’s what we raised that one year. The program went on for three more years. Then after I left, the person that followed me didn’t keep it up.

LD: When did you leave?

JT: In 1976, I left the chamber.

The other thing is that because of the dynamic youth program we had developed between the business community, the schools and the non-profits, I was invited to become the national director of youth programs for the National Alliance of Business out of Washington, D.C.

LD: Wow.

JT: However, the chamber felt they could not spare me because I would be gone for a year. They needed me here. So we opted not to accept the offer for me to become the national director for one year, as a loaned executive.

LD: Right.

JT: We also developed a crime prevention program. Do you remember the Crime Watch Program, or the Neighborhood Watch?

LD: Yes. Yes.

JT: We developed a program that was something similar to that, to help communities get rid of crime in their neighborhoods. The Saint Paul Police Department operated the program and the business community funded it. Tony Policano, a police sergeant, headed up the program. These crime watch program was recognized by the United States Department of Justice. Amos Martin, the vice president of the chamber went to Washington to receive the national award.

LD: This was, again, while you were still at the chamber?

JT: At the chamber? Yes. Now, one thing that I want to point out about the chamber that was very unique. Here is an organization that was very conservative, very traditional, very set in its ways, not too willing to bring about social change, and it's the same business community, the same group of people who, after working with the minority communities and working with different groups, were the first people to say, "*Yes! We will do it*", "*Yes! We can do it*". And businesses had the resources to do it, which made a difference. I mean there can be a great organization trying to do certain things, and not be able to do it, not because it doesn't want to, but because it doesn't have the resources. When you brought in the business community, a company, or something like that, and you partner them with a minority organization, then more things can be accomplished.

LD: Right.

JT: The unique thing about my job with the chamber was that I was given freedom to do what I believed needed to be done. I came up with ideas, or other people came up with

ideas, and we packaged them. Then they were implemented. It was seldom, seldom, that I was told, “*No, that can't be done*”. I usually got a “Yes, let's do it. Let's try it”. So it was a very unique position to be able to work with the businesses, and at the same time to do all this incredible outreach to minority communities that was being done at the time.

LD: Especially at that time.

JT: I was offered a position as Equal Relations and Equal Employment Opportunity director for a company called Buckbee Mears in 1976. I took the position.

LD: What was the name of the company?

JT: Buckbee Mears. Now it's called BMC Industries.

LD: That was in 1976?

JT: 1976.

LD: Director of ?

JT: Employee Relations and Equal Employment Opportunity. Before I went to Buckbee Mears, another thing that I had done at the chamber that was unique. I had talked the chamber into hiring students to come to work at the chamber itself. There were a lot of students during my tenure that worked at the chamber. Up to the time I joined the chamber, no students had worked there. One day, the chamber had a major mailing to send out. Over four thousand letters. Of course we didn't have the equipment that we have now.

LD: Sure.

JT: All the secretaries, about twenty of them working there, were just overwhelmed by this huge mailing that had to go out in a hurry. I asked, “Do you want help?” They replied “Yes, we need help”. I had already talked to Humboldt High School, telling that I may call them to ask to send students to work at the chamber. I called the school, and said to them, “Send me five students, the best you've got. We'll pay them ten dollars an hour. They can work maybe a day”. The following morning the five students were there, all shiny and ready to go.

LD: [Chuckles]

JT: They helped the secretaries get the mailing out and by three o'clock they were done. A few days later one of the secretaries asked, “Where can I get one of those?” [Laughter] meaning a part-time student worker. So, before long, we had them working at the chamber. They came and they did really well at the chamber. So when I went to work at Buckbee Mears, I said to them, “Well I don't come alone. I come as a package. I'm bringing students with me.

LD: What kind of work did they do?

JT: At the chamber, the students assisted the secretaries, sorted and delivered mail, worked in the print and copy room and collated, folded and stuffed envelopes for major mailings. Also, when the Summer Youth Program started, two students, Laura Carlson and Catalina Adames, from Humboldt High School coordinated the program, and assisted in training the student volunteers. These two students were featured in a WCCO Television program that talked about students helping students. Also, Laura Carlson was invited by the National Alliance of Business to go to Washington DC and make a presentation on our program. That's when I was asked to become National Director of Youth Programs for the organization. At Buckbee Mears, the student that came with me [Laughter] ended up delivering mail to different departments, which was a good job, you know, for a student.

LD: Sure, a high school student.

JT: Yes, a high school student.

LD: Why did you make the switch?

JT: To Buckbee Mears?

LD: Yes.

JT: Because I was recruited. I was asked to come and help them out. They were going through some turmoil at that time. The main reason was that the competition from Japan was wiping them out. Then, after I got there, there was a major shake-up in management. The president of the company was fired. There were a number of people that were terminated. Then there were problems in employee relations. I was asked to work directly with the administration to terminate whole departments and lay-off people. So out of two thousand people, in eight months eight hundred employees were laid-off.

LD: Wow.

JT: That was a very hard job. I didn't want to be doing that.

LD: Sure.

JT: This was not what I applied to do, but because of the economic downturn and the competition from Japan, the company was forced to reduce workers dramatically. It was real difficult. Then the position to be director of the Governor's Office of Spanish Speaking Affairs became open.

LD: Tell me about that.

JT: Okay. Let's backtrack a little.

LD: Yes. So the Spanish Speaking Affairs Council...

JT: The council came later. Now in 1969, when I came to Saint Paul and I was working at the chamber of commerce, I was also very involved in the Latino community. One of the first things I did was to meet with Governor Wendell Anderson to speak about issues in the community. Also, the Minnesota Historical Society featured an article on its Gopher Historian magazine about the Mexican-American community. I was the Chairperson of the Minnesota Migrant Council, Chairperson of the Churches United For Spanish Speaking, an organization of the Minnesota Council of Churches. I was a member of the Bilingual Education Task Force and worked with various other organizations.

LD: Bilingual Education in the Saint Paul Schools?

JT: Saint Paul Public Schools, which was a difficult challenge.

The biggest thing that I got involved in the Latino Community, while I was at the chamber, was the lawsuit that was filed against the Saint Paul School System for not properly meeting the education needs of Latino students.

LD: When was this?

JT: It was in 1976. Here's what happened. In 1975, or thereabouts, there was no bilingual education in the Saint Paul schools. It was a new concept at the time and many people were opposed to it.

LD: Sure.

JT: We started working on a bilingual education program. Bridget Gonzales led the initial effort. We found out that non-English speaking Latino children, were being tested in English and couldn't pass the tests. So they were relegated to special education classes, which we felt was not correct.

LD: Right.

JT: They were not really learning what they needed to learn-English. So some parents began to complain. We explored the possibilities of what we could do to work with the Saint Paul School System. Now, up to that time I had worked with the school system in other programs through the chamber of commerce. We attended a school board meeting, and we presented a request for \$ 25,000 to do an evaluation of Latino students to see if they had been properly placed and to generate some programs in cooperation with the school system that would help the Latino children catch up. That was our proposal. We were volunteering our time and just needed the money to bring in outside educational experts. We were turned down. At the same time, a group of Highland Park School parents came to the school board and made a request for a skiing program for Highland Park students and they got it.

This galvanized the Latinos. People who learned of it, were irate. Everyone got together and a lawsuit was prepared through the Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS). One hundred and twenty families were named as Plaintiffs. The lawsuit was called "*Garcia vs. Board of Education*". A group of Latinos, headed up by Roberto Aviña served the lawsuit. The school's response was dismissive of our efforts. I was elected spokesperson for the parents. This was two years before the Spanish Speaking Council was created. The lawsuit was filed and the school system decided to fight it. It dragged on for three years. Then we won. We won everything we had asked for. It ended up costing the school far more than the \$ 25,000 that we had originally requested. This really changed the attitude of a lot of Latinos about changing the system.

LD: How so?

JT: Well, let me—before I get to the Council—backtrack again.

LD: Sure.

JT: When I first came to the United States and started getting involved back in the early 1960's, we had a Mexican American community that was more laid back, that was more status quo, did not want to change. Anything that came up, was relegated to somebody else. "*Que la comadre hable*" "*Que la comadre lo haga*" "*Que el compadre vaya*" "*Que Don Manuel nos diga*" "Let her (*la comadre*) speak for us", "Let her, (*la comadre*) do it", "Let him (*el compadre*) go" "Let Don Manuel tell us what to do".

LD: Yes

JT: So we were giving up our own power as individuals to someone else. We delegated our own authority to some spokesperson, intermediary. If the spokesperson happened to be a good person, we benefited, but if the spokesperson happened to be a scoundrel, we suffered. So the community's focus, up until the late 1960's, was on this one messiah, one important person, one leader. When I came to Saint Paul in 1969 and started working at the chamber of commerce, I also got directly involved with the Latino community, so it was kind of a dual track. I felt very strongly that we needed to diversify our leadership base. We needed to have more people able to speak for the community instead of relying on one individual as our spokesperson, who controlled everything, for good or bad in the Latino community.

LD: [Chuckles] Yes.

JT: I kept asking, "Why are we doing this"? "Why do we relegate our authority as individuals to someone else?"

LD: Right.

JT: I felt very strong about it. So I began to become more and more involved in the Latino community trying to demystify this one individual, one savior, one messiah concept of leadership that we had up to that time. In fact, a supposed Latino "leader" in

Saint Paul, who felt threatened by my actions, wrote a strongly worded letter to Amos Martin, Vice President, of the Chamber, complaining about my actions and requesting that I be curtailed from being involved in the Latino community. I still continued to bring about changes in our leadership concept. It took a long time. It wasn't something that happened overnight. In fact, after working at the Chamber for a while, some people began to think of me as "*el lider*" (the leader). I didn't want that. That's not what I was trying to become.

LD: Right, right.

JT: So I kept really working hard to bring up other people onto the leadership scene. There were younger people who were becoming involved more and more and other people who were moving to Minnesota and becoming involved. So by the time we won the lawsuit in 1978, we had a group of people who were willing to work together. They were educators, community activists, social workers, who were willing to work together as a team and bring about changes in the Saint Paul school system. That would not have happened before 1969.

LD: Yes.

JT: So I was very heavily involved in Latino issues in the Twin Cities community and statewide. Especially with the Minnesota Migrant Council. I went all over the state organizing. I would work for the chamber during the week, and then on weekends rush off to Clara City, or rush off to Crookston, or Albert Lea, here and there organizing migrant workers, organizing communities, developing leadership here and leadership there. So that more and more it wasn't just one leader, it was multiple-leadership.

The Minnesota Migrant Council was created in 1970. Following the Minnesota Migrant Council, there was an organization that was called the Migrant Affairs Office, out of the State Department of Administration.

LD: And those were both state?

JT: No. Minnesota Migrant Council was not; it was a private non-profit organization.

LD: Okay.

JT: It was a non-profit. Then the Migrant Affairs Office was a state organization, a public agency. The Migrant Affairs Office was created through a Governor's Executive Order, to basically work with state agencies to bring about more benefits and more support for the migrant community. It was supposed to work in parallel with the Minnesota Migrant Council.

LD: Okay.

JT: However, at that time, the Migrant Affairs Office wanted to have all migrant programs channeled through it. The Minnesota Migrant Council had already been in

existence since the early 1970's. The Migrant Council said "No way. We're not going to have everything channeled through the state. We want to go directly to the federal government and do our own thing" So the two organizations had a falling out. When they had this falling out, the Migrant Affairs Office lost the support of the very same people they were representing, which was the migrants.

LD: Because they went with the non-profit.

JT: Yes, they chose the non-profit. The Migrant Affairs Office closed. They had been created by Executive Order, and they could be closed at any time by the order of the governor.

Here we are without a state organization. Now the Migrant Affairs Office had employed five people and they had a couple of hundred thousand dollar budget. I don't remember exactly what the budget was. But as compensation for that loss, our great white father, the state...

LD: [Laughter]

JT: ...decided to give us the office of Hispanic Affairs, which as officially called the Governor's Office of Spanish Speaking Affairs.

LD: The Spanish Speaking Affairs Council?

JT: No, the council came later.

LD: Okay.

JT: The Office of Spanish Speaking Affairs came out of the governor's office, and it was allocated a \$ 76,000 budget.

LD: Now, just so I'm clear... You were president of the non-profit?

JT: I had been Chairperson of the non-profit, but I was no longer at that time.

LD: You were chairperson of the non-profit. All right.

JT: Since the Migrant Affairs Office was no longer in existence, people began complaining to the state. Some people were really upset. The state's response was the creation of the Spanish Speaking Affairs Office to deal with all Latino issues, not just migrant issues. But in order to do that, the staff was reduced by three people and the budget by two-thirds and the workload was increased to include, not only the migrant workers, but the whole Latino community in the state. So the office started out with very limited resources and a major increase in responsibility.

LD: So this was when you switched jobs again...

JT: Yes.

LD: You said this position came open.

JT: Open, yes. There was an eleven-person committee of Latinos that was appointed by the state to interview candidates. I was one of the candidates to be interviewed. So the committee selected candidates to be interviewed out of the 103 applicants. I was one of the candidates to be interviewed. There were candidates from the Twin Cities, from rural communities and from other parts of the country.

LD: Wow.

JT: We got interviewed, and I was elected by the committee. My name was submitted to the governor's office for appointment. I started to work in January 1977.

LD: You were chosen and your position there was?

JT: Executive Director of the Office of Spanish Speaking Affairs.

LD: Yes.

JT: The first order of business for the office was to deal with three lawsuits filed by other applicants because they didn't get the job.

LD: [Laughter]

JT: Yes, that was the very first order of business. That was handled properly by the state. The selection committee had done a good job, and the state could prove that there was no favoritism. The lawsuits were dismissed. Anyway, that was the first order of business.

There was no council then, and I started working with the Department of Administration and the Governor's Office. Technically, I reported to the governor.

We knew that the office had been established by Executive Order and we knew what had happened to the Migrant Affairs Office. We said, "Wait a second. This office is under Executive Order". So some people got together and started talking about how we could change it. We started to talk about changing it to a legislative-mandated commission. Then it would be up to the legislature to fund it and it would take a legislative act to terminate it. Also, if it continued under the Governor's office, then when there was a change in governors, the new governor could change the administration and put someone else in charge. Then the office would become a political football.

After making our presentation to the legislature, we were told that a commission had rule-making authority, that it could promulgate laws. The legislature didn't want us to have that authority. So they said, "The only thing you can have is a council", which is advisory in nature. So that's what we got. We didn't get a commission like we had expected, but we got a council.

LD: But, at least, it wasn't an executive order.

JT: It was no longer an executive order. We did get a sunset clause on it, which meant that the council could be terminated in a certain period of time, unless re-instituted by the legislature. We had a sunset clause for the first six years. Every year, the legislature would have to re-instate it. Then we got rid of the sunset clause. It took a while, but we got rid of it. One biennium the council was not included in the governor's budget. However, we prevailed in the legislature to appropriate money so that the council could continue.

So that's how the council got created, by a group of people, not just myself. Other people were involved. It was a lot of work done, mostly behind the scenes. We got a group of Latinos together and we wrote a report called "*Latinos En Minnesota*" back in 1977 that was presented to the governor and the legislature as supporting documentation for the need of a council.

LD: I think I read in your bio that was the first real report done on Latinos in Minnesota. Is that right?

JT: As far as I know, yes it was the first report on Latinos. There had been other reports done in the past but mostly about migrant workers or Mexican Americans.

LD: So this was the first kind of broad ranging report?

JT: It was a report that took a broad view of the Latino community in Minnesota. Not just migrant workers and Mexican Americans, but all Latinos.

LD: Yes.

JT: The council members were appointed by the governor. It was a seven-member council at the time. All members were Latinos. After the council was created, the council had the option to keep me on board as Executive Director or to terminate me and hire someone else of their choosing. The council had a meeting and they voted to keep me on. I was, you know, ready to go either way. If they wanted me to stay, I would stay; if they didn't want me to stay and felt somebody else could do a better job, fine. I would go on to something else. There was no issue with me personally, whether I stayed or not stayed. Since I had already been running the office for one year and I knew the ropes and all that, they decided to continue with me. We began to work setting up the council.

What's interesting is that at the time most Latinos had no experience as to what a council was supposed to do. What were the council's parameters, what were the things we were supposed to undertake? So there was a disconnect between what the council was supposed to do and what the people thought it was supposed to do. This happened from the very beginning. Some people thought that the council represented them. It was my opinion that the council did not represent the people because it was appointed by the governor and not the people. I felt that the council could not represent the people unless

the people elected the council. The council members were not elected or appointed by Latinos.

LD: Right.

JT: So the first issue we faced is trying to explain to the Latino community that the council did not represent them. You need to understand that there were very high expectations of the council and that Latinos had divergent ideas as to what the council could do for them. In some cases some of these ideas were contradictory. For example, some people wanted the council to focus its efforts on Saint Paul's West Side, the site of the largest Latino population at that time, while others felt we should do more for the migrant workers, and so on.

We kept repeating that the purpose of the council was to advise the governor and the legislature and that we worked with the community to receive input in order to advise the governor. Many individuals couldn't get over the idea that the council was supposed to represent the people. Many times the things we were being asked to do, were not what the council was supposed to do to begin with. When some Latinos saw that the council had been appropriated \$ 76,000 by the legislature, there were many requests for the use of that money. What these people failed to understand was that the council's appropriation was meant to operate the office and pay the staff and cover council expenses.

LD: [Laughter]

JT: The council had an office to run and other things to take care of. Some community members overlooked all that. The thinking was, "Seventy six thousand bucks. That's pretty good." Because of these requests, the council's first order of business was to sponsor a dance.

LD: [Laughter]

JT: I kept arguing, "What do we have to do with a dance? This is not a social group or a community organization. This is a government organization. What are we doing sponsoring a dance". Well anyway, the council overruled me and it prevailed. I had to go to the Department of Administration, which handled our finances, and explain to them that our first official action was to sponsor a dance.

LD: [Laughter] Oh, my goodness.

JT: Well I managed to convince the Department of Administration by explaining to them that it was a cultural event and that it would bring the people together. It was an appropriate thing to do.

LD: Yes, yes.

JT: They said, "Okay you can go ahead and spend the money to sponsor a dance." The next thing that happened is that a couple of council members wanted to go on trips. These

travel requests started coming in. There was no need for the council members to travel because we had a lot of work to do right here. Why would we need to go to Chicago?" "Why would we need to go to Arizona?" After having these initial setbacks... I don't want to say they were bad people or they were in it for themselves... No, they were just not knowledgeable, at the beginning, about what the state was requiring of us.

LD: Right.

JT: So I thought, "We can't work like this because some council members keep seeing the full amount of the appropriation, but they don't see that the money is already obligated to operate the office and run the council. So I went to the Department of Administration and asked them to separate the appropriation between the council and the office. We needed to have two budgets. So the appropriation was separated into council funds and office funds. The council received a \$ 3,000 annual budget and the office was allocated the remainder of the funds. This way the council knew what was the amount for their operations. This was done to keep the office running.

LD: Just a quick question... Who made up the council?

JT: The way we went about in getting council members was to have two community-wide meetings, one in the Twin Cities. At these meetings individuals were nominated. We ended up with a total of fifteen nominations. These names were submitted to the governor, for him to select seven of them. Now the governor could name anyone of his choice. He was not required to accept the community's recommendations. The governor appointed six members from the list submitted and one member appointed directly by him.

LD: You mentioned Gilbert de La O was on the first one.

JT: Yes, Gilbert was on the first council. In addition to Gilbert, the first council was composed of Irene Gomez-Bethke, JoAnne Cardenas-Enos, Fidelina Fischer, Frank Guzman, Arturo Rivera and Marilyn Vigil. All of them except Arturo Rivera were of Mexican American descent. Arturo was Puerto Rican. Fidelina lived in Saint Cloud. The rest of the members lived in the Twin Cities. Arturo was elected Chairperson of this first council. There were four women and three men appointed. Even though there were some internal disagreements, it was overall a good council and got the organization to a good start.

LD: And you said there were fifteen?

JT: There were fifteen people nominated, and seven were appointed to the council. The fifteen were nominated by the community. Of the seven that were appointed, only one was not nominated by the community. This was Fidelina Fischer from Saint Cloud. She applied directly to the governor's office and was appointed directly by the governor. Fidelina was an excellent council member.

LD: I see.

JT: So the council was created and composed with the community in mind from the very beginning. Then we started to work. People began to come up with ideas. Our unwritten philosophy was to do as much as we could get away with and don't ask the state if we could do it.

LD: [Laughter]

JT: There were things we needed to do that if we went to the governor and asked, "Can we do this" he could have said "No", because of political or other reasons. So we went ahead and undertook a lot of activities that we felt were necessary. We adopted this attitude of going ahead and doing things that we believed were right for the community's common good and didn't ask the government if we should be doing it. In the 12 years I was director of the council, the governor or the legislature, never asked us not to do something. Of course we were questioned as to why we were doing a certain thing, but after we explained our reason, we were allowed to continue.

LD: Like what? Tell me a few of the projects.

JT: In 1978, which was the first year of the council, we began to strengthen the Latino community's organizations and leadership. We felt that the council should be more of a clearing house and we needed to work with communities and organizations, and we needed to develop good tie-ins with and between them and help them in raising funds; help them in developing programs and so on.

The second thing...the council adopted the attitude that it was not to be involved directly in programs, especially social service programs, but to be a funnel by which we could get resources to those organizations and have this community-based organizations and other groups run them. So we never really ran so-called programs ourselves. We played more of a coordinating and enabling role. The first three years, from 1978 to 1981, were spent primarily in strengthening the leadership of the community, developing resources for the community and working to create new organizations.

In 1980, we sponsored a major statewide Latino conference that was called, "*Somos Uno, Somos Familia*". (We are one, We are family). This conference was aimed at examining the resources that we had and determining where we needed additional resources. Everybody that came was a member of a community based organization or non-profit. And came with the purpose of explaining what they did, how they worked and what resources they had. In that two day conference we went through that process. Then we sat down and said, "Okay, what areas are we missing that are not here?" Well one of the areas identified was economic development. We were not doing much on economic development. So as part of the ideas generated, the Minnesota Hispanic Chamber of Commerce was ultimately created.

Now, it wasn't discussed as the Minnesota Hispanic Chamber of Commerce at the time, but, talked about as a need for an economic entity that would help business. Later it became the Minnesota Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Rick Aguilar headed up the

organization. The other idea that came out of the conference was the Minnesota Hispanic Women's Economic Development Corporation. Sandy Vargas was the first person who led the organization. There were many other people involved in the creation of these economic development groups.

LD: Sandy, who is the head of the Minneapolis Foundation?

JT: Yes, she was very involved in some of the council activities. By 1980, people were really beginning to work as a team, really beginning to work together. Of course, there was still dissention, still arguments; however, there was overall a feeling of working together.

LD: Sure.

JT: By that time more and more people began to buy into the idea that we could do a lot more if we worked together.

As a result, people who did not want to cooperate or people who had their own agendas began to be marginalized more and more. This had been very common in the early 70's when we had the yoyo's.

LD: What's that?

JT: The yoyos? Yo is the word for I in Spanish. A yoyo was a person who kept saying I, I, when claiming to do something for the community. (*Yo hice esto, Yo hice eso, Yo hice el otro, yo, yo, yo.*) I did this, I did that, I did this other thing, I, I, I.

LD: Oh, okay, I did this, I did that, I see.

JT: We had a lot of yoyos. I kept thinking, if the yoyos have done as much as they claim to have done for the community, how come we still have a low standard of living? How come the community has not progressed as would be expected by all these yoyo contributions?

LD: [Laughter]

JT: They were those people that came out of the woodwork and became instant leaders, and then vanished. We had a lot of that back in the early 70's.

LD: The yoyos.

JT: Yes the yoyos. People whose experience of leadership was limited to how loud they could shout, how loud they could scream, how much they clenched and raised their fist. They came and went hot and intense like a grass fire and disappeared just as fast. In Spanish this behavior is called "*Como llamaradas de petate*". Like grass mat flames. You know, hot, intense and short lasting. I felt that this type of leadership was not going to sustain us over the long run. We needed to have leaders who had the power and

perseverance to work with us in the long-run. Fortunately we began to get over the yoyo style of leadership. We began slowly working with a lot of people to establish a sustainable leadership group. We got into collaborative efforts more and more. Those people who were not willing to cooperate, who had always been critical of what the council was attempting to do, were more and more left out. They pretty much left on their own, not that we wanted to exclude them. These yoyos could not function in a collaborative process, so they came and went.

LD: [Laughter] Like a yoyo.

JT: Yes.

LD: How long were you with the council?

JT: Thirteen years.

LD: So from...I'm loosing track.

JT: Actually eleven and a half years with the council and before that one and a half years with the Governor's Office of Spanish Speaking Affairs, a total of 13 years. It's sometimes confusing because I was with the office from January 1977 to July 1978, and with the council from August 1978 to January 1990.

LD: Wow. Oh...that covers such a huge amount of time. Tell me about how the Latino community changed in that time.

JT: In that time, the major changes that I saw in the Latino community were, first of all the diversification, the fact that people from different aspects, of different nationality groups, different occupation groups, different educational levels, and so on. Prior to that the Latino community was almost all Mexican American. Other nationality groups were very, very limited. The Mexican American community was very homogenized. The majority were blue-collar workers in meat packing companies, the railroad or migrant laborers. Some were small business owners, primarily restaurants, beauty salons or barber shops. The professionals were mostly in social services and some teaching jobs. There were people in other professions but they were the minority.

We really didn't have any manufacturing capability. I don't remember anyone operating a manufacturing facility. We really were more in the services area—beauty salons, grocery stores, restaurants, those kinds of things. Social services and teaching were two entry ways for Latinos into the professions.

As more and more people began to arrive from different countries and different backgrounds, we ended up having more professionals and the community began to become more diversified in economic attainment, educational attainment, the professions and outlook on life.

As I mentioned earlier, before the mid-1960s the Mexican-American community tended to be very insulated. When you come into a strange land and you feel different than the rest of the folks, you tend to become insular. You gravitate to people that are like you. In these instances, the first thing that happens in these isolated communities is to celebrate your culture and your religion. Cultural events, fiestas, dances tend to be the first activities that are carried out by these isolated communities. These activities are carried out along with your religious expression. You build a church and the church becomes the focus of the community. This is what usually happens in the beginning. Later on other things began to take place, opening up small businesses for example, usually restaurants or small grocery stores.

LD: Right.

JT: Those activities become your initial and you generally don't look outside of that. The thinking was, "As long as I can feed my family, I have a job, my kids go to school and the family is mostly healthy, I'm okay". At the time most aspirations tended to focus on family, work and education. Thoughts of bringing about social change were not a common feeling in the community. Now in the late 60's a new dynamic community surfaces. Unrest come in and turns everything topsy-turvy. Now we have some people shouting "Chicano Power", "*Sal si puedes*" and so on. The Chicano Liberation Front, the Brown Berets and others are challenging the way things are. This militant movement began to change the community. The attitudes changed and a new aspect of the community surfaced. We no longer had just "one leader". Now we have multiple leaders in the various communities, usually young people, vying for attention. Some of them came and went like the yoyos.

Some of them lasted a long time, like Gilbert De La O. He is one of the prime examples who was a good leader. He was an advocate, He was strong in his convictions. You know he was a firebrand in the beginning, but he learned to cooperate, to work to become a part of the new wave, a new way of thinking in the Latino community.

This new way of thinking and greater cooperation allowed us to go from an angry community to a community that was willing to work for the long haul, that was willing to say, "Okay, we're going to take this on, and we're going to continue on until it's accomplished. Winning the lawsuit against the Saint Paul Public Schools, the creation of the council and the passage of the bilingual education act were some of the results of a new way of doing things. In the process, we learned the value of perseverance.

LD: Wow.

JT: If it had been a different style of leadership, a leadership that would have kicked the door in, hollered and screamed and then left and not followed-up nothing would have happened. Fortunately, by 1978, our tactics had changed from clenched-fists to long term advocacy.

LD: When was the law implemented.

JT: The bilingual education act became effective in 1978.

LD: As a child who came in 1982, speaking only Spanish, I thank you [Laughter]

JT: Let me share an interesting example with you. In the legislature nothing ever really dies. People keep bringing things up until they succeed. A prime example is the Twins Stadium.

LD: Yes. [Chuckles]

JT: People went back and went back for years until they finally got a new stadium. Well in the late 60's, the advocates in our community were not used to that. They wanted things now. Change had to be immediate. If there was oppositions or things didn't change, they kind of walked away from it, until a new issue surfaced. These advocates didn't realize that you had to go back over and over again.

LD: Yes.

JT: If you got clobbered this one time, people went against you, you got shredded at the legislature, you retreated, and you recovered, and you regrouped and gathered your forces, and you went back and struggled all over, and again, you got clobbered. But the second year you got stronger. And you went through the same process all over again, and maybe by the third year you accomplished your goal.

LD: What taught you that patience?

JT: First it was my parents. They had the patience and perseverance to see the three of us through college, even if my dad had to work two jobs to do it. Also is the fact that I had seen what could be done with perseverance, what could be done if you sincerely said to yourself, "I want to do this. I want to accomplish this". When I first arrived at Austin Community College, I read about the Dean's Silver A (Leadership) Award and said to myself, I'm going to work towards this goal. Two years later I received the award.

At the chamber of commerce, I came up with ideas and some of them were a far distance from what the chamber was about. I would present the idea and they would look at it and say, "Mmmm. We don't think so". Then I would go back and think how I could dress the idea in a different form and would take it back. And "Mmmm, we don't think so" But the rejection wasn't as strong, you know. So you go back again. Sooner or later, they'll say "That's pretty good, let's try it". And you do it. This was one thing I learned—That you can't accomplish something worthwhile overnight. If it's given to you right away, it's usually because the power structure really doesn't care one way or the other.

LD: Right, right.

JT: "*Dale lo que quiera para que se vaya*", (Give him what he wants so that he'll go away).

LD: Yes. So basically, pawning you off?

JT: Yes, they put you off. But if you really want something worthwhile, you know they are going to oppose it. The Saint Paul School System didn't want to have a new program—Bilingual Education—foisted on them. They had done without it in all their existence. Why should they have to put up with that? So they fought it. If it had been something simple, something that would not have drastically change the way they were used to doing things, they would most likely have said “Okay” to the proposal presented.

LD: Right.

JT: The council was involved in the creation of a lot of programs. For example, we developed a coordinated Minnesota Hispanic AIDS education project called the Minnesota Hispanic Aids Partnership Program. It was between the council and six community-based organizations. The council was also involved in the creation of the Minnesota Hispanic Leadership Program. The Minnesota Hispanic Scholarship Program was created by a group of Latinos under the auspices of the council. The council helped in the creation of Casa de Esperanza and the Instituto de Arte y Cultura, and other organizations and programs like the Latino Outreach Program of the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Council.

LD: I didn't know that.

JT: Yes, the council was involved in the beginning of these programs.

LD: Wow.

JT: In 1981 and 1982, we sponsored two statewide Minnesota Hispanic Women's Conferences. The first one, in 1981, was called un *Primer Paso* (A first Step) and the one in 1982 was called *Un Paso Mas* (One More Step). As you know there was a program at the College of Saint Catherine called Un Primer Paso.

LD: I went to that program! Un Primer Paso.

JT: That program came out of these conferences. June Norhona was the first coordinator of the Un Primer Paso program.

LD: My goodness, I learned so much in that program. I'm not supposed to insert myself personally, but I just have to say, “Thank you” I learned how to shake someone's hand at that program so that they would take me seriously. Oh wow” [Chuckles]

JT: The thing about this program is that it was created by a group of women, who got together and said, “We need to do something for young Latinas”. Now the council was involved because it had sponsored the conference in cooperation with the College of St. Catherine. The conference was held at the college. So we had the partnership already built with the college. Then, Un Primer Paso came out of that. The second year we sponsored the “Un Paso Mas” which was the follow-up conference. For the first conference we had about one hundred and twenty people that came and the second year

we had about one hundred. Those two conferences were aimed at bringing about change. They were not about getting together to chit chat.

LD: [Chuckles] Right.

JT: They were definitely working conferences where we were going to sit down and come up with ideas as to how we can change the system, how we can bring more resources to the community, how we can develop far more reaching programs. Just getting together and talking about our woes and our problems was becoming old hat. We didn't want to do that anymore. We got beyond that.

LD: Right.

JT: We wanted to see what we could come up with. So I think those were the things that really allowed the council to grow and was the whole change in attitude. We began to change from victimhood to "*Si se puede*"

LD: *Si se puede*. Yes we can.

JT: Yes, we can do it. We began to change. I'm not saying that I was the only one. I'm not saying that I was one of the yoyos. No, what I'm saying is that we were a part of a process, all of us in many ways, and we accomplished things. Another accomplishment we had at the Spanish Speaking Affairs Council was legislation. We recommended some major legislative initiatives that the legislature passed.

LD: Tell me about them.

JT: The biggest one was the Bilingual Education Act. Another one was the Migrant Health Act, and the Latino Outreach Program, under the auspices of the Higher Education Coordinating Board, that targeted Latinos to inform them about available scholarships. Also, the Bilingual Communications Act.

LD: What was that?

JT: The Minnesota Bilingual Communications Act, is an act that requires public agencies who provide services to have interpreters and translators available to non-English speaking persons.

LD: Okay.

JT: Nowadays, if you go to a hospital, like Regions, the hospital is required to have an interpreter available if you don't speak English.

LD: Right, right.

JT: Then there was the Latino Outreach Program. The Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board, with the involvement and support of the council, created this

program. Rosemary Hammerlink, who is a native of Chile was the first director of this program.

We also advocated for the passage of some Executive Orders. One of these Executive Orders, created by Governor Rudy Perpich, was the Latino Employment in State Service Program. This was an eighteen-month Executive Order that encouraged state departments and agencies to hire Latinos in state service. As a result, we went from 98 Latinos in state employment to 186 in the eighteen months that the Executive Order was in effect.

LD: Wow. That's more than double. What year was that?

JT: 1983, or thereabouts.

In 1985, Ana and I were invited to the White House as part of a delegation of Latino leaders. During this visit, President Reagan gave a speech, but there was no opportunity for meeting with the President. He came into the room where we were waiting, made his speech and left. However, we did get to meet with some White House officials.

LD: Oh, my gosh. I feel like we could keep going on and on. But can you take me from 1990 to now? [Laughter] That's only twenty years. But just kind of briefly, because I do want to get to just a few more questions about...

JT: In 1990, I left the council. The main reason I left the council was that I felt we had reached a point in which there was a better leadership structure. We, as a group, had learned a lot. We had become very proficient at the things we needed to do. I felt that I was becoming an institution. People were looking at me more and more as the "*lider*" or as some people used to call me, "*el jefe*". I didn't want that. I never wanted to be that. It all came to a realization one day when a Latino said to me, "You know, you have done such a good job, that you can be here for the rest of your life, if you want it". So I thought, yes, I probably could do this, but what about other leadership. So I announced that I was leaving because I wanted to do something else. During that time, I had been asked by the Mexican government to help develop liaison programs between the United States and Mexico, as a forerunner to NAFTA, (The North American Free Trade Agreement). I had also created an international business consulting company to facilitate trade between the two countries.

LD: Oh, okay.

JT: After I left the council, the first thing I did was work with the Mexican Government in addressing NAFTA issues. And I developed a private corporation to help U.S. businesses trade with Mexico and Mexican businesses to trade with the United States. I served as a consultant to these companies. Then I became very involved with the PRI, (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) liberal wing. The PRI was Mexico's main party and had controlled the country since its creation in 1927. There was a major split within the party, with the conservatives, then called "*dinosaurios*" and the liberals, then called "*pitufos*". You know what a "*pitufito*" is, don't you?

LD: A Smurf. [Chuckles]

JT: They were called *pitufos* because they were always getting into everyone else's business. And the conservatives were called "dinosaurs" because they never wanted to change. I became closely associated with the liberal wing of the party, the one that wanted to change. The one that wanted to end corruption and bring about more transparency in government.

In 1992, Ana and I were invited by Mexican officials to be their guests on a ten-city goodwill tour of Mexico. Throughout this goodwill tour we were accorded all the courtesies that visiting dignitaries receive, which was surprising to us. It was something we didn't expect. The following year, 1993, Ana and I were invited to Mexico City to visit with high-level officials to discuss relations between Mexican Americans in the United States and citizens of Mexico. We discussed subjects like cultural exchanges, student exchanges and trade.

JT: In March 1994, the Mexican Presidential Candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio, who was a friend of mine, was assassinated in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. After he was assassinated, the ruling party's conservatives gained more power. As a result, because of my association with the liberals, my involvement with the ruling party was cut off. Anybody who had any hint of liberalism, or had work for liberal causes within the party was shunted aside. Prior to the assassination, I had the opportunity to meet with Mexico's President Carlos Salinas de Gortari four times. Two of these times, I served as the liaison between Governor Arne Carlson and Mexico's President. The other two times, I was a member of a delegation of national Latino leaders from the United States, and member of a Midwestern U.S. Latino delegation. I also led a Minnesota Latino leaders delegation to meet with high level Mexican officials, including the Secretaries of Foreign Relations, Education and Labor.

LD: Wow.

JT: How many people get to meet with the president of another country on a one-on-one basis?

LD: Not many.

JT: By the way, I also met with President Jimmy Carter in 1977, and I met with President George Herbert Walker Bush, in 1982, the first one, the dad, when he was vice president. Now, what is interesting about this...I met with President Carter for the purpose of being briefed on the SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) II Treaty with Russia to deal with nuclear arms limitation talks.

I met with President Carter and members of his cabinet. I was there for three days. I was briefed on the arms limitation talks. I had just taken the position in the Governor's Office of Spanish Speaking Affairs. I learned all about dealing with the Soviet Union.
[Laughter]

JT: I had the opportunity to talk directly with President Carter and asked him about human rights in Latin America. This was the time that there were civil wars in Latin America.

LD: Yes, all the civil wars.

JT: President Carter asked one of his assistants to contact me to follow up. So I had a contact in the White House and we established communications regarding Latin America and Latinos in the United States. The White House used to call the office to either update us on issues in Latin America or ask questions. This went on for sometime.

I had an interesting experience. I'm at the office, here in Saint Paul and the phone would ring. My secretary would answer it, and they would say, "This is the White House calling", then my secretary would transfer the call to me. One day, the secretary from the neighboring office was visiting our office when the White House called. When my secretary transferred the call to me, she said, "It's the White House". The other secretary said, "What? The White House called?" My secretary told her that they called regularly. So the visiting secretary said, "Please, the next time the White House calls, pass it over to me and I'll pass it on to Jose."

LD: [Laughter]

JT: The other secretary said, "I want to go home and tell my family that I talked with the White House." So the next time the White House called, that's what my secretary did. As I was talking to the White House, the other secretary came rushing in excitedly saying, "I talked with the White House, I talked with the White House."

LD: That was pretty incredible to take a meet and greet kind of moment and turn it into a real conversation.

JT: You need to sometimes. Otherwise you are never going to get another opportunity. In 1982, I had a similar experience. I had been invited by the ruling party to visit Mexico as their guest. On my third day there, I was invited to go to Acapulco. The under-secretary of the party's Mexico City office and a chauffer accompanied me. We left Mexico City around 10:00 at night. The party official and I were sitting in the back seat. Around 2:00 in the morning, we were stopped at a military checkpoint. The party official got out of the car, presented his credentials and went to talk to the officer in charge, to see what was going on.

On the left of the road, stood a military truck. The box top and sides were covered with canvas and there was a canvas flap covering the back. A light breeze came and the flap on the back of the truck flew open. I could see several young men sitting on benches on the sides of the truck box. A soldier quickly closed the flap. I asked the chauffer "What's going on?" The chauffer said "*Pobres diablos . Son guerrilleros, los militares los tienen*

LD: Oh, wow. So, just to translate, he said, "Poor devils". "They're guerrillas, the military has them".

JT” Yes, they got them. So I said “Oh”. The undersecretary returned to the car and told the chauffeur to go. Then he started talking about what we were going to be doing in Acapulco. No mention was made of what was going on.

So in the morning, after we arrived in Acapulco, I looked all over the newspapers to see if the incident had been mentioned. There was no mention whatsoever. I talked with other people and no one knew about it. Then I was told by my escort that there was no need to talk about the incident. That was on Saturday.

On Sunday afternoon, I got a call from Mexico City stating that the president (of Mexico) would meet with me the following Tuesday morning. I was to tell the caller, what I wanted to discuss with the president. I told him, “Tell the President that I want to discuss human rights in Mexico.”

LD: [Laughter]

JT: The caller conveyed the message, and then called back and said, “That is not an item for discussion.”

LD: Wow.

JT: I responded, “I want to talk about human rights in Mexico. If I can’t talk to the President about human rights in Mexico, what’s the use of meeting with the President?” They were shocked. After all, it was supposed to be a great honor for me to meet the President and here I was being stupid and stubborn not to go and say, “Hello Mr. President” chit-chat and leave. I said, “It’s just a waste of time for me and for him, I’m not interested in going.” Everything came to a halt. No longer was I going back to Mexico City in a chauffeur-driven car. [Laughter]. I was left to fend for myself and had to find my own way back.

So, I flew to Mexico City and from there took a flight to Monterrey. From Monterrey, I took a bus further north to where my relatives lived. I arrived, unexpected, at one of my uncle’s place and told him what had happened. He was furious with me for not meeting with the President.

Well, that was in 1982, by 1992, I was meeting with Mexico’s President Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

LD: You’ve had an amazing array of experiences. It really is astounding.

JT: In 1994, everything changed for me in my relations with Mexico. In March of that year, Luis Donaldo Colosio, who was the PRI’s candidate for President, was assassinated. He was the leader of the liberal faction of the party and I had been closely associated with his faction. So my relations with the government stopped when the conservatives regained control of the party. Then in December 1994, the Mexican peso

collapsed and I lost everything I had invested in Mexico. I was literally wiped out. So I started developing another company to develop more trade programs in Mexico, but this time outside the government and in the private sector. I became a consultant to some major corporations in Mexico and the United States to develop trade.

After I had retired, in 1998, I was asked to come and work...

LD: When did you retire officially?

JT: Officially, several times. [Laughter]

LD: Like my dad.

JT: Even though I had retired in 1996, in 1998, I received a call from Joy Sorenson Navarre, director of the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing (MICAHA) in Minneapolis. She asked me if I would be interested in becoming the associate director for the organization. MICAHA is an advocacy organization that promotes safe and affordable housing for everyone in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. I was at MICAHA from 1998 to 2002. While there, I initiated a minority community outreach program to involve these communities in advocating for affordable housing. Black, Latino and Asian community based organizations participated in this effort.

I did not work for any employer for a year. Instead I spent time doing consulting work in international trade between Mexico and the United States.

Then, in 2004, I was hired by the Saint Croix Falls Chamber of Commerce to be the director. I had permanently moved to Wisconsin in 2000. It was a very interesting job and I met a lot of people in the area. I worked there for about nine months. After leaving the chamber, I continued with my international consulting work.

JT: In 2006, I signed a consulting contract with Breaking Free to help them in fundraising and management training. They were working on a program to get women and girls out of prostitution and violent lifestyles.

LD: This is the organization you first mentioned.

JT: Yes, it's an organization that primarily works with black prostituted women and girls. There were also women from other ethnic groups and I worked with them. It was a very excellent experience. After working as a consultant for about six months, I was asked to become the Program Director. This was a learning experience as I became more and more knowledgeable of the problems and challenges facing prostituted women and girls. The biggest problems were chemical dependency and homelessness. By the time I started working there, I was living in Wisconsin.

LD: When did you move?

JT: I moved permanently to Wisconsin in 2000.

LD: You had mentioned because your kids were out of school.

JT: Yes. I was living in Wisconsin, but working in Minnesota.

LD: But, right on the border.

JT: Yes, right on the border. While working at Breaking Free, I was appointed to the Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force and elected its Co-Chairperson. Then I was appointed to the Community Cooperative Council on AIDS and HIV Prevention (CCCHAP) of the Minnesota Department of Health. I also was a member of the Ramsey County Continuum of Care Committee. I also worked with the Minneapolis Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). I was a delegate to the Department of Justice's National Human Trafficking Conference in New Orleans.

While on the other side of the border, Wisconsin border that is, I was appointed as an advisor to the Polk County office of the Farm Service Agency of the United States Department of Agriculture. I served in this capacity for nine years. Also, I served as a consultant to the Farm Service Agency on the recruitment of minorities. Presently, I'm a member of the Polk County Citizens Advisory Committee on Rewriting Land Use Ordinances and the Advisory Committee on the Comprehensive Plan. I also served on the Town of Eureka Planning Commission and coordinated a community-wide survey that served as the basis for the town's comprehensive plan, and I served as a consultant to the New Richmond, (Wisconsin) Chamber of Commerce.

LD: Yes, and you were elected...

JT: I was elected Town Supervisor for the Town of Eureka. I have served in this capacity for three years and my present term of office ends in April 2011.

LD: It's quite incredible.

JT: The thing I want to tell you...This is interesting. The biggest career break for me came when I worked at the chamber of commerce.

LD: The Saint Paul Chamber?

JT: Yes. The United States Chamber of Commerce had a program where you went to the University of Colorado, at Boulder, where you studied organizational management, how an organization functions and how an organization is managed. All organizations, all groups follow the same principles, whether it's a small unit or whether it is a multi-national corporation. The principals are the same, only in different scales. Organizational dynamics are basically similar for all organizations. After this course of study, I could go to an organization like the Polk County Farm Service Agency office, without an agricultural background and in a few days I could understand how it functioned. I could then contribute to that organization. Or I could go to Breaking Free, an organization that dealt with a completely different issue, and with almost no knowledge of the issues

facing prostituted women, I was able to provide recommendations on how to improve their program of work. This ability to be able to understand the principals and dynamics of organizational management, whether it was the town board, a non-profit organization or a corporation, was the biggest career break that I had.

I was never only one thing. I never was only a teacher, I never was only a politician, I never was only a consultant. Yet people see me in different ways.

LD: I see you now in different ways, because you've told me a lot about your incredible career. [Laughter]

JT: This is usually what happens. You know, in Mexico and other Latin countries, professionals are called by their title: *ingeniero*, *licenciado*, *doctor*, *maestro* and so on. When I was doing consulting work for an engineering firm, I was called *Ingeniero* Trejo, until I explained to them that I was not an engineer. Or when I did consulting for a governmental institution, I was called *Licenciado* Trejo, and so on. The people in Wisconsin know I'm Latino, yet they see me as one of them doing the work that needs to be done, whether it is agriculture or something else. When I was working at Breaking Free, a women's organization, I was fully accepted, even though I was male. It's this ability to understand how organizations or groups function that has been helpful to me. If I'm working with engineers, they see me as an engineer, If I'm working with farmers, they feel I'm with them.

LD: Sure. [Chuckles]

JT: The best example of this ability to see how things work is during my work at Breaking Free. In spite of being a male, I was able to relate to prostituted women and girls. They felt comfortable telling me some of the most intimate things that happened in their lives of prostitution. Something they would not normally discuss. And many of these women hated men. Yet, I was able to talk with them and go over very, very traumatic issues and be able to get them to say, "This is what happened to me...." If they wouldn't tell me, then how I could help them? When I left, they gave me a big farewell and an award for my contributions to the organization. Three of the prostituted women I worked with, came up to me and said that they did not trust men and that they were glad they met me, because maybe, now, they'd know that not every male was the same.

LD: Wow.

JT: To sit down with a woman who has been out in the street and has been criminalized, sold and bought, who has gone through some horrible things that she was forced to do, and have her come into a room with you and sit down and try to get them to open up and tell you what happened to them, when many of them see males as the victimizers, it's not an easy task. But because I learned to deal with issues, no matter what the issue was, I was able then to work in many different fields and develop programs that would benefit the particular group that I was working with. Whether that group happened to be farmers in Wisconsin, or Latinos in Saint Paul, or the state legislature, it really didn't matter

because the dynamics are pretty much the same. If you understand the principals of organizational management, they're basically the same for all groups.

LD: I'd like to kind of wrap up all of this by getting your perspective on... You've experienced so much, your own experience as an immigrant child, all of your experiences with so many different organizations. What do you see as the challenges that face the Latino community going forward, here locally or nationally?

JT: There are several challenges that I see the Latino community facing. The first major challenge is the challenge of long term highly dedicated leadership. We have not had the luxury of having this long-term dedicated leadership. Leaders have come and gone. Work needs to be done in developing a group, not individuals, but a group of leaders that can truly bring about change in the long term. Our progress has been sporadic. We really do great for a while working together for a common goal and then we kind of fall apart.

JT: At one time the Spanish Speaking Affairs Council (SSAC), now the Chicano Latino Affairs Council (CLAC), was the focus and center of activity. People were willing to work together, and develop effective programs and recommend legislative solutions. It was this partnership between SSAC and the community members that made this progress significant. Now CLAC is almost non-relevant in the community. The question that today's Latino leaders need to ask themselves is, "Why has this been allowed to happen. Why is CLAC not as relevant today as the SSAC was in the past". CLAC as a resource is still there, but it's not being utilized to its full potential.

In so many groups when the leader leaves the organization, the organization becomes non-relevant to the issues and concerns of the community. As long as we focus on the "one leader" concept, our progress will be limited to whatever that "one leader" is able to accomplish. We need diversity in our leadership and we must insist that those who have leadership positions work together for the common good of the community and not for their own personal agendas. The biggest challenges that I faced at the Spanish Speaking Affairs Council were when individuals, who claimed leadership, tried to impose their personal agenda instead of working for the common good.

LD: Right.

JT: So that's one thing we need to look at. We need to look at how we can develop a leadership structure that is willing to work together, is willing to set aside all kinds of personality issues, that is willing to dedicate its efforts for the welfare of the entire community. When leaders can no longer go on, there should be another group to ready to take over. So this continues on and on. Every time a community has a charismatic leader and the leader doesn't leave behind a structure to take over, that community really falters and many things slide backwards. When Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, it happened in the black community. It took a long time for that community to come up with a new leadership structure. Now, the black leadership is more diversified than just one person. But it took years to develop this new diversified leadership. So that's the first issue—how can we get this attitude in our leaders that it's our responsibility as spokespersons and leaders to make sure that the leaders coming up behind them will have

the skills—That’s what I tried to do through the Minnesota Hispanic Leadership Project. This is the first issue, effective and committed leadership continuity.

The second issue is that there really is no “Latino community” There are Latino communities and sometimes they have different issues. Also, the “community” over-all really doesn’t know what it wants.

Each of these Latino communities has a different perspective on things and what they want to do. Until those communities get together and say “This is important for all of us and we are going to work together” some important issues will not be resolved. We need to get over the idea that because we can’t agree on certain issues, then we can’t work together.

This working together happened with the Bilingual Education Act, when many community members worked together to advocate for the passage of the bilingual education bill. People rolled up their sleeves, put aside personality issues and all the garbage that goes with individual claims to be the one leader. This is how the Bilingual Education program was created in Minnesota, by many people working together for a common cause. Unfortunately this collaboration doesn’t last. The other thing we need to understand is that we are not a monolithic community. We are a diversified community that has different issues and different ideas. Also we have different styles of leadership. Let’s look at the unifying issues. Some of these issues are education, crime is another, health, employment. You know these issues that affect everybody. Like I told you, whatever I do, whether I’m at a town board meeting, or the agriculture committee meeting or work with prostituted women or work with Latinos, my goal and idea is to ask myself, what can bring us together to accomplish certain things and what benefits the whole group, not just a particular interest group.

LD: Right.

JT: It’s all those things that affect a community. The third thing that I see is that many people in our community struggle day to day and get bogged-down in day to day activities.

LD: *La vida cotidiana Americana* [Everyday life in America]. [Chuckles]

JT: Yes. Getting to those everyday tasks and not having the time to become visionaries, or to visualize what could be, instead of what it is, because they’re overworked or they back themselves into a particular niche, a particular state of being. So this is also another issue that within the community, that I think, is very difficult to overcome. How can you take a social worker that has fifty clients a day, limited resources, working long hours, to sit down and visualize what it could be?

LD: Yes.

JT: We don’t have that luxury. So then change becomes very difficult. I see all these everyday issues being a detriment to the growth of the community. It’s not anybody’s

fault. I'm not saying people don't want to do it. No it's simply because of the fact that we don't have the luxury to visualize far into the future. This is where a committed and dedicated leadership core comes in.

JT: Another thing that affects us is the failure to look at past accomplishments. There is a penchant among leaders and organizations to claim that they are "first" or "first ever" at doing something or other. Last year, the Girl Scouts in Saint Paul sponsored a Latino women's conference and claimed that it was the "first ever" Latina conference in the state. We were doing that almost thirty years ago and there may have been other Latina conferences before the ones we had.

LD: Right

JT: So how can you be the first? This is 2010, how can anyone claim that this is the "first ever" Latina conference in the state. Some time ago, there was an article on the Saint Paul Pioneer Press about this Latino leader who was the "first ever" Latino appointed to the Saint Paul Red Cross Board of Directors. I served on this board of directors from 1971 to 1973, even before I was working at the council. This "first ever" mentality needs to change. There are a lot of things that have happened in the past that we, either don't know, have forgotten or don't care about. If we would recognize the sacrifices and involvement of the community before us, we can take whatever we learn from the past and move forward. Unfortunately, a few "leaders" would rather get up and claim that they are the "first" to imply, "I'm the best". It's just selfish nonsense.

LD: The yoyo.

JT: We need to get away from this self-aggrandizing attitude. I would rather say, I'm glad I'm not the first. I'm the tenth person to do this, but I want to do it better than the first nine." My father used to say to me, "The reason you can look farther is because you stand on the shoulders of those that came before you."

LD: Yes.

JT: Yes. In our community, we don't look at that. We don't see that. A lot of programs came about through the sacrifice of a lot of people that are now taken for granted.

LD: Right. Yes. This is one of the main goals of this oral history project.

JT: It's an excellent goal.

LD: It's to let people know who did the work and what's already been done. One last question.

JT: Sure.

LD: We talked about the challenges. What do you think that the Latino community has contributed to Minnesota, and in what fields and in what ways?

JT: The Latino community has contributed to Minnesota in a lot of ways. First of all, through its migrant labor. Latinos have made tremendous economic contributions to the state through their labor.

The second thing that the community has contributed is that it has slowed down and in some cases reversed the idea of me, me, me, because we're more family oriented and more community oriented. The majority community, particularly in the northeastern and southwestern regions of the country, is more individually oriented—I, I, I, me, me, me. So we have done something along those lines to bring a sense of community back. Not only Latinos, but other ethnic groups bring a sense of family, bring a sense of togetherness. This family-centered orientation can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, you know, there are families that have a tendency to keep the women in "their place". While other families do not. The concept of community, as a whole, has gotten away from the majority community. So, I believe, this is one of the contributions we have made—to bring a sense of community.

The next contribution that Latinos have made is that we have revitalized the inner cities through retail shops, through living in the inner city, and being a contributing part in the inner city. While the majority community has gone into the suburbs, we have maintained the core cities throughout the United States. It's very positive example in Minneapolis' Mercado Central and in Saint Paul's Distrito del Sol (The west side). So this contribution has been very strong. Here we have a group of people who come from other countries, whether its Somalia, or Laos, or Mexico or South America, who are directly involved in the revitalization of the inner city. That's very important. Some people don't realize it. I venture to say that as things continue, there's going to be more of a movement from the suburbs back into the cities, as the cities progress. The people will benefit, because of economics, because of the high cost of gasoline, because of urban sprawl, all kinds of reasons that are going to start impacting this continued growth and spread of urbanization as it has been in the past fifty-years. We, Latinos are part of that contribution. We're part of making the downtowns, the urban cores livable again.

LD: Yes.

JT: The next contribution that I see is one of being able, as a Latino community, to persevere in valuing our families and traditions, through some very difficult times. You know, we look at the Greatest Generation during World War II and the sacrifices they made. We say that they're the greatest generation. How come today's generation is not greater than the Greatest Generation? Because the majority community has drifted away from core values of family and community. It has become absorbed in its individuality. However, we still have those values in the Latino community. We still have the core values of family, community, perseverance, hard work and dedication to these values. These values are another contribution. They can't be quantified, but these contributions are there.

LD: Yes

JT: Sometimes we don't see things that are right in front of us. For example, most Latino families have a high regard for education, and they struggle to educate their children. Let's look at one example, my father. He never earned more than \$ 5,000 per year, even working more than one job, nevertheless he put his three children through college. This high value placed in education is another contribution that has been made by Latinos.

LD: That's persevering.

JT: My father didn't know how to read or write. He never learned because of the Mexican Revolution and other political turmoil that happened during his early years. Also, his mother, my grandmother died when he was only eight years old. Even if he had to work sixteen hours a day in two jobs, he was sending us to school. That kind of perseverance has drifted away from the majority culture, but we can bring it back. Have you ever thought about this? When you go to the farmer's market in Minneapolis, there are mostly Hmong vendors. Why?

LD: Yes.

Because immigrants are willing to do many things that the majority society no longer considers necessary or important. They brought an old-fashioned work ethic, a whole different way of looking at things. Those are things that are really, really contributing to the majority community by being examples of what can be done to persevere. See, we had the Greatest Generation at one time, and somehow, through the (President Ronald) Regan years, the "me, myself and I years", we got away from that. We became more materialistic as the majority society drifted away from the sense of community, family and from things that were really important. It all became compartmentalized—women's rights, men's rights, elderly rights, gay rights, but not family rights, community rights—so everything was separated.

LD: Any others?

JT: Not that I can think of right now.

LD: That's pretty good. [Chuckles] Well, I want to thank you so much on behalf of the Historical Society, but also, personally. Really, as you were talking, I realized how many parts of my life were impacted by your work. So, just personally, I really want to thank you.

JT: One thing that we did that I found very satisfying and, at the time very sad, was that we worked really, really hard to get the 3M Company to provide scholarships for students, full pay, four year scholarships for minority students in the Saint Paul School System. Humboldt was one of those schools. If a minority student, under this scholarship, wanted to attend any higher educational institution in Minnesota, they got four years paid.

LD: Wow.

JT: A full scholarship. The sad part is that very few Latinos of this program.

LD: I think my cousin might have been one. So, again [Chuckles].

JT: How can we have a major corporation come and do that? It took a group of people to approach a major corporation and say, “This is what we really, really need.” So we had some minority students who took advantage of it, but many did not. I had hoped that a lot of them would sign up and be part of it, and it didn’t happen.

LD: That’s the work of our generation.

JT: Yes.

LD: I think we’re done.

JT: Do you have any other questions?

LD: No, unless you have anything else to add?

JT: No, I can’t think of anything else. There were a lot of programs that did happen, a lot of good ones, and some of them died along the way and others continued. The thing that I feel sad about is that we don’t take advantage of what’s already there. We just don’t do that.

LD: Okay.

JT: We need to work more in putting personalities aside and to look at the overall picture. What is in the best interests of the community? We shouldn’t say “You know, I don’t like that Juan Doe. He’s not very good” and then either walk away or try to discredit him. What we need to do is say, “I don’t like Juan, but you know, he is working on some good programs that will help us and I should help him”. Our leaders, if they are dedicated and conscientious to the overall benefit of the community, not only need, but also deserve our support.

LD: Right. Those are some very wise words to end on. Thank you again so much!

JT: Well, thank you for this opportunity.