Roberto Treviño, Jr. Narrator

Abner Arauza Interviewer

December 15, 2010 Kandiyohi County Historical Society Office Willmar, Minnesota

Roberto Treviño, Jr. -RT Abner Arauza -AA

AA: This is Abner Arauza interviewing Roberto Treviño, Jr. in Willmar, Minnesota. We are in the Kandiyohi County Historical Society Office and this is December 15, 2010. Roberto, thank you very much for participating in this project for the Minnesota Historical Society, and for approving the use of this for this particular project that we're discussing. So we'll get going. And if you will state your name?

RT: Roberto Treviño.

AA: And your parents' names?

RT: My father's name is Roberto Efraín Treviño and my mother's name is Elvira Flores de Treviño.

AA: Okay. And where were your parents born?

RT: Mom was born in Piedras Negras, Mexico. Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico. And Dad was born in Allende, Coahuila, Mexico. And Allende is about sixty, seventy miles south of the U.S.-Mexican border.

AA: Okay.

RT: And Piedras Negras is right on the border between Texas and Eagle Pass.

AA: Allende is close to Morelos [Mexico].

RT: Yes. Yes.

AA: Yes, that's where my dad is from.

RT: Okay. Okay.

AA: Yes.

RT: Yes.

AA: How many siblings?

RT: Well, I have three sisters.

AA: Okay.

RT: An older sister, Yolanda, and she is thirteen months older than I am, and then there's two younger siblings, Noemi Anjelica and Ruth Abigail. Noemi is seven years younger, and Ruth, the baby Ruth, is fourteen years younger than I am. So there's a little bit of a gap. And so, essentially, we had two families, Yolanda and myself, and then the two younger siblings, you know. Because by the time the two babies, the two little girls were old enough, we were already in high school and college.

AA: Yes. And some of them live here and some of them don't.

RT: Actually, Ruth lives here in Willmar. And Noemi lives in Saint Paul. And Yolanda lives in Indiana, in Bloomington, Indiana. So that's where they live.

AA: Okay. And your mom and dad?

RT: And Mom and Dad are snowbirds, which is kind of nice to have. They still own the house here in Willmar, but every winter they head down to San Antonio. And they have a house down in San Antonio, right outside of San Antonio. So, normally, they are there six, eight months out of the year. Try to get away from this cold weather.

AA: [Chuckles] Wow. I don't blame them.

RT: Yes.

AA: I'd like to be able to do that. Yes, that's nice. Tell me your age and your date of birth.

RT: Okay, I'm actually forty-three years old. And I was born April 6, 1967. That's the day that the world became a better place!

AA: Wow. I would have guessed you were in your late twenties.

RT: Oh, thank you. Thank you.

AA: *De nada*. And you were born where?

RT: I was born in Eagle Pass, Texas.

AA: Okay.

RT: Which is right across the border from Piedras Negras. So it's like Fargo-Moorhead, you know, it's the Rio Grande that separates Texas and Mexico. And I was born right on, right on the river. Right there in Eagle Pass, Fort Duncan Hospital.

AA: [Chuckles] Is that still around?

RT: Allí dejé el ombligo. Yes. That's where I left my belly button.

AA: Wow. Because I know that they were talking of converting it into something else.

RT: I don't know. I don't know.

AA: So I wondered if something happened to it or not. Yes, well, they probably still have it.

RT: [Chuckles]

AA: Okay. Tell me about your education level.

RT: I have a bachelor's in business administration, so I've got a four-year degree from Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

AA: Okay. Okay, and you're not married.

RT: No, not married. But still looking! Not looking very hard, pero [but] . . .

AA: Okay, so that's an ad here.

RT: Yes.

AA: We're going to have to charge you for that. [Chuckles] Okay, no number of children or names of children . . .

RT: No.

AA: Since we're not talking here about children, how about your siblings? Education and occupation.

RT: Yolanda, my oldest sister, she's got a Ph.D. in education policy.

AA: Okay.

RT: And she's the assistant dean of the graduate school at the University of Indiana in Bloomington. My little sister, Noemi, she's in Saint Paul and she has a master's in education. And she works for the Department of Education, in federal programs in the Department of Education.

AA: Okay.

RT: And little Ruth, baby Ruth, and she's what, thirty years old . . .

AA: [Chuckles]

RT: She has a bachelor's in anthropology from Baylor University.

AA: Okay.

. βethel U RT: So all of us went to Baylor except Noemi, and she went to Bethel University in Roseville, here in Minnesota.

AA: Ruth?

RT: Noemi.

AA: Noemi.

RT: Noemi, yes.

AA: Okay.

RT: Ruth started off at Ridgewater [College in Willmar, Minnesota], then she transferred to Saint Kate's [University of Saint Catherine in Saint Paul, Minnesota], and then she ended up at Baylor down in Waco.

AA: Okay. What is she doing now?

RT: She actually works for the Department of Employment and Economic Development here at the Workforce Center here in Willmar. And she works with migrant farmworkers. She helps them find work, helps them find jobs.

AA: Yes.

RT: That's what she works with.

AA: Okay. What year did your family settle in Willmar?

RT: Well, in Willmar, it was actually 1987. But really, you know, our history is a little different. My family was migrant farmworkers and we would come up to the Fargo-Moorhead area in the 1960s. So I was born in Eagle Pass, Texas, in 1967. And we moved to Moorhead, Minnesota, in 1968, and so I grew up in Moorhead, Minnesota. And we lived there until 1977, so ten, eleven years. And then we moved to Dallas because my dad had an opportunity to run a business with one of his brothers. So he had his own construction company in the Dallas metro area. We were there until 1987 when they moved back to Minnesota, and that's when they moved to Willmar. And really, I didn't move with them. I was already in college at that time.

AA: Okay.

RT: And so when I went to college, they moved to Willmar. They tried to lose me, but I found them!

AA: [Chuckles] You followed, hmmm?

RT: Yes, yes.

AA: Homing instinct.

RT: One of those, one of those baby boomer bounce back kids. That was me.

AA: [Chuckles] Okay, so you came in the late 1980s.

RT: In the late 1980s, yes.

AA: Okay. You kind of told me that your dad, you know, that process that your . . .

RT: Yes.

AA: How your dad felt to come here.

RT: Yes.

AA: But what was the thought process in finding Willmar and settling here?

RT: You know, actually, it's kind of a miracle that we really ended up in Willmar, because we came on vacation that summer. We were visiting. We were going to come to Moorhead. The economy was bad in Texas in 1986, 1987, and Dad hadn't taken a vacation in ten years because, you know, when you're a small business owner . . .

AA: Sure.

RT: You know, that doesn't happen. And so we came up to visit. We went to Moorhead and visited friends, and then we were going to swing by Willmar because we had a friend that was here, Saraí Rodriguez, and she was actually the minority advisor at the Willmar college here.

AA: Yes.

RT: And as we came by and visited and talked, she said that she was moving to the Chicago area. And she says to my father, "Why don't you apply for the job here?" And Dad's like, "No, no, no, no, I can't. I got a business in Texas. You know, I can't come up." And so, to make a long story short, he said, "Okay, I'll apply." And so he applied and he ended up getting the job here. But at the same time we were here that summer, we went to visit a church in Blomkest, History Projett Minnesota, which is a little town, population, I don't know, a hundred. So it's not even on the map in most maps. And so . . .

AA: But close to Willmar.

RT: Close to Willmar, about ten miles away.

AA: Okay.

RT: And so we grew up Protestant, not Catholic.

AA: Yes.

RT: Okay, so we grew up Baptist, which is different than most Latinos. Most Latinos are Catholic. And so we grew up Protestant, we grew up Baptist, and so we went to a Baptist church. Well, here in Minnesota, they have like summer hours or something. And so when we arrived, we thought we were arriving, you know, for Sunday school hour, but it was actually the service.

AA: [Chuckles]

RT: And if you know anything about Baptist churches, all the seats get filled in the back of the church. So the only seats that were left were the front seats. And so we had to go all the way to the front pew, you know, right there and almost in the middle, almost towards the end of the service. And so here's the whole family, you know, filing in to sit at the very front. And then you know, "Amen," the very last hymn, and we're dismissed. It was like, oh! I guess we kind of, we didn't time that one very well.

AA: [Chuckles]

RT: And so the pastor immediately says, "Hey, why don't you come on over and have lunch with us?" And he invited us to stay and says, "You know what? You guys are an answer to prayer, because we are looking for somebody to outreach to the Hispanic community."

AA: Wow.

RT: At that time, the Hispanic community was starting to grow and change here in the Willmar area, and so the church's ecumenical council was looking at ways to reach that population. And Dad was a lay pastor down in Texas, meaning he helped pastor a church and teach, but he wasn't ordained or anything. And so Dad was like, "No, no, no, no. I'm not here, you know, I'm just here for vacation." But the economy was just terrible. And so really, you know, the timing of things. Dad was making excuses, you know, "Oh no, we don't have a place to live." And the pastor said, "Well, we have a house for you." "No, no, we don't have a job here." And then of course Saraí's position was available.

AA: Sure.

RT: And they offered him the job. So every excuse that Dad made, you know, something happened where the opportunity was available for us. And so we moved to Blomkest. I stayed in Texas, went to college. The whole family moved up. And we didn't sell our home in Texas because the economy was bad. The house wasn't selling, the house wasn't selling, so we ended up renting the house in the Dallas area and we moved up here. And so we lived in, we bought a small house here in Willmar, and we lived there, oh, I don't know, four or five years.

One of the teachers that Dad had met at the college had a nice little property right outside of Willmar, probably about ten acres. And we went to visit them at their house and everything, and Mom says, "You know what? If you ever decide to sell, you let us know." And okay, sure, fine. And that was the end of the conversation. Four or five years later, David Sjodin, you know, the guy, the teacher, knocks on Mom's house at about seven a.m. and says, "You know what? I'm moving. I'm retiring, I'm moving to Arizona for health reasons. I want you to have the opportunity to buy this house. I haven't told anybody, but I'm going to go and give my two-week notice." And later that day, Mom gets a call from the realtor in Texas who says, "Hey, we found a buyer for your house."

AA: Hmmm.

RT: And so I mean, every step that has happened, things have fallen into place. So Mom and Dad purchased the property, you know, ten acres right outside of Willmar. And so that's where the family kind of grew up, my two younger sisters.

AA: Yes.

RT: Of course, I was already in college at the time, and I'd only come home, you know, for summers and holidays and stuff like that.

AA: Yes. How did your mom and the rest of the family feel about moving here?

RT: You know, Mom was excited because, obviously, being a self-employed, the money was tight. Money was tight.

AA: Right.

RT: And so getting a job with benefits, Mom was really happy. Dad was kind of, you know, struggling with his business and tying up loose ends, but we enjoyed Texas, we enjoyed Dallas, but the reason we moved was economic opportunity. That was the main reason. The biggest adjustment, I think, was moving from the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area to a small town, you know, a small rural area.

AA: Yes.

RT: Which, again, was an adjustment, but not really, because we had grown up in Moorhead, you know, in the 1970s. So it was an adjustment, but it wasn't like a complete culture shock, you know. I mean, I learned how to drive in Dallas, you know, so you're driving seventy-five miles an hour on an interstate freeway. You know, and here you're driving ten miles an hour behind a tractor.

AA: [Chuckles] I did on the way here!

RT: [Laughter] So it was some adjustment, you know

AA: Yes.

RT: But I think Mom was very, very happy. And of course the girls, you know, they didn't care. You know, they were just too young to see the difference. They enjoyed it.

AA: Just being with Mom and Dad was enough.

RT: Yes, being with Mom and Dad. Yes.

AA: Well, you know, so Moorhead, because of the weather, similar weather . . .

RT: Yes.

AA: Similar ethnic composition.

RT: Yes.

AA: Similar size.

RT: Yes.

AA: So it was kind of like boot camp. But there's a difference between Willmar and Moorhead, anyway.

RT: You know, there was. And I think the main difference was that growing up in Moorhead, I think there was like two Mexican families year round, you know, in the 1970s. Because all the Latinos that would come in, they were migrant farmworkers. They would come to the Red River Valley, work, and then leave.

AA: Yes.

RT: Well, obviously, every year, more and more families would stay. Well, when we moved to Willmar, it was the same situation. Just recently, Hispanics were starting to move into the area, so there were a lot of changes to the demographics that was happening. Here in Willmar, it's agricultural-based, but not as much field work. It's more, in the Red River Valley it is sugar beets that's the main crop.

AA: Yes.

RT: Well, here there are some sugar beets, but there's also a lot of livestock, you know, a lot of turkey processing.

AA: Okay.

RT: And some dairies in the area. And so the work was more factory work, more year round work, and families were starting to settle in the area. And that's why the churches were kind of looking to reach out to that Hispanic community at the time.

AA: So what were some of the experiences that your family went through?

RT: Yes. There's a saying that the color of a Latino is like coffee. You know, some with a little more sugar, I mean, some a little more cream, and some a little more coffee. So the color of a Latino, you know, can range from blonde hair, blue eyes to, you know, black, dark, African features.

AA: Yes.

RT: And so all of them can be Latino. And so the darker your skin, I think, there was a little bit more institutional racism, some prejudicisms that occurred. I can think of two things that happened. My little sister, Noemi, was born in Fargo, okay, and then we moved to Dallas. So when we moved to Willmar, I think she was in like first grade or second grade.

AA: Yes.

RT: And we go to register in the school and they say she has to take ESL classes. And it's like, well, what for? She doesn't know Spanish, you know, this is all she speaks is English.

AA: Yes.

RT: So just because of the last name, just because of, you know, my parents' accent, they immediately stereotyped and categorized that she needed to be in ESL. So there were some issues, you know, for my younger siblings. Dealing with, I think, some prejudice and preconceived ideas of what a Hispanic was.

AA: How was that resolved?

RT: Mom said, "No, it's not going to happen."

AA: Yes.

RT: You know, "She doesn't speak Spanish; she's not going into ESL." And so it was resolved. And Dad being on staff at the college, well, that carried a little more weight, you know. And even when they were looking at houses to purchase, the realtor would show them, you know, some dilapidated, rundown houses. And my mom was like, "What is this?" You know. And I think a little bit of steering was happening, as opposed to, you know, taking them to some better houses. I think that, again, that was some prejudice that was happening. It was resolved just by my parents being persistent, saying, "No, that's not what we're looking for. No, that's not what we're looking for." It took them quite a while to find the right place. But those were two incidents that I can think of.

And then a third incident that I can recall is during the summers, I would come up and work during the summers. And my older sister also came home from college and worked during the summers. And one of the things that she did, she worked for the migrant education program where, during the summer, the schools have like a summer school for migrant farmworker kids, because they tend to fall behind in the regular school district. So there's opportunities for them to catch up and go to school. One of the opportunities was to take a field trip.

Yolanda, my older sister, is a little bit darker than I am—black hair, jet black hair, black eyes, and darker skin. I've got dark brown hair, dark brown eyes, but lighter skin. And so one of the opportunities was that we were going to take a field trip, so the program gave her like a two thousand dollar check, you know, to pay for the hotel and the car rental and this and that. And so she went to the bank to get it cashed, and I went with her. And so we go up to the teller to say, "Hey, we need to cash this," because, you know, it is part of the program. And Yolanda, the check was written to Yolanda, and yet the whole time the cashier was talking to me. And I was like two steps behind her, I wasn't even, you know, at the counter.

AA: Yes.

RT: And almost like she was ignoring Yolanda. And I don't know if it was because of her features, or because she was a female, or what the issue was, but my sister was *livid*. Here she is, working on her master's [degree] at the time, and she's being treated like a second class citizen. She was *livid*.

AA: I can imagine.

RT: And she, in fact, she said, "Excuse me, can I speak with your manager? I want to see the vice president or the bank manager." And oh, my sister ripped the guy a new one. She says, "I don't know who this little clerk is, some, you know, farm, farmer's wife with, you know, barely a high school education. But you need to train her on some customer service," and da, da, da, da, because of course, we grew up in Dallas, you know.

AA: Yes.

RT: I mean, so those were some incidents that were like culture clashes that we experienced at the time when we first moved to the area.

AA: But your family wasn't shy about establishing themselves.

RT: No. In fact, when I was in fifth grade, in Moorhead, Minnesota, my father decided to take us on a family vacation. And we took a van from Moorhead, Minnesota all the way to Mexico City. And it was a two and half month vacation. We knew we were going to do this in September at the beginning of the school year, and my Dad says, "You talk to the teacher and you get homework to get ahead so you don't fall behind."

AA: Yes.

RT: And so that whole first semester we were getting homework, because we knew we were going to be gone December and January. And so that was a very, very critical time in my life where we were able to receive some ethnic pride and some, and, you know, some *orgullo* (pride) of who you are.

AA: Yes.

RT: Because my mother and father thought it was that important to take this trip and see where our roots were. You know, the Aztecs and the pyramids and the colonialism and all the history of Mexico. And because we were in our own van, we could stop anywhere we wanted, and we could see the sights. And it established something in me at a very young age of being proud of who I am. Especially being a Mexicano, and that's one thing that Dad always said, he said, "Mijo, tu eres un Mexicano. [Son, you are a Mexican.] I don't care if you're born in the U.S. You're a Mexicano, because your mother's Mexicana and your father's Mexicano. It makes you a Mexicano." But I'm not, you know. I'm a U.S. citizen. I'm not, you know, Mexican by nationality. But the corazon [heart] is a Mexicano, you know! And so I see myself as and that's how I was able to deal with those issues, because I knew who I was, you know, because of my father and my mother giving us that pride.

AA: Good. And how long have you lived in Willmar?

RT: I have lived in Willmar since 2001.

AA: Okay.

RT: Again, in 1987, when my folks moved here, I was in college. I bounced around, I moved to Marshall, Minnesota. I've lived in Saint Paul, I lived in Marshall, Minnesota, which is Southwest Minnesota, rural Minnesota. And that was my first quote/unquote "real" job. I was the director of human resources at a turkey processing plant.

AA: Okay.

RT: Which was quite an experience. And eventually I moved to Willmar in 2001. There was an opportunity for me to get a job here in Willmar and then I moved to the area. And for me it's like, well, where do you consider home? Well, home is wherever Mom and Dad are, you know.

AA: Yes.

RT: I've got great childhood memories of the Fargo-Moorhead area, and junior high and high school in the Dallas area, but home is really wherever Mom and Dad are. That's kind of the feeling.

AA: That's being *Mexicano*. [Chuckles]

RT: Yes, yes.

AA: Yes. And you've been living in your parents' home all this time?

RT: Yes, yes. My parents purchased a home. And of course, you know, ten acres, so there's always grass to mow. And I said, "Dad aren't you going to buy a lawn mower?" And he says, "What for? I've got you." [Laughter] Yes, just helping around the house and, you know, it's quite a bit of things to do, especially having a house. So it works out. People always say, you know, the homeless population, the homeless situation is pretty bad, but there's not a whole lot of Latino homelessness. Well, you've actually got to move out of your house [laughs] to have to be homeless! So I'm still living at home. [Laughter]

AA: Well, but again, that's very Mexicano families.

RT: And that's the culture. That's the culture, you know.

AA: Yes.

RT: You know, listening and talking to friends and stuff, "Yes, when my son gets to be eighteen years old, boom, he's out of the house." And I'm like, wow, that's so *gringo* [colloquial for Anglo], you know. That's so different, alien to my concept of what family is and extended family, you know. I mean, that's just the way it is. And you think about, "Oh, you know, we're going to put the parents in a nursing home." What? You know, that's why you have a room for

your mom or your dad or your *abuelito* [grandpa], *abuelita* [grandma], you know. It's just the thought is just foreign, you know. And just, it doesn't compute. So that's different.

AA: Yes. Yes. Okay, so your parents are snowbirds, so they have one foot in Texas and one foot in Willmar.

RT: Yes.

AA: Do you perceive Willmar as a temporary home or a permanent home?

RT: I do. I do perceive it as a temporary home. Being single, it's, I'll go wherever the economic opportunities are, you know. I mean, there's nothing tying me here to the location other than, you know, I enjoy living in a rural population. I think it's, you know, growing up in Texas, you have that elbow room, that feeling of being spread out. And I lived in Saint Paul for a while, and oh boy, it was just cramped and the big city. It was fun, but there's no elbow room. And I enjoy the wide open spaces, you know, being out here in the country. I like to tell people I'm a city boy but a country boy at heart.

AA: [Chuckles]

RT: But yes. No, I view Willmar as temporary, you know. It's just kind of, there's nothing really keeping me here as far as permanency unless, you know, because again, roots are where the family is. And so we're all spread out, so there's really nothing keeping me here.

AA: How does Marshall and Willmar compare?

RT: I think Willmar's population is about twenty-five thousand. I think Marshall's population is about fifteen thousand, so it's a little smaller, but they are both regional hubs. Willmar is more of a medical and an economic hub, but Marshall has a state university there, so that's one of the big . . . and they also have one of the big hospitals in Southwest Minnesota. So they're both regional hubs.

AA: Yes.

RT: But Marshall is a little bit smaller and more of a college town, because when the students leave during the school year, you know, it's a very small town over in Marshall. But I was there for seven years. And I enjoyed Marshall at the time, but I was beginning my career in human resources, so I'm putting in, you know, sixty, seventy hours a week.

AA: Yes.

RT: You know, so not much opportunity to get involved as far as outside the workplace.

AA: Do you maintain contact with what you consider homeland, whether it's South Texas where your family came from or?

RT: Yes, definitely.

AA: How often and how does that happen?

RT: Yes, well, you know, obviously, my mother has eleven brothers and sisters and my father has eleven brothers and sisters.

AA: Wow.

RT: Obviously, some *tios* [uncles] and *tias* [aunts] have passed away, but it's a very large extended family.

AA: Yes.

RT: On my mom's side, I think, I've got a hundred and eighty-six first and second cousins. And I know them all.

AA: Wow.

RT: And I know them all. And on my dad's side we have about, I don't know, ninety-eight, a hundred and five first and second cousins. So it's a big, big family. And we have family reunions every other year. One summer it's one side of the family and the other summer it's the other side of the family.

AA: [Chuckles]

RT: So we try to make it to as many of them as possible, and that's how we keep in touch with extended family is family reunions, is the main way. But also, you know, we talk on the phone a lot with cousins. Kind of just touch base and seeing where they're at and what's going on. This interesting phenomena of this new Facebook, that's been kind of neat. *Una tia mia* [one of my aunts], she calls the Facebook *esa cosa del chisme* [that gossip thing]. [Laughter] You know.

AA: Yes. [Chuckles]

RT: In the old days, *she* was the *chisme*. You know, she knew everything that was going on. And now, you know, everybody posts what's happening in their lives.

AA: That's the competition, right.

RT: Yes, yes. So she doesn't like the Facebook anymore, because she's not the main conduit of information.

AA: Yes.

RT: But yes, you know, pretty much family reunions. And then you do try to get back to visit family, you know, when you can. On my mom's side, we still have some relatives who come up and do fall harvest kind of farm work.

AA: Oh, okay. Sure.

RT: And a lot of my cousins are truck drivers, and so whenever they're passing through, you know, Interstate 29 or I-35, you know, they'll say, "Hey, I'm passing through Minneapolis," or, "I'm passing through Saint Cloud." And so we'll drop whatever we are doing and we'll go and have lunch with them on the road somewhere, you know, just to be in touch.

AA: Yes.

RT: Because it's family. So you have to make that effort.

AA: Boy, those family reunions must be fun.

RT: Yes, they are. They are. In fact, we usually order t-shirts in a lot of different colors. And so, you know, the yellows, and the reds, and the purples, and the blues, and you kind of see, you know, the different branches of the family tree.

AA: Oh.

RT: So it is a lot of fun, yes.

AA: Yes. I wondered how you would organize an event that big.

RT: Yes, yes. Well, one year we had it here in Blomkest, actually.

AA: Okay.

RT: And everybody came up to Minnesota that summer. And so we rented out the community center in Blomkest, which is a little rinky-dink town. And we had a band, Los Lobos Del Norte from Renville County, and music and everything, big, old speakers the size of this room.

AA: [Chuckles]

RT: And boy, the whole town, you know, opened up their doors and said, "What's going on over there?" He says, "Oh yes, those *Mexicanos*, that's just one family." So that was quite an experience of that for people to see, you know, Latinos in a different light. You know, having a family reunion, as opposed to just being the farmhand or the farmworkers. That was kind of fun.

AA: [Chuckles] That's great. So the music spilled out and the aroma of the food spilled out.

RT: Yes, *las carnitas [the meats, usually pork]*, and *carne asada* [grilled meat, usually beef or chicken]. Yes, definitely, the whole town was . . .

AA: So it was very traditional.

RT: Oh, very traditional, yes. Yes. El guizo [sautéed cubed meat prepared in a seasoned gravy], el menudo [beef tripe soup prepared with hominy and spices; often includes beef or pork soup bones], and it was a, three-day event, you know, especially with people driving from so far.

AA: Yes.

RT: Most of our reunions are three, four day events, because everybody's flying in or driving in from around the country. So everything revolves around food, of course, and, you know, catching up with one another and stuff like that.

AA: Yes. Wow. Describe language use in your home with your family.

RT: Yes, well, I remember growing up in Moorhead, I went to preschool, I went to Head Start.

AA: Yes.

RT: And I remember sitting down with my mother and teaching her colors and shapes, and I was learning the words and she was learning English. So I remember, you know, helping my mom learn English, because Mom didn't know English when we moved to Moorhead. So Mom and Dad would speak to us in Spanish. And by the time we moved to Texas, when I was in sixth grade, we would answer in English. And so they would talk to us in Spanish but we would answer in English. So we understood everything but we couldn't speak it very well. And on the flipside, Mom and Dad understood, you know, ninety-nine percent of the English, but their first language was Spanish.

AA: Yes.

RT: So even now my parents speak to us in Spanish. And now, of course, we answer in Spanish, because we've realized the importance of practicing the language and how it's an asset. But growing up, you know, there was a time there that I just wasn't able to speak Spanish very well because that wasn't the language we spoke often enough. But we always understood everything.

AA: Yes. How about outside the home?

RT: Outside the home it's mostly English, obviously, because of the workplace. But I remember growing up in Dallas, I worked construction during the summers. And plus, all the workers were Mexicanos, Latinos. And so I ended up from a very early age being that bridge, being that conduit between the two cultures, helping translate, and helping my parents understand what was going on. And same thing in construction, you know, translating what the foreman wanted from English to Spanish. So I always used my language skills, since the very beginning.

AA: Okay, so outside the home with other people it's English.

RT: Yes.

AA: And with your family? If you're out about town with your mom and dad?

RT: Yes, well, with my siblings it's definitely English.

AA: Yes.

RT: But with Mom and Dad, it's mostly Spanish, you know, because that's what they're more comfortable with. But I remember my father saying something, I think, at a very young age, he said, "Mijo, tienes que hablar en Espanol or Ingles, pero no los mezcles. [You need to speak English or Spanish, but don't mix the two.] And you hear a lot about Spanglish, you know, where and this is from a lot of South Texas people, California people, where they mesh the languages together. They'll mix the words in English and Spanish, and you get this Spanglish happening. And my father said, "You know, mijo (son), a lot of people are going to think you're stupider than you are because you're not speaking proper English and you're not speaking proper Spanish." So that's always stuck in my mind, trying to speak complete sentences in one language or the other, but not mixing the two. Because again, perception is reality. And being a minority person, people are going to make assumptions about you, and so you don't want to give them an opportunity to make negative assumptions.

AA: So when you say Spanglish, you refer to creating hybrid words from, by mixing, making up a new word between English and Spanish.

RT: Right.

AA: As opposed to flip-flopping between English and Spanish?

RT: Both. Both creating hybrid words and also flip-flopping in the same sentence. For example, Que vamos a comer ahorita right now? [What are we going to eat right now?]

AA: Yes.

RT: You know, *subete a la troca*. [Get in the truck.] well, you know, *troca* isn't even a Spanish word

AA: You make it up.

RT: But that's a Spanglish word for truck. *Troca* and truck.

AA: Yes.

RT: You know, but people recognize it, you know. Things like that, different words that are just as you're speaking, it's just easier to say it in English than saying the Spanish word. And Dad always frowned upon that. You know, Dad is very well read in Spanish, he reads a lot. And he passed that love of reading on to me, so that's one of my favorite pastimes is reading. And one of the things I hate reading in Spanish because in English I read so fast that it's work for me to read in Spanish. And so I struggle reading it. Not that I don't understand it or that I don't read it, but I'm not, I don't read it as fast as I'd like to. One of the things that Dad says, Dad still thinks in Spanish, and so then he has to translate everything into English. Well, I think in English and have to translate everything into Spanish. And it happens simultaneously almost, you know.

AA: Yes.

RT: Super-fast, but at the same time if I'm immersed in the Hispanic culture, like when I'm in Mexico for two, three weeks, then I begin to think in Spanish, you know, but it takes two or three weeks to be able to do that.

AA: Yes.

RT: But right now, you know, my dominant language is English.

AA: How about when you run into or meet other Latinos in the community? The language.

RT: Yes. It seems a lot of the non-verbal cues, you know, you look at someone and you nod and you find that familiarity with someone by the way they act, the way they look, you know, the facial expressions, and you find a common ground. And I've always been a person who likes to make other people feel at ease, so if I see them struggling with English, you know, I'll break into Spanish, saying, "Hey, you know, can I help you?"

AA: Yes.

RT: I'm a real estate agent, so that's kind of the personality I am. Well, you know, how can I help you? How can I serve you? But I'll speak English or Spanish or whatever you want to make you feel comfortable.

AA: So you kind of go with the flow and let them kind of guide as to how they feel more comfortable in English or Spanish.

RT: Yes, exactly, how the conversation is going to go. Yes. Yes.

AA: Good. What do you consider Hispanic or Latino cultural traditions? How would you define?

RT: Wow. That's such a gray and such a broad category.

AA: Yes.

RT: Because the culture is dynamic and it's changing. And there are myths about our culture that still exist, both good and bad. But one of the things that I would define, because I grew up with it, was the *piñata*, you know, at birthday parties. You have the *piñata*. And being the only Mexicano in Fargo-Moorhead growing up . . .

AA: [Chuckles]

RT: You know, there wasn't very many *piñatas*. And so that tradition carried on to my little sister here in Willmar is we'd have a *piñata*. Of course, her birthday is in December, so you couldn't have it outside. [Laughs] So it was a very small *piñata*, you know, in the gym or whatever.

AA: Yes.

RT: Or in the garage, right, because it's so cold out. But that would be one of the things is the *piñata*, and bringing family together. And of course another cultural tradition would be the foods. You know, traditional breakfast with *huevos rancheros [sunny side up eggs with a spicy salsa]*, and *frijoles* for breakfast and even having *frijoles*, pinto beans. Without the pinto beans it seems like it's not a meal, you know, there's something missing.

AA: [Chuckles]

RT: Same thing with *tortillas*, you know. Without the *tortillas*, like, hmmm, well, that was kind of a nice snack, because it is not a meal without it. But again, that's changing, you know, obviously, the health issues and things like that. But *menudo*, Dad makes a mean *menudo*, you know, that beef tripe soup. It's very Mexican and it's an acquired taste, but that's very traditional. So that would be some of the cultural traditions that I can think of.

And again, our family wasn't very traditional, because we grew up Protestant, not Catholic, so a lot of, we would say Latino customs are really Catholic Church customs, you know, like the *posada* [A multi-day Christmas celebration depicting Joseph and Mary looking for lodging. Each night, the procession ends at a home where the host family serves coffee or Mexican hot chocolate and Mexican pastry or traditional snacks] and things like that. That's really from the Catholic Church around Christmas and things like that. But I didn't grow up doing that. Although it's very Latino, I would consider that more Catholic than Latino. But so that was different.

AA: Have you retained any of those traditions?

RT: You know . . .

AA: And let me add something here while you're thinking that one through. And is it just something you live or is it a conscious effort? It is *Mexicano*, I'm going to retain this part of my culture.

RT: Yes, I think it's a little bit of both. I think it's a little bit of both. I remember in college struggling, struggling with that whole identity issue as far as how do, how do I pronounce my name in a business environment?

AA: Yes.

RT: You know, my name is Roberto Treviño, you know, it's not Robert. It's Roberto.

AA: Yes.

RT: And so do I say Robert Treviño [Tre-veen-yo.]? Because my last name has an 'ñ' [pronounced en-yeh], it's not an 'n' it's an 'ñ'.

AA: Right.

RT: Or do I say, I'm Roberto Trevino, you know, to make the other person feel at ease? So sometimes it's a conscious effort, you know, trying to establish my identity as a Hispanic, because sometimes it's an advantage to be seen as a minority person. And just having that pride of who I am. But at the same time, I want to make other people feel comfortable. Although I don't like being called Bob. I think that's too Anglo. That's not me.

AA: Yes.

RT: That's not me, but my sisters call me Bobby.

AA: Okay.

RT: You know, not Bobby, Bobby [Bah-vy] with a Spanish pronunciation.

AA: Okay.

RT: So, you know, it's kind of fluid. You know, it's a fluid question to answer that. I'm proud. Do I retain traditions and cultures? I don't have kids, you know, so I'm not going to have a *piñata* for myself at this point. But yes, if and when I do, I think the *piñata* would be something that I would continue to incorporate as probably one of the cultural traditions.

AA: How about your sisters?

RT: Again, back to the skin color. I think my older sister has experienced much more racism than I have. And my two younger sisters, they've experienced much less than we have. Both because of the age difference, I mean, there's fourteen, fifteen years between my youngest sister and myself.

AA: Yes.

RT: So times have changed. And also because they don't even look Hispanic, you know, they've got red hair and blonde hair and blue eyes. My baby sister has blonde hair and blue eyes. And so she didn't experience those prejudices as much as we did. I think she's the one that has struggled to maintain her Hispanic identity, being proud of who she is. In fact, baby Ruth speaks better Spanish than Noemi does. Again, it's just that whole rebound of struggling to maintain your identity in the culture.

AA: Yes. Did your parents make a deliberate effort to especially with your younger sisters, because of what you just described, to maintain and keep the culture alive?

RT: Yes, I think they did. Because just trying to give us some pride in whom we are. Not being ashamed of our background, of our history.

AA: Like that trip to Mexico.

RT: Yes, like that trip to Mexico. Because there is such a negative stereotype of Latinos, you know, the migrant farmworker, and I don't know if you remember the Frito Bandito commercials and things like that.

AA: I remember.

RT: Well, those perceptions continue into the older adults. Now my younger siblings didn't have that issue, because those ads weren't there anymore. Or even Speedy Gonzalez, you know, and the accents and things like that, you don't hear that. Because they are much younger than I am. But my parents did instill in them, made a conscious effort to give them a sense of pride of who they are. And then they were always, always exhorting them to be the best they can be, you know, wherever their talents and interests lie.

AA: Now you were telling me that at some point you're still looking for a wife, so that at some point there's going to be children, I'm assuming. Let's say there are. How are you going to handle traditional culture?

RT: Wow. [Chuckles] Whatever the wife wants. [Laughs]

AA: She's the boss. [Chuckles]

RT: She's the boss.

AA: If she's happy, you're happy.

RT: You know, again, being a teacher in the eyes of your children, letting them know where they came from, giving them a pride, because most Americans are immigrants to this country.

AA: Yes.

RT: And so the strength lies in bringing out the best of each culture to make a better country, and retaining some of the good things. One of the stereotypes of strong family unity, you know, and how that's a cultural tradition, all of the Hispanics are very family-oriented. And really, that's a cultural myth. Because one of the highest single parent households are among Hispanic populations, you know, so that's a fractured nuclear family. But the myth exists that Latinos have strong family bonds. Well, we do, but not in your traditional sense. So but passing those things on, you know, family is important. You would do anything for family because that's, I think, one of the bedrocks of our culture is that family support network that we need to share, especially when you're in a new part of the country or whatever, so far away from your extended family.

AA: Right.

RT: Yes.

AA: What type of relationship did your family, your parents, your sisters, and you when you visited, have when they settled here in Willmar with neighbors, employers, colleagues, church congregation, schools?

RT: Again, you know, the leader in our family would probably be my father, obviously. He's very proud *Mexicano*, very well read, so he may not know the answer, but he knows where to find the answer. And that's one of the things that he passed on to us. You don't want to be a troublemaker, but if trouble comes your way, you need to stand up for yourself. So our relationship has always been friendly with our neighbors, with our community, but at the same time, if somebody makes a comment or treats you in a negative way, you need to stop it in the bud, saying, "Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey know, what's going on here? Why are you doing that?" And being vocal about it.

AA: Yes.

RT: Because if you don't, then people are just going to walk all over you. If you let them, you know. And that's not to say, you know, be defiant and be a type of individual who's an instigator. But at the same time, being an individual who demands respect by being respectful.

AA: Yes.

RT: And being involved, you know, taking the time to participate in civic opportunities, volunteering when you can. Unfortunately, I think one of the negative stereotypes of Hispanic families is that they don't get involved in activities. Well, I think that's a socioeconomic reason, because if you're working, you know, sixty, seventy hours a week just to put food on the table, you don't have time to get involved. So that's why when you can get involved, stand up for what you believe in. I remember one situation when I grew up in Dallas, very first day of class, the teacher's going through the roll call. Adam Becher, Billy Knutson, Marcia Miller, *Roberta* Trevino. And so I stand up and say, "Uh, excuse me, my name is Roberto not Roberta. Roberta is a female, I am Roberto." And she went *livid*. This is the first day of class. The teacher goes, "Don't you sass back at me, don't you . . ." Oh, she just went off on me.

AA: Wow.

RT: And so the first eight weeks of school were torturous. And finally, my dad had to come to school and say, "Hey, what's going on here? My son is a straight A student and he's getting an F in this class. What's going on?" And I kept telling Dad, "Dad, this is what's happening, you know, I'm not learning," and da, da, da, da. And so my dad came to school and he got things straightened out. When he got out of the meeting with the principal, I got grounded and spanked for being disrespectful. It wasn't until years later that I found out that my dad just *reamed* the principal, saying, "What the hell is going on?" But in front of me, you know, the school was right. Again, to give you that respect for authority. But I ended up being transferred from that classroom the very next day, and went on to have a stellar educational foundation. I mean, I've got my bachelor's in business.

But little things like that, you know, just the mispronouncing of my name, and how that could have been a very detrimental experience, and yet it turned out to be good, because I asserted myself. And not in a defiant way. I mean, I was, you know, trying to be respectful. She pronounced my name wrong. I didn't experience that here in Willmar, because I never really lived here until 1991. But I did have a situation when I was in college that I drove my beat up, raggedy, old vehicle up to Willmar and I got pulled over by a police officer. "What are you pulling me over for, man?" I mean . . .

AA: [Chuckles]

RT: And it was just because I got a DWB—driving while brown. You know. It was out of place and Texas plates. Again, I believe that it was a stereotype. He pulled me over and he gave me the ninth degree. I didn't get a ticket or anything, but just the disrespect of having out of state plates and being a Hispanic, and he sees my driver's license. Very, very frustrating. Back in the early 1980s, the city was beginning to change. And the demographics were changing and the dominant culture, the Anglos, did not like it because it was change. So lots of issues when I'd come up here in the summers. Like that story I related with my sister about being disrespected.

AA: At the bank.

RT: Disrespected at the bank. Little things like that. Individually, not a big deal, but cumulative. Willmar was changing. So as far as the relationship with government and civics, I mean, you get involved as much as you can. But I think that's an economic reality that if you don't have time, you just don't have time, because you're trying to put food on the table.

AA: What was the experience of your younger sisters?

RT: Much less. Much less, although my sister Noemi just came back for her high school reunion here in Willmar. And she came back and saw people she graduated with and they all said, "Oh, we thought you were an international student."

AA: When she was here?

RT: When she was here, you know. Noemi was not a very cliquey person so she would hang out with a bunch of different people. But they saw her as an international student. You know, she wasn't a Nordstrom or a Johnson or an Anderson, you know, she didn't have that S-O-N on the end of her last name. So I don't think she experienced . . .

AA: So they put her in a different category.

RT: Yes, a different category as far as how they perceived her. *Pero* [but] so I think they had less, but I still they had some. You know, I told you about her being immediately farmed into the ESL program.

AA: Yes.

RT: And my parents said, "No, that's not going to happen. You know, she doesn't speak Spanish, she doesn't need ESL." So there was still some of that when they moved here. But again, because they don't look Hispanic, I think they were accepted much more readily. Yes.

AA: You know, the way you describe your dad and how he dealt with things and differences and confronted teachers and so on, how did that color the relationships with his coworkers and neighbors and other community people?

RT: You know, I think it created some respect for Dad among the community. Dad was never a hothead, you know, someone who was demanding to take over the city hall. You know, that wasn't Dad. Dad was always one who wanted to change things from within and change people's perceptions and understanding of things. So, obviously, I think people saw him as an outsider, but someone who had something to say and someone who was respected within the community. You know, especially, working at the college gave him some standing within the community because he wasn't just a Mexican factory worker.

You know, Dad wore a suit and tie every day to work. Which, well, it was kind of funny one time. He was going to make a little extra money, and so he was going to drive semi over the summer. And so he went to get his CDL license [commercial driver's license] and here he is, he comes out of the office with a coat and tie on and says, "Yes, I'm here to take the CDL." And the instructor had to do a double take. He says, "What?" [Chuckles] "Are you Roberto Trevino?" "Yes, that's me." And he says, "In my twenty-five years of administering this test, I've never seen somebody in a coat and tie come and take a truck driver position."

AA: [Chuckles] Yes.

RT: But again, Dad was very ubiquitous, I mean he, jack of all trades, master of none. Dad had no fear in speaking his mind, letting people know what he thought and trying something new. So I think it gave him a considerable respect in the community. And Dad's always very helpful, too.

I mean, he would give you the shirt off his back for someone. If somebody has a flat tire, you know, he would stop and help them. So little things like that. And word gets around, you know.

AA: Yes.

RT: That, the type of individual that he is.

AA: You described your sister's experience with the ESL classes, and yours with your car, and Yolanda's at the bank. Would that happen today? Or is that happening today?

RT: I think it still does happen, but I think it depends on the age of the individual involved—on both sides of the situation. I think there's still some resistance among older adults that have those ingrained perceptions. I think younger adults there's still less of it. But again, hatred and prejudice is taught, it is something that is learned. So yes, I think those things still happen today. I think it happens less often, but yes, I still think it does happen.

Unfortunately, there's been a new wave of immigrants into the community, East African. The Somalis are in the community now, which is, you know, if Anglos thought Latinos were different, you know, these Africans are completely different than the Hispanic population. I mean, the Africans, they're not even African-American. These guys are Africans, you know, from another country, and they're Muslim to boot. So completely it's not just Catholic and Protestant anymore, it's completely different religious cultural mores. So there's still some of that happening. Again, because of the language issues, but I think it's less with Hispanics than it has been in the past.

AA: Okay. Did acceptance or non-acceptance by the host community, by the community here, affect your family's decision to settle and stay? From year to year, you know, you sit down around the Christmas tree and you think, "Gee, it was a good year or it wasn't a good year."

RT: Yes.

AA: "Should we stay here? Should we leave?"

RT: You know, I don't think acceptance or non-acceptance by the dominant community was really a factor, I think it was more of an economic decision, although I think if we didn't feel comfortable, the decision to leave would have been. It would have contributed, I think, obviously, but I don't think it was one of the main factors.

AA: Yes.

RT: Because, you know, economic opportunity is really the driving factor. You know, jobs, and if there were no jobs, we'd probably move. But because there was work available, and the situation we were coming from, being self-employed for fifteen years, I think the main reason was economic more than being accepted or not accepted. Because again, we had that ethnic pride or that self-assurance of it doesn't matter where you're at, you know, you're going to have to

make your place, be it the big city or the small town. And Mom and Dad, being in Moorhead in the early 1970s, you know, they experienced a lot of that whole newcomer issue previously to that. And so it wasn't anything new for them.

AA: So it was just chapter two.

RT: Chapter two, yes. A different community, again, teaching, changing preconceived ideas and perceptions. Because one thing that Dad said is that doesn't matter what color someone is, a jerk is a jerk is a jerk.

AA: Sure.

RT: You know, so if you're not a jerk, people are going to accept you.

AA: Yes.

RT: It doesn't matter what color you are. So that's something that he taught us. You know, just do your best.

AA: Very good. Do you feel part of the community now? How or how not?

RT: I do and I don't. I do and I don't. I think, you know, my roots aren't very deep. They only go back to 1987.

AA: Yes.

RT: I think my younger siblings have deeper roots because they grew up here. I never really grew up in Willmar.

AA: Okay.

RT: So it's difficult to meet people my age and have something in common, you know, so on the one hand I don't feel like I'm part of the community, but on the other hand I do feel like I'm part of the community.

AA: Give me a couple examples, or one for each.

RT: Okay. Well, on the one hand, I'm a realtor, I'm in business, so I'm meeting a lot of people and a lot of people recognize me. A lot of people say hello to me. They think they know me because they've seen my picture, you know. And so that feels good, as you're part of the community. So that would be one good thing. But on the flip side, if there was a job opportunity in Dallas tomorrow, see ya. I mean, my roots aren't that deep.

AA: Sure.

RT: You know, I mean, if the money's right, you know, *hasta la vista*, baby. So other than the fact that I like being in a rural area, you know, it's nice.

AA: So in view of what you're saying now, you're still here, so you must be pretty satisfied with Willmar.

RT: I don't know if I'd say satisfied. Comfortable.

AA: Okay.

RT: And sometimes if you're comfortable you don't take the next step to get out of your comfort zone.

AA: It's easier to stay.

RT: It's easier to stay, yes.

AA: What is the ethnic composition of the Latino community in Willmar?

RT: I think I would probably say maybe seventy percent are Mexican or Mexican descent, meaning people like me, from Texas but I'm a U.S. citizen, American, but my parents are from Mexico, so Mexican or Mexican descent. And then the other thirty percent are probably more Central American, Guatemalan, Honduran, maybe twenty-nine percent. And then the other percentage being South America. Colombians, and Ecuadorians, Chileans, people from further South. But the majority are going to be Mexican or Mexican descent, although that's changing. I think every year there's more and more influx of immigrant population from Central and South America. I don't see as many Mexicans coming into the community, or as many Mexican-Americans coming into the community, because Texas's economy is going good. It's been going gangbusters for the last ten years.

AA: Yes.

RT: And it's still not bad. Why do people move? You know, we moved because of economic opportunity. So if there are jobs available, people aren't going to move from where they're at, where they're comfortable.

AA: Sure.

RT: So the people that are moving here from Central America, they don't have those economic opportunities in their countries. And that's why they're moving here, taking the risk to be here.

AA: Yes.

RT: And those big changes.

AA: Do you know why it's changing?

RT: You know, I think it all goes back to economics—it's jobs, it's all about jobs. The changing demographics of Minnesota, the workforce is getting older, so your white Anglo people are getting older, they're retiring. So who's going to do the hard, physical, manual labor? You know, it's going to be your minorities. If we want this economic engine to continue, we're going to need that labor force. So I think that's why it's changing. I think business leaders are opening up their eyes to five and ten years down the road, and they're saying, you know, "What do we have to do in order to attract good quality workers?" And they're not saying any specific race, they're saying workers.

AA: Yes.

RT: And I think business leaders are realizing that they're going to have to be changing policies. Like a good example would be like a leave of absence policy. You know, if most of our family is down South, and we only get one week of vacation, well, that's not enough time to spend time with your family. You know, I've got a hundred and eighty-six cousins, I can't see them all in a week. And so those leave of absence policies that are systemic, you know, policies that are systemic to how business is run and making changes. I think business owners are realizing what they need to do to continue to make this an inviting place for people to live.

AA: What issues did you see your parents and your sisters deal with here in the community that affected not just them? Because you've told me how they dealt with some the things. But that affected the rest of the Latino community also?

RT: You know, I think that one of the main issues was the police and the media portrayal of Latinos in the community. The late 1980s, early 1990s, when there was in the crime section when there was something that happened, and it was a Hispanic male who shoplifted or who was pulled over for DWI, it would read, "Jose Angel Ramirez, a Hispanic male, was pulled over," da, da, da, da, da.

AA: Yes.

RT: Well, then three paragraphs later, it would say, an Anglo male was pulled over, but it wouldn't give his name. Wait a second, why is that disparity there? How come you're only naming the Hispanic name and not the Anglo name? And so things like that. Again, perception is reality, you know, and so little things like that would continue to foster, "Oh, all those Hispanics are breaking the law, are illegal." And again, it just takes one incident. So wow, everybody, all Mexicans drive without insurance, you know. And you make those stereotypes. So that was one thing in the media portrayal. I think the newspaper has really changed a lot in the last ten, fifteen years.

And the second thing, I think, has been the police, the police enforcement and police treatment of the Hispanic community. I think there was a lot of distrust, a lot of negative perception between the two groups. In fact, one of the things that the city of Willmar did, the city of Willmar is like

three miles wide, okay, in distance. Three miles wide. They opened up a police substation in a Hispanic community, right next to the mobile home park. Why do you need a police substation in a town that's three miles wide? And so on the one hand, people are, oh, it's because it's better for law enforcement. There's a police presence. And on the other hand is that how come there isn't a police substation on the other side of town? You know. I mean, why just next to the mobile home park where Hispanics live?

AA: Sure.

RT: You know, and so there was that tension. So the city of Willmar has progressed. You know, I think the city council is willing to listen to issues and there are a lot of advocates for the Hispanic community, and now you've got more Hispanic professional and paraprofessionals in positions. Whereas, ten, fifteen years ago, you'd go to a bank and nobody speaks Spanish. Well, now every bank has at least one Spanish speaking teller. Why? Because they want the business, and so they're making changes to their customer service. There's a couple Spanish speaking loan officers in town, you know. So fifteen years ago, no way, that wouldn't even have existed. So again, I think business is taking the lead in seeing, being proactive, and trying to get a piece of that, the Hispanic buying power, the Hispanic market.

AA: So you think that that's what it is rather than a change of consciousness or awareness?

RT: Yes. I think love makes the world go round, but money greases the axle.

AA: [Chuckles]

RT: So until you see economic realities, then you see changes, you know, because if it wasn't beneficial for both parties, they wouldn't be happening.

AA: Any particular issues that stick out that have changed? I mean, you did mention . . .

RT: Those would be the two. And I think one that we're still struggling with is the school system. You know, I mentioned about my sister being funneled into the ESL. I think the school system is still struggling with trying to serve minority populations and keeping them interested in school. I don't personally, and of course I'm not a teacher, but I don't think kids drop out of school. I think they're forced out because of lack of attention or there's no support. So I think our school system is struggling, dealing with those populations of students. I hear stories of, you know, cliques and gangs. And, you know, why does that exist? It's because they're not feeling acceptance within school activities.

And a lot of that now, again, is back to economics. You know, if you don't have the money to buy a trumpet or you don't have the money to participate in golf, you're not going to join those extracurricular activities, because you've got to get a part time job or you've got to go home and babysit because both of your parents are working at the factory twelve hours a day, first shift and second shift. So there's nobody at home to take care of the little brother, little sister. So you can't participate even if you wanted to. Even if you have the talent and the aptitude, you can't, because

of economics. So I think the school district is struggling to try to meet the needs of minority students.

AA: Can you talk some more about the condition of education or the state of education, junior high school, high school, and college?

RT: You know, I wish I could. But since I didn't go to school here, I really can't speak intelligently about the subject matter. Just from what I hear anecdotally . . .

AA: Through your dad.

RT: Yes. You know, my dad was a minority recruiter at the college, and when he retired, his position was never filled. And he was a full time recruiter and cultural programming activities. But when he, and so the college says they want to be inclusive, they want to attract minorities, and yet they don't fill the position where, you know, that support is there for that population. And so they're talking out of both sides of the mouth, you know, "Yes, yes, we want to do this." And yet they're not funding those activities. So, since the early 1970s, you know, there's committee after committee after committee but there's very little change, you know, incremental change.

AA: Yes.

RT: Because those that, I mean, you can talk a good show, but until you actually put dollars and funding and priorities into doing something, it's not going to happen. And if it does happen, it's going to happen through other means, you know. It's not going to be directly related to the institution. It's going to be outside forces that force change within the institution. But I really can't speak specifically to instances other than what I just said. I can't think of anything.

AA: Are there situations that call attention to how services, public services are delivered or accepted?

RT: Yes. I think, again, perception is reality. That whole "Hispanics are coming here because they want to come to get welfare," you know. And that's a myth. Hispanics don't come here to get on welfare. They come here to work.

AA: Yes.

RT: You know. And so when people say, "Oh, all these Hispanics are on welfare," well, really, you know, has anybody heard the term *farm subsidy*? That's welfare, you know, that's getting a handout from the government. It's the exact same thing. And yet it's not discussed in those terms. And we're talking billions of dollars in the ag [agriculture] program, but no, that's not welfare, you know.

And what about the Medicare and Medicaid? Again, it's a government benefit, but no, that's not welfare. You know, it's not discussed in those terms. And yet the majority of the services, the

funding, are the Anglo population. You know, so it's a drop in the bucket if you look at the minorities that receive benefits compared to how much money is spent with the dominant culture. But again, perception is reality. The county built a building, a new building, a new health and human services building right north of town. And for the longest time there was a perception that that it was called the "Mexican money mall" because that's where people would get their welfare assistance, their public assistance.

AA: Oh.

RT: You know, it's the three 'm' building. What do you mean the three 'm' building? The Mexican money mall. You know, and so every once in a while you hear comments like that. It's like, you know what? That's not reality, because the reality is much different. But they are still perceptions that are out there.

AA: Tell me about the other community organizations that in any way touch the lives of Latinos.

RT: Well, I think, obviously, all the social service agencies that are out there. When people move here from out of state or they're coming for jobs. And so they move here, you know, they have to get on their feet. You know, they need that. Some help getting that first month's rent or whatever.

AA: Sure.

RT: So a lot of the different social service agencies help people get off the ground. But I think there's, I don't want to say there's less and less need, but I think there's more and more awareness of professionals and paraprofessionals that speak Spanish that can help direct people to where they need help. Like, you know, if you go to the bank, there's a Spanish speaking teller or a Spanish speaking loan officer or you look up the real estate directory and there's a couple of realtors that speak Spanish, and they advertise that way. So I think there's better access than there used to be in the past. But again, you know, agencies like Heartland Community Action, The Salvation Army. The Ecumenical Council, all the different churches are doing things that try to help people in need. And it's not just for Latino populations, but people in need.

AA: Yes.

RT: And so, obviously, the economy and the economics that have happened in the last few years, there's just greater need. The Food Shelf, there's just more and more need. And not because of someone's particular ethnic background, but because, you know, there's jobs or there's less jobs. Or one spouse has lost their job or they have reduced hours and now they're barely making ends meet. So those are some of the agencies. I know one of the things, that the churches here in town, they have a free community meal to anybody that wants to go. You know, so you don't even have to be a member of that particular church, it is wide open to the whole town.

AA: Wow. And that's one church or a group of churches?

RT: It's a group of churches. And so it's one meal per week.

AA: Okay.

RT: And so it's at a different church every week.

AA: Same denomination or different?

RT: No, all different denominations. It's through the Ecumenical Council.

AA: Okay.

RT: And so different churches are hosting community-wide meals. Again, to help people, you know, that are in need, and not just minorities, but anyone in need.

AA: Yes. Wow.

RT: And so they're trying to couch it in a way that it's not for poor people, but it's for the community. It's for anybody who wants to share a meal. And there are a lot of senior citizens that are attending those. Because again, you've got senior citizens who are on fixed income, and it's kind of difficult for one person to eat alone. Well, here's an opportunity for them to meet other people and to eat within a group. So it's a better social environment for them. So that's one of the things I think the city is doing right, you know, at least the community.

AA: Yes.

RT: The County Fair Board, I know that they've reached out to try to get Hispanic groups to perform at the county fair, you know, Ballet Folklorico or even Bandas Latinas to come and perform at the county fair. You know, which is again trying to express the people of the community which, I think, ten years ago they wouldn't have done that. And now they're trying to attract people.

AA: Integrate

RT: Yes, to be inclusive.

AA: Wow.

RT: So, you know, slowly but surely. I think one of the issues still that's facing the community is immigration. The immigration, again, because perception is reality. When there's a crime that happens and then the person ends up being undocumented, well, there's just an uproar, you know. Because what's he doing here in the first place, you know, being undocumented. And that whole push and pull between is that a federal issue, state issue, or local? You know, where on the

continuum do we address it? But that's one of the issues that is facing the community. Again, because, you know, one negative incident colors everybody with broad strokes.

AA: Yes.

RT: It's not just, it's not true, but that's what it is.

AA: So that influence is the thinking of . . .

RT: I believe so, yes. And again, as the population grows, you know, ten years ago we were what, fifteen thousand? Now we're at twenty-five thousand, twenty-two thousand. It's no longer your little rural town. You're becoming a mid-sized city now.

AA: Yes.

RT: I mean, I remember driving from here to Minneapolis, there was very distinct city limits. Well now, you know, slowly it's filling up. You don't know where one city ends and one city starts.

AA: Yes.

RT: Because, obviously, the economy is still growing, and so business is happening and people are moving to the area. So we're still facing some struggles and some changes as a community. As every community does that is going through change.

AA: How about this Economic Development Agency?

RT: I think they're providing direction, and maybe not financial resources, but they're directing people to places where they can get information to help small business owners. And if somebody comes in, a Latino comes in and says, "Hey, I want to start a business," they're directing them to different agencies that can help them. Or they're providing information in Spanish or directing them to small business development centers where they can get some counseling to start businesses. The Chamber of Commerce has taken steps to try to be a support to small business owners—minority small business owners, you know, aside from all small business owners.

AA: Yes.

RT: There's another entity in town called the WAMM, the Willmar Area Multicultural Marketplace Group, which is a group of minority business owners that want to start a Mercado in town. And so that's been ongoing for about four or five years now. Again, providing resources to Latinos who want to open up a business, because as a culture, where many of us come from, you just hang a shingle and, you know, you're in business. Well, you can't do that in the U.S. You have to follow the laws and learn the laws and what's taxable and what isn't. And so it's very different than it is, say, opening up a business somewhere else. So there's that learning curve, that in the past, there was nobody there to help you. And I think there are different entities in

town that are willing to take the extra step to lead you in the right direction. Still, one of the barriers is language, you know, as new immigrants come in. Language is still a barrier, because things are in English. So you have to understand the system before you really can have success.

AA: Yes.

RT: So I think that we're making steps, taking steps in the right direction, but there's just not enough economic resources, dollars, to help everybody.

AA: So the leadership for this development, WAMM and the economic development and so on and so forth, is the leadership for this propelled by multicultural or Latino individuals or from the white community?

RT: Yes, it's mostly, mostly it's Latinos.

AA: Okay.

RT: That is pushing this forward. But again, if you don't have the dominant culture's support, it's not going to happen. And so, slowly but surely, I think we're moving in the right direction.

AA: It's also a sign of the change.

RT: It's a sign of change, yes. The Southwest Minnesota Foundation is also an entity based out of Hutchinson, but they serve the Southwest eighteen county area. And they're giving out micro loans from the SBA [Small Business Association] to help minority businesses. So that's good, too. You know, help people establish their credit, so they can move forward on their business plans.

AA: Are Latinos involved in the political activities?

RT: Not that I can see, no. No. And I don't see that. Very rarely, if ever. Again, back to their . . . there's a few professionals and paraprofessionals, and so they're the ones that get pulled into the different committees, and it's the same ten people. You know, the same ten people.

AA: Sure.

RT: They're the people who've got a two-year degree or a four-year degree, you know, it's the same ten, fifteen Latinos, that you get called to be on the Park Board, on the School Board, on the . . .

AA: Sure.

RT: You know. "And you should really participate." Well, there are only so many hours in the day. You've still got to try to make some money, you know. [Chuckles]

AA: So would that be, I mean, I know that when a politician runs for a position, sometimes it's just the ego part. And sometimes it's the desire to express your roots in your community. You know, I live here, so I am going to contribute. So do you think that lack of involvement might indicate the feeling of permanence or non-permanence?

RT: I would agree with that, yes. I think it's very shallow roots within the Hispanic community. A lot of people are immigrants or first generation.

AA: Yes.

RT: You know, my dad was born in Mexico, I was born in Texas. So I'm first generation. So I'm not that far removed from another country.

AA: Yes.

RT: And so as I said earlier, you know, I could leave tomorrow. And I think a lot of Latinos are like that.

AA: Yes.

RT: And so I think you're right. Because there are very shallow roots, they—and by shallow roots, I'm really talking about a mentality.

AA: Yes, that's what I'm . . .

RT: My father said," Cuando me jubile, me voy a México." He said that for sixty years. Cuando me jubile, me voy a México. "When I retire, I'm going to Mexico. When I retire, I'm going to Mexico." And now it's like, "Dad, you going to Mexico?" "No! Are you crazy?"

AA: [Laughs]

RT: "It is just terrible over there!" Well, but, it's that whole mentality.

AA: Yes.

RT: You know, "I'm gone tomorrow." So then how come you don't get involved? Because I'm going to be gone tomorrow.

AA: Yes.

RT: Why don't you invest here? Because I'm going to be gone tomorrow. Why don't you invest in a 401K? Well, because I'm going to be gone tomorrow.

AA: Yes.

RT: You know, so there's no permanence, that whole feeling. And it's an attitude, aside from the fact that. So my dad was in Willmar, what, ten, fifteen years, and yet he didn't have deep roots, you know. So I think that's part of it.

AA: Describe the realities of integrating a long established community with the more recent arrivals, whether they be from Texas, Mexico, or other Latin American countries.

RT: Can you say that again?

AA: What kinds of issues are popping up because of the population? What kind of real issues are we having to deal with because of the growing number of people coming in from Mexico, Texas, Latin America? So what dynamics are in the works?

RT: I think there are two issues that pop up that come to mind. Number one is when you see a Hispanic who doesn't speak English, you immediately have a negative perception. Because he's here in Willmar, he should speak English.

AA: Yes.

RT: Okay. And yet, he just got here from another country last week.

AA: Right.

RT: Okay. But now all Hispanics are painted with that brush. And so even somebody who's been here, you know, fifteen, twenty years, because you have the ethnic last name, you're lumped into the newcomer category. And so you're still, even though you're part of the community, you've been here a long time, because you have an ethnic last name, you're lumped into that second category of, "You're a newcomer, you're not from around here, go back to where you came from." Hey, I graduated from high school here. [Chuckles] You know. My sister, you know.

AA: Yes.

RT: Go back? What do you mean where I came from? I grew up in Blomkest, you know. She's from here. But because she's got that Latino last name, she's painted with that brushstroke. So that's the first thing. The dominant society tends to lump you with the newcomers.

AA: Yes.

RT: The second thing is those that have been here fifteen, twenty years are now . . .

AA: That are Latinos?

RT: That are Latinos. Are now in quasi-managerial roles. They're your first line supervisors; they're your shift managers. Okay, so they've got some English skills, they've been in the community a while, and so now they're the ones dealing with the newcomer population. And so there's some tension there because, again, that whole negative racism also exists within our community, you know. Esta persona es indio de a tiro. [This person is indigenous /uncultured through and through.] He doesn't know anything, you know. And so you treat them as second class citizens because they don't speak the language, where here, you know, fifteen years ago, you were the one who didn't speak any, or your parents didn't.

AA: Sure.

RT: And yet now because you're in a little position of a little more authority, you tend to be more abusive to the newcomers that come to the area. So those are the two issues that I see. That there's some tension now between Hispanics that have been in the community and new Hispanics. Because it's constantly changing, you know. The Hispanic that was here five years ago, well, now he's been here five years, he's in the community.

AA: Sure.

RT: But tomorrow his cousin's here. You know. And so there's always that tension of that, the changing reality. So how come we're never progressing? Well, because you're constantly getting that new immigrant here, you know, the Spanish speaking new immigrant. Well, we didn't have that issue with the Germans, or with the Belgians, or with the Norwegians. Well, that's true, because there's an ocean in between. You know, it took you five months to get here from Norway, from Germany. It takes you six hours to get here from Mexico on a plane.

So the old country is not the far country anymore, and so there's that dynamic. "You know what? It's not working out for me. I'm leaving." And so that in the Thirties, Forties and Fifties when those immigrants came over, they knew they weren't going back. They didn't even have a *dream* of going back. You see Latinos coming up, "No, hey, I'm here to work, I'm going to make money, but I'm going to go build my house in Mexico or in Central America. So that's home. This is where I work. This is temporary." You know, and even my father has that mentality. "When I retire I'm going back to Mexico." And here he is, you know, eighty years old. Are you going back to Mexico? "No, are you crazy? I'm not going back to Mexico."

AA: [Chuckles]

RT: But it's that whole mentality.

AA: So why should I stop speaking Spanish when, you know, I'll be using it tomorrow in Mexico.

RT: Exactly. And in fact, why should I learn English when I can turn on CNN or Univision? But you didn't have that forty years ago. You know, the fastest growing television network is Univision. You know, 1989, the fastest growing condiment: salsa.

AA: [Chuckles]

RT: It's passed ketchup and mustard.

AA: Yes.

RT: You know. You go to any fast food restaurant now, super picante, hot, hot, hot. The taste buds are changing of America. You know, you saw the article in *Time Magazine* three or four years ago, "The Browning of America." So the demographics are changing. And so there's no need for the minority, quote/unquote "minority" to change, right. Because the dominant culture is slowly fading away, you know.

AA: Yes.

RT: I read a book, *Future Trends* by John Nesbitt. And it said if you want to be successful in the twenty-first century, you have to speak three languages. You have to speak English, because that's the international language of business. And some people say, "Well, the Chinese, there's a billion Chinese." I go "Yes, but they're behind a wall." So English. Number two, you have to be computer literate. You've got to be able to function in a computer society. And the third one is Spanish, because half the world speaks Spanish. All of South America, Latin America, Spain, and those are untapped markets. Those are growing, growing markets for business. So to be successful, Spanish is one of the languages that businesspeople need to know. Why? For two reasons. For sales opportunities, and number two, that's who your workforce is going to be, is Spanish speaking immigrants is the labor force.

AA: Yes.

RT: And so I get so frustrated talking about our educational system. You know, they're teaching French and they're teaching German when, you know, the need for the manager down here, or to sell insurance, or to sell real estate, is to be able to speak Spanish. You know, because that's the untapped market. So but I think that's changing. I think people are realizing it.

AA: Good point.

RT: I think people are realizing that those are skills that are beneficial.

AA: You know, we've talked about the dynamics that are created as new people move in between the white community and the Latino community, between Latinos and Latinos. How about between Latinos and other multicultural groups such as the African groups that you spoke about earlier?

RT: Right, right. Yes. I think there's some tension there. Because the ugly truth is that there's racism even within, you know, Latino cultures.

AA: Yes.

RT: Obviously, a Latino is a mixture of Native American and Spanish European blood, right. I mean, the Portuguese and the Spaniards came to this new world and created a new group of people. Well, because you have such different varying skin colors, people with lighter skin and more European skin tend to be looked on more favorably. And so the darker your skin, and again, you have that African American, that African blood that's mixed into the culture also. So the darker your skin, the more second class you're going to be treated. And so there is that perception within the Latino community also. You know, it's a dirty little secret that nobody talks about. You know, you only talk about black-white or black-brown racism, but there is brown racism with other cultures.

And again, back to the work ethic and the mores. Those cultures are completely different. The African cultures are completely different, you know, and the work ethic that people bring to the table is different, and so that causes some tension. And I think the people that really take a proactive role are your business owners and your factories that are integrating these cultures to work. And they're making policies to help everybody produce whatever product that they're producing. And so, because they're new immigrants to the area, they have to learn some things, and yet at the same time they can share some things with the different cultures. And I'm not just talking about, you know, food and festivals. I'm talking about perceptions and ways of looking at things; values, value-based decision-making on what's important, and sharing those deep core philosophies in your daily life. I think businesses are the ones that are incorporating a lot of that. The other, I think it was last year during the Super Bowl, there was a Spanish language commercial. Wow! Wow! Talk about changes, you know.

AA: At ten million dollars a second.

RT: Exactly, exactly.

AA: Or a spot rather.

RT: Yes, yes. And so you see, you know, the Wal-Mart. You can walk into a Wal-Mart, everything is bilingual, English-Spanish.

AA: Yes.

RT: And so, slowly, even out here in rural Minnesota, people are accepting the economic realities of the new immigrant populations and trying to make the best of it. Because everybody wants a better place for their family, and be African or Latino, that's the goal, is to have a better life than what your parents had. So I think we're moving forward in the right direction. And there are still tensions, but we're moving in the right direction.

AA: What else can you tell me about Willmar? Let me ask it this way. You're living here now, and if you had a friend in Dallas who said, "You know what, I'm thinking of moving to

Minnesota. Tell me something about Willmar. Why should I move to Willmar or not move to Willmar?"

RT: Well, I think Willmar is a great place to raise a family, because they have a very strong park and rec system, a very strong YMCA system. So if you like the outdoors, there are lots of activities that you can do. They have a strong park system within town. You can live anywhere in town and be about three blocks away from a park. So I think there's a very strong church community, so if you're Catholic or Protestant or Muslim, you know, there's a religious aspect. Socially, you know, I think there are opportunities to get involved if you want to. But the very first thing would be jobs. You know, I think Willmar is growing, providing some job opportunities, so if you have a job or you have skills to bring, it would be a great place to raise a family. That's what I'd say about Willmar.

AA: Well, thank you. Any other comments?

RT: No, I just, thank you for the opportunity to share some of my experiences with Willmar and er i eve. Sinnesota liistoita liideres liinnesota liistoita liinnesota liinne in the area. Hopefully, the next generation will have it easier and better than I did.

AA: [Chuckles] It is heading in that direction, I believe.

RT: Good.

AA: Well, thanks a lot.