

Jesse Bethke Gomez
Narrator

Lorena Duarte
Interviewer

July 19, 2010
Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio
797 East Seventh Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota

Jesse Bethke Gomez - **JG**
Lorena Duarte - **LD**

LD: I'm Lorena Duarte. I'm here at CLUES [Chicanos Latinos Unidos En Servicio] for the Latino Oral History Project. I'll be doing the interview today with Jesse Bethke Gomez.

First of all, on behalf of the [Minnesota] Historical Society, thank you so much for taking the time to be part of this project. We're very excited to hear your story.

JG: It's my great honor and I'm humbled. I'm speechless, actually, which is not good to say at the beginning of an interview. [Chuckles]

LD: All right. Let's start off with where you were born and where you grew up.

JG: I was born in Robbinsdale, Minnesota. I grew up in Brooklyn Park and in New Hope. My mother's [Irene Gomez Bethke] parents and their families were from Mexico. They came in the 1920s. My father's side of the family... his mother came from Småland, Sweden, and his father was born in Minnesota, and we understand that his father came to Rochester, we think, in 1867. His background was German. So my background is Mexican, Swedish, and German. Interestingly enough, my grandparents on my mother's side of the family and my grandmother on my father's side of the family, were all people whose primary language was other than English. So it's a very interesting journey, in that there's this broader sense of the journey to seek a better life that was very rich in my own family growing up.

LD: Absolutely. I forgot to say today is Monday, July 19, 2010, and could you spell your name for us?

JG: Yes. Jesse Bethke Gomez,

LD: Is there a hyphen between?

JG: No hyphen.

LD: Okay. I just wanted to make sure we had that.

JG: That's fine.

LD: Tell me a little bit about your parents and what they did and if that influenced you as far as your choice of career, profession later on.

JG: You know what's interesting about my family is that there's so much richness of my mother's journey and my father's journey that speaks to who I am today, and that of my grandparents. For instance, for my dad—I'll mention him first—I remember growing up he had a great love of jazz, Latin jazz. I became a musician early on, and he was always encouraging me to pursue music. My mother, too, always promoted music. They're very eclectic. I grew up listening to everything from Mozart and Beethoven to Cal Tjader, who was a vibes player, to an arranger for mandolin named Dave Apollon. So it was a very rich musical experience, as well.

And on my mother's side of the family, my grandparents, my grandmother in particular, always had a very strong sense of social justice. Throughout the era of the Bracero Program, my grandmother and her generation were very vocal about the treatment of Hispanic peoples who often were American citizens sent to Mexico. It was a very bad time for the Hispanic community in that regard. I remember growing up joining my mom in a lot of our concerns for the labor movement around the picking of grapes, the César Chávez effort. So that made a huge impression on me. What's interesting is that a favorite T-shirt that I absolutely loved was an American Farm Workers T-shirt with the symbol of the eagle. It said, "*Unidos en la lucha*." It was, I guess, a prefigurement to be united in service. If there is a fight, it's really a call to humanity to be caring for one another. I would reframe the word *lucha* only in that regard.

For both my parents, there was a huge influence from the musical influence and to my grandparents. . . I must say, my grandmother was the one that really encouraged all of us to dance. She taught us some basic dances from Mexico. Then, we became Los Chicos del Norte.

LD: [Chuckles]

JG: I'll see if I can find a picture of that.

LD: Yes.

JG: There was the Bethkes and the Vargas as well. We would perform at parochial schools. I loved it. We started, really, by dancing for a quarter for my grandmother.

LD: [Laughter]

JG: Then, I pursued it as a career as well, in theater arts and dance and music and so forth. I want to say that I was a professional musician by the time I was fourteen. I was in the Minneapolis Musicians Union. I think they were Local 76, at the time. I remember that by the time I was in high school—I was a sophomore—my grandfather said, “Jesse, I want to come and sit down and chat with you. So let’s go to your room.” Now, my grandpa *never* did that. It was like, oh, god, what did I do? I’m in trouble now.

LD: [Chuckles] Yes.

JG: But he sat me down and he said, “Jesse, I want to give you my bass.”

LD: Wow.

JG: My grandpa was like among the top ten jazz bass players in the 1930s in Minnesota. He played violin, mandolin, *la oud*, which is an instrument from the Mediterranean in Spain. He played guitar.

LD: Is this your grandfather on your mother’s side?

JG: Yes, on my mother’s side, Jesse Gomez. I’m named after him. He had this beautiful acoustic bass or contra bass with a beautiful what’s called a German bow or *arco*. He said, “I’m going to give you the bass, and if you want to sell it to buy drums, go right ahead if that’s what you want to do.” I said, “No, Grandpa, I want to honor you. I want to learn how to play it.” So I signed up for orchestra and taught myself how to play the contra bass, because I could read music for drums and stuff. I started reading music when I was in second grade, and, by my senior year, I was first chair. In fact, I remember doing a *Concerto in A Minor* from memory. I’ve always had a great love for orchestral music, as well. That profound moment in my life had led me to, now, composing a show called *Mi Vida Amore*. A tremendous interest has been shown by Grammy award-winning Latino artists to perform it, and there is a very famous orchestra in Minnesota that is looking to see how they could take some of my compositions and actually perform them. So, you know, the direct influence of my parents and grandparents is really quite profound.

The other thing I might say about my mom is that my mom was always active in the arts and always in the social fabric of the community in a broader, global way. She created El Instituto de Arte y Cultura.”

LD: Right.

JG: That organization, IAC, had phenomenal board members like Mario Duarte.

LD: [Chuckles]

JG: Long time leaders. They were the organization that brought Hispanic Heritage Week, which, later became Hispanic Heritage Month, to Minnesota. She was also the Human

Rights Commissioner for the State of Minnesota. When she was working on, at the time, the revision of the Human Rights Act for Minnesota, I remember her saying that she was going to come up with this concept of a human rights day, and, a couple years ago, we celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of Human Rights Day.

LD: Right.

JG: So I think about my mom's lasting contributions to advancing the human rights of all people. That has had an enormous and profound impact on my life. It is about that great sense of family tradition and contribution, and making a difference in the lives of not only the Hispanic community but the larger communities, as well.

LD: Wonderful. Let's go back just a little bit. Tell me about the Mexican side of your family. How did they come to Minnesota?

JG: Well, they came by way of Cisco, Texas, in April of 1923. There was my grandfather's mother, Atanacia Landeros - she and her then husband, Manuel Martinez. My grandfather's two sisters, and my grandmother's two brothers, they married. So there is a larger family. They came in the 1920s. They were drawn by recruiters to work in the sugar beet fields in Hector, Minnesota. As my grandparents recall, there were very squalid living conditions. It was inhumane, in that there were no restrooms for families who worked in the field during the day. By the end of the first six weeks, the only place that they could purchase basic sustenance from was the farmer's store. It was such that all the families—I recall my grandparents distinctly telling me this—saw that they would end up owing more money than was actually paid to them. So there was almost a sense of indentured servitude. They did not like that. They stood up to the farmer, and they found their way by moving to north Minneapolis.

There, they lived in a very poor part of town. I asked my grandmother many years ago when I was actually pursuing one of my undergraduate majors, in Chicano Studies, what was life like in Minnesota for her. Notably, I wanted to know about prenatal care.

It was interesting. She said that prenatal care, back then, consisted of the kindness of a Jewish store owner who, I think, also was leasing or renting these apartments, providing cod liver oil. That was, basically, the public health system back then.

LD: Wow.

JG: It was pretty much by your own sense of survival. The 1930s were very difficult on my family, given the Depression. It was, apparently, on my mother's side that my grandfather kept sustenance by being a musician, of all things. He later worked for the railroad and retired from the railroad. It was the Milwaukee Railroad, from my recollection. It was a time of enormous change for Minnesota, and for the North Side of Minneapolis. The estimation of the size of the Hispanic or Latino community was probably a thousand to two thousand people, at the most. When I think about my extended family, they were probably more than ten or fifteen percent of the total Latinos.

LD: [Laughter]

JG: Now, we haven't kept up that percentage! We're not procreating in those numbers.. What is interesting is that, from early on, my grandmother found her way to really be an advocate, to be political. She remembered way back when she was involved in Hubert Humphrey's campaign when he ran for the *mayor* of Minneapolis. So that goes back many years. There's a long sense of contribution and tradition.

What I've always appreciated, when my grandparents were alive - on the Latino side of my family, the Mexican side of my family - is that they would always tell us about the *other* families. . . now, I guess you would say the prominent Latino families that came at the same time. They recall back in Cisco, Texas, or they recall back in Mexico, that these families also made the journey. We always heard as much not only about *our* family but *their* journey, as well. That is, for me, very important here in my role at CLUES. I am very mindful in my own journey when I think about the services we deliver from a family-centered operation.

Now, we know we have over eleven distinct communities. As of 2010, there are well over 200,000 Latinos in Minnesota. We may not always know one another and we may not really have that sense of longevity of tradition by virtue of the phenomenal growth of our community. But what we all have in common, greater or less, however we define that, is our sense of family, as well as our sense of tradition and our sense of history. So, in many ways, oral history is such a *critically* important part of how we come to understand our world, our families, the world around us, and the journey of other families. That, I think, creates a tremendous sense of values, hard work, and a sense of contribution. It is a sense of being mindful of history.

In times of great peril, my great uncle and others fought in World War II. My uncles were in the military on my mother's side of the family. On my father's side of the family, my grandfather was in the military, but he was stationed stateside during World War II—not to minimize his contribution. There's always been this sense of tradition of contribution on both sides of the family.

The other comment I would have is that, when I was a kid, I very much remember going to my great grandparents' on my father's side of the family, the [Unclear], the parents of my grandmother, Agnes Bethke. There was lutefisk. Am I saying it right? [Chuckles] They spoke in Swedish. We would all jump in the car and we'd go to my other grandparents, [Unclear] and there was piñatas and music from throughout Latin America. It was just such an incredible journey of navigating culture, early on. That, to me, became part of the journey towards a world view that I think has tremendous mindfulness of the richness and diversity of who we are in Minnesota now, compared to who we were twenty or thirty years ago.

LD: Yes. I want to touch on that, the growth of the community. But just to go back a little bit more about your childhood. . .

JG: Yes, sure.

LD: Talking about two different cultures, etcetera. What was it like as far as—? You were born in Robbinsdale. Did you stay there?

JG: Yes. But, I grew up in New Hope, Minnesota. Honestly, we were in Brooklyn Park, more of a rural area; that was my parents' first house. Then, there was a house that they bought in New Hope, Minnesota. The first recollections I can recall is that one day when we first moved in, somebody had put in the mailbox, "Move back to Mexico."

LD: Mmmm.

JG: It was just like, oh, dear, you know. Little did I realize that would be part of the journey *all* the way through - this sense of tension, this sense of, "I don't understand who you are; therefore, I'm afraid of you, so go away." That's all we could surmise from that, as we grew up. A bit ironic that the name of the community is New Hope. [Chuckles]

I remember in my youth, people didn't understand why my grandparents came over every week. My mom, she was the only daughter. There were four or five brothers. It mattered to us greatly. I looked forward to my grandparents' visits. They lived in Robbinsdale, seven or eight miles away. I remember on days off from school or during the summer, we'd get on our bikes and we'd bike over to Grandma's house. That was just what we did. Grandma and Grandpa were so much a part of our journey. Also, every Thursday, it was like, "Clean the house because Grandma's coming over."

LD: [Laughter]

JG: Maria Gomez would come over and look under the bed, "No, this isn't clean. You've got to do better."

LD: [Laughter]

JG: I remember one time I was cleaning pots and pans. It was my duty. She inspected them. "No, this isn't done. You've got to do more" [Chuckles] Hard work was very much drilled into us in a loving way.

There we were in New Hope, practicing dances of Mexico, while part of the neighborhood saw us like. . . move back to Mexico. It didn't stop us from living the lives fully of who we were. It was exciting to see. The dads gave us a sense of connection and a sense of pride, and for me it was big deal when I was a kid. I think I was maybe in Kindergarten and first grade when I first started to perform. Those are some really happy memories.

What followed suit, as well, from that era was the great love of music. My brother, Jack, and myself were always listening to albums, listening with my dad. Eventually, you

know, we picked up some percussion instruments. My uncles were very accomplished musicians, so we just followed that sense of tradition. My dad played the sax. We didn't have an interest, Jack or me, in playing sax, but we did in percussion. So there we were in New Hope playing Latin music and congos and timbales and drums. Then, eventually, we were inviting people over and formulating some really cool musical acts that would lead Jack and me to some really cool contributions artistically. For me as a musician, there are some folks that I've played with that I'm always and forever proud of in terms of my musical discography or musical accomplishments.

So there was a lot of dance. There was a lot of music. I always was, you know, going to go to college. I always wanted to do that, but my love of dance. . . At one point, I wanted to just go to Mexico City and go be a [Unclear]. Actually, my first love was dance. I wanted to join The Ballet Folklórico de Mexico. That's how accomplished I was. At the first show that I produced for paying audiences. . . I was sixteen.

I just had to remember choreography. We had gone to study with maestros throughout Mexico through what was called the Asociación Nacional de Grupos Folklóricos. I mean, some of the people I trained with were like the George Balanchines of dance from Mexico.

LD: Wow.

JG: Today, it's not uncommon that I and Raquel, my wife, will contribute and volunteer to the emerging dance groups so that they can better understand form and framework and choreography, so that there's a contribution. Ultimately, we would love to have some kind of a school of dance that could teach *all* of the dances, not just Mexican dance but a lot of the other things we're doing now, to many people that may not see college as a journey. It would show that there's a formal way for them to pursue the arts. For me, I took drum lessons when I was a kid. We took dance. I used to mow the lawn to get money to take drum lessons and get on a bike when I was in third grade and bike five, six miles away. It was cool that my parents let us venture out. [Chuckles] I was going to learn to play those things one way or the other. But it is important - for people that have an artistic desire - to nurture that.

For me as a leader, a sense of creativity and out of the box thinking has made the difference in really thinking about how to better serve whom we serve. Growing up, though, we were in a situation where there was no *Minnesota nice* as far as I was concerned. [Laughter] It didn't matter. We had friends, and it was very eclectic. There was no denying that the strongest part of, I think, our cultural context was from my mom, and it's not uncommon for the mom to bring the values that really set the family in order. Our family system, you know, as far as I'm concerned and will forever be written down, was a matriarchal system.

LD: Yes.

JG: Grandma Gomez was the chief executive officer of our family. [Laughter] That's the way it was. We all understood that. I had a *great* love for my grandparents. It's interesting when I talk to my cousins or my brother and my sisters. Our grandparents, all of them, but notably Jesse Gomez and Maria Gomez, they were profound people, absolutely profound people. For instance, my Uncle Joe was in a car accident. He was killed by a drunk driver in the 1960s.

My grandmother was such that when they asked if she wanted to press charges, she said, "No." She'd forgiven the man and prayed for his soul. I mean, we learned the values of what it meant to have a strong faith. If you can forgive somebody that takes the life of your own child, that sets the measure for all of us in terms of what honor is about and the sense of values. That was a very painful time for my grandparents. My grandfather never really wanted to stay in Minnesota, but, after my Uncle Joe died, he knew that he would never leave.

For him, there was, I think, a bitter sweetness because of his journey. I know this is about me, but when he was growing up, it was the Revolution in Mexico. The family was torn apart. So there were a lot of tears in him over the life that never was, but there was tremendous joy in seeing how his children grew to fruition. My grandparents were very happy. They traveled quite a bit through Mexico and even into Spain. What for me was so exciting is that I'd go over there, again as a kid, and my grandfather would take a headset. He goes, "Now, I want you to listen to this." What's cool about this is that I just finished revising arrangements on a song called *Budapest March Number Five, Circo del destino*[?]. It's a circus song, an ode to Dave Apollon, who is this great, phenomenal mandolin composer/arranger. This is written in like turn of the century kind of rich, lush orchestrations for orchestra. I'd never been able to write that tune if it wasn't for my grandfather simply putting that headset on my head.

I tend to remember music and dance from memory. You know, I wanted to write the circus piece and show that I've written it maybe in honor of my grandfather. There's an ode to Mozart in it but, ultimately, it goes over to my grandparents. My grandfather *always* had music for me to listen to that just was *so* expanding. I remember being in second grade and third grade listening to orchestral music while everybody else was out throwing football or something—not that I didn't, you know. That was a big part of our family, too. But, I just really had a love for music, and for him, later on, to say, "Look, I'm going to give you the bass." I played with the orchestra. I just very much love playing a string instrument. It gave me an understanding of how to write music in a way that could be nimble and rich in telling a story, if you will. I am who I am for all of that, what it meant for us. My parents, they lived in the same house for a very long time in New Hope. Then, they moved, and, now, they live in an apartment, which is near an assisted living called Waterford [Brooklyn Park, Minnesota]. The home was always happy, and it was always a place of tremendous warmth, as well as fiestas and things of that nature, too. I would say that was pretty much the context of family and friends. I do remember the dance was huge. The music was huge. The vitality of our life around the family system, notably my grandparents on my mother's side, was huge.

My grandfather Edward Bethke on my father's side, had a cabin in Cedar Lake, Minnesota, so there was a lot of time just being in Minnesota, which is wild. I remember going up there. We'd bring a sense of being Latino up to these cabins. It was like, now, who's moving here? [Laughter] Who's moving in up here?

My take away is that, look, Latinos have been in Minnesota for a *long*, long time. We've seen the journey. I would listen to my mom say that during the time that Atanacia's son, Charlie Martinez, was in the war, everybody said the rosary every day that he would return home. He was a great war hero. He jumped out of a plane a hundred seventeen times in the Pacific as a paratrooper.

LD: Wow.

JG: He was at the Battle of Guadalcanal. Our family has been part of the fabric of who we are in Minnesota. That's why, for me, here at CLUES, it brings tremendous joy. How can we be about the warmth and the invitation to people who will be our future contributors in ways we know not of? What I know about a journey—I've mentioned this *many* times to our staff—that story about my grandmother and the kindness of a Jewish store owner that will forever record in the annals of history - that hospitality. For my staff, we need to be that source of hospitality and a mindfulness of dignity and respect because it will be their *grandchildren* that will say, "You know, Grandmother, Grandpa, what was it like when you came to Minnesota?" and they'll say, "Oh, I remember that staff person at CLUES." Our contributions live beyond us if we treat people with a sense of mindfulness and dignity and respect. All we are is a means to help people find what they need to fully realize their dream of a better life for themselves and their family.

LD: [Sighs] Oh. . . [Laughter] I don't even know where to go from all that. We've kind of gone through your childhood and teenage years. Where did you go to high school?

JG: I went to Cooper Senior High [Robbinsdale, Minnesota].

LD: Okay. Then, you said that you knew you wanted to go to college.

JG: Yes.

LD: Did you go straight away after high school?

JG: I graduated early. I was on the honor roll and the National Honor Society. I graduated early. I started a play called *Dracula*, which was fun. It was cool. I was actually *Dracula*.

LD: [Chuckles]

JG: It was a very natural deal, because I'd been in the performing arts for a very long period of time. But during the time, I was working with a number of bands and doing a lot musically. At one point, I really contemplated what would it take for me to go to

Mexico City to study at [Unclear]. I did for just a little bit, which was very exciting. But I had been accepted to Macalester College.

To honor my grandparents and my parents, I went to Macalester College for a semester, but it was so *expensive*, notably in what my parents would pay. So I thought, well, I have good grades, so I went to the University of Minnesota. At that point I was an independent, I lived by myself. I was independent. I put myself through school. I wasn't going to have my mom and dad pay. It just didn't seem like the thing to do. I went to the University of Minnesota, and graduated with two majors, one in sociology of law and the second one in Chicano Studies, all with an eye towards going to graduate school.

LD: When did you graduate?

JG: 1983.

LD: Did I ask you your date of birth? That should have been my first question. Date of birth?

JG: January 31, 1961.

LD: Okay. [Laughter] I've got to establish a timeline here.

JG: That's right.

LD: So you graduated in 1983 with an eye towards graduate school. What did you want to get your degree in?

JG: Business, some type of leadership.

LD: Interesting. How did you go from such a strong bent toward the arts towards business?

JG: I remember growing up, also. . . Two things. My mom was a great leader, and I wanted to follow in those footsteps. My dad was, at the height of his career, an inventory control manager for a multimillion dollar plastics firm. So I remember him sitting at a desk, and he'd give me a pad of paper and a sharp pencil. It was always cool. I had a little briefcase that I took to school for real.

I should tell you this story, too. Here is where my expectations come into play. I didn't want to go back to school after the first day of first grade.

LD: [Laughter] Oh, why?

JG: I told my mom, "Mom, you lied to me." She says, "What do you mean I lied to you?" "I'm not going to go back to school." She recounted this. I remember telling her

this. I said, “You said if I went to school, I’d learn how to read. I still don’t know how to read.” I thought I was supposed to learn like in a day.

LD: [Laughter]

JG: Maybe that says something about my expectations! My dad worked at what was kind of a white collar job. He worked himself up. He didn’t go to college. I was very proud of him. I think, for me, you know, politics, business. . . This artistic part of me was always there, but I realized in college that I’d always have the arts with me.

I became interested in social science research. It was really this *broadening* of the world. What I loved about music was that to be able to read the scores of Mozart and Beethoven, to me, it was just about unlocking the ideas of people that have gone before me. So when I got to college, I was very much interested about the ways of the world. What I loved about sociology was empirical research, socially cultural change theories, the whole journey of explaining and understanding how society is organized and the different theories of humanity evolving or humanity progressing, however one would look at that. It was really just the type of liberal arts education for me that was very mind expanding. I knew I always wanted to work in non-profits. In order to be that executive director, I felt that a master’s degree would be the best route.

I was a business consultant. I think, early on, I saw that leadership could help make a difference. I realized that with a liberal arts education, that would serve as a really good platform for graduate school. I liked school. I was good at it. I graduated a quarter early from college, as well, with really good grades. Then I went to a master’s program afterwards.

LD: Where was that?

JG: The University of Minnesota is where I received my baccalaureate degree, and then at Metropolitan State University for my master’s in management administration degree.

LD: Okay. You got your master’s when?

JG: 1987.

LD: In the meantime, did you work or did you go to school fulltime?

JG: I did. Right after I graduated, I was a pre-college coordinator, and, then, assistant director for Inroads.

LD: Oh, okay.

JG: It was very exciting helping. We created a pre-college program that became accredited. I wanted it. We achieved accreditation status by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. What I thought would be really cool is helping bright, diverse

high schoolers prepare for college. I thought of my own journey. I was the first one in my family to graduate with a baccalaureate degree and, then, in the larger family system, the first to actually graduate with a master's degree. While I was pursuing my master's degree, I worked fulltime. I just knew what my journey was. College was foreign to us. My Uncle Roman, he had his baccalaureate degree and, then, my Aunt Jean had her baccalaureate degree as well, but no one in my immediate family had received their degree. Many of them have by now. I thought what was really cool about Inroads is that we could help prepare families with a sense of intentionality about the journey, about preparing for college. We received two national awards of excellence.

From there, I was recruited to go to the United Way, which was a great experience. I felt that if I was going to pursue a career in the non-profit area, I'd want to learn much about fundraising, and I was very successful at it. It was a great time for me to learn the fundamentals of the nature of non-profit organizations.

I was at United Way when I had completed my master's degree and then was recruited by Esperanza Guerrero-Anderson—I'm *so* honored to say—when she was the chief executive officer at Metropolitan Economic Development Association [MEDA]. I became a business consultant in their Pacesetter Program, and I managed, I believe, approximately, half of what we called their Pacesetter Group. They were high growth, high potential, high net worth, diverse business owners. That was a really neat time in my life, too.

Actually, during that era after my master's degree, there were some really cool, kind of accelerations of learning. For instance, Doctor [W.] Edwards Deming was teaching in Minnesota, I'm going to say in 1990, 1991, some time period like that. As a business consultant, I *absolutely* wanted to train with him, to meet him. I was able to train with him. In fact, I corresponded with him. Doctor Edwards Deming helped to rebuild Japan after World War II, and he's considered one of the preeminent designers of the Industrial Revolution, as it relates to quality improvement. I trained with him on a little known treatise that he had put forth on what was called "The Deming System of Profound Knowledge."

There are not many of us left who actually trained with him. What I've enjoyed is bringing that teaching directly to others nationally, other non-profit leaders and leaders in many different fields, to help them with the application of this knowledge. What kind of interesting is that, I think for me, it was the creative background, the artistic background, the discipline of learning in the performing arts that was applied in the discipline of learning and knowledge retention in the realm of business. My forte is in strategic planning, which is, in some ways, like choreography, if you will.

LD: An interesting analogy!

JG: This is kind of neat. One of the most profound moments of my early professional career was one day, I remember, as a business consultant. I had a handwritten letter that was sent to me. On the outside of the letter, it said, "Dr. Edwards Deming, Consultant in

Mathematics, Washington, D.C.” I was the kid in *Willie Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. I had a golden ticket when I opened that letter.

LD: [Chuckles]

JG: In fact, that letter adorns my office to this day. . .

LD: Oh, wow.

JG: It’s faded and so forth, but it’s one of my most cherished memories.

LD: Oh, my goodness.

JG: It’s just a commitment of excellence. What does that mean in terms of where I am now here at CLUES for fifteen years? How do we bring forth world class excellence? Meeting a person like Doctor Edwards Deming, who is a historical figure, had a profound impact. It has allowed me to say, “How do we bring applied knowledge in the system of profound knowledge and the principles of quality improvement to the organization of the agency?” It’s been a core business knowledge that’s been incredibly helpful throughout the years.

LD: Was it after that that you came to CLUES?

JG: Let’s see. After MEDA, I worked for the American Red Cross. While at the Red Cross, I became a presidential scholar selected by Elizabeth Dole, who was then the president of the American National Red Cross. My journey was such that I had been looking to deepen and broaden the skills that I thought would be important for me in becoming an executive director. I had been asked to look at a number of directorships throughout the country for Red Cross chapters.

I threw my hat in the ring, so to speak, for the executive directorship of the (then) Chicanos Latinos Unidos En Servicio. I had known the agency well as Raquel, my wife, was among the first board directors and was the first clinical therapist, as well. I used to actually drop her off at work when they were up on. . . It was a store front up on Robert Street in Saint Paul near what’s called the Keys Restaurant. I remember interviewing for the job and, later that day, inviting my parents and my wife, Raquel. . . and we then went to the Black Hills. I didn’t think I was going to get, you know, an interview. When we came back, one of the board members called and said they’d been looking for me. [Laughter] It was funny. I remember I had my camping shorts on and hiking boots and a backpack on, negotiating salary for real. It was funny. [Laughter]

LD: When was that? What year?

JG: It was the summer of 1995. That’s when I was hired. My first day at CLUES was July 31, 1995.

LD: You came in as executive director?

JG: Yes.

LD: Before I forget, how many siblings do you have?

JG: I have one brother, who is the oldest, Jack, followed by Mary, Julia, Patty, Anita, and then I'm the youngest.

LD: You mentioned you were the first to go to college, though?

JG: Yes.

LD: Tell me about CLUES. Tell me about kind of the history a little bit before you came in. What was the agency like when you came on board as executive director?

JG: Yes, absolutely. The agency really started as a result of a graduate project by Latino graduate students in the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota. The question that they looked at was where do Latinos go to receive language appropriate mental health services in the metropolitan area? This project really showed that there were little, if any, services that our community could go to. It started off as an association, from what we're able to ascertain, in 1979, 1980, and then was incorporated in 1981 as Chicanos Latinos Unidos En Servicio.

Its first service was mental health services, and there were four people on staff. I can confidently say this because my wife, Raquel, was recruited to be the first mental health therapist. It was very small at the time. What's interesting, though, is that when people would come for mental health services, people would say, "Gee, I need to learn English as a second language [ESL]," and, "Gee, I need to look for a job." Donna Sherlock was the first executive director. Donna brought a high commitment to education, and CLUES has always had high caliber professionals. So it very much had begun with a sense that we need to provide high quality mental health services.

When I came to the agency in 1995, Rafael Ortega, who was the second executive director, had won the elected position as a commissioner on the Board of Commissioners for Ramsey County. He had then left the organization. There was a recruitment, and then I was selected. When I came to the agency, CLUES played, at the time, a very vitally important role in helping the community both in Minneapolis and in Saint Paul. It had an office in Minneapolis at 2110 Nicollet Avenue South. It had its Saint Paul headquarters on the West Side, and it had what they called a Seniors Program at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Saint Paul. I'm going to say we probably had about eighteen staff, as we were relatively small. We were about a \$1.2 million budget. Then we had additional services, La Escuelita, and another program called HACER [Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research], which was the formation of a community research organization.

LD: Oh. . . All those came from CLUES?

JG: Yes!

LD: Wow.

JG: When I came in the agency, the board had wanted to have a strategic plan. We took our time to do that, because it was important to establish a relationship with the staff, you know, to determine what our values were. The agency provided mental health and chemical health, ESL classes, education, and then also some case management services in Aging Well. We had these broader two arms, La Escuelita and HACER. In talking with staff, I remember. . . I did interviews with maybe sixty, seventy percent of all of the staff and was really quite taken at the *great* contributions of the administration that was before me. I'm going to say that the 1990s, I think, were tough for our community, because for human service organizations there was this top of mind sense that, well, the Hispanic community is on the West Side. When in fact our community, such as our family, was from the North Side in the 1920s.

LD: Right.

JG: By the mid-1990s, Latinos lived in every one of the eighty-seven counties that comprise Minnesota three hundred sixty-five days a year.

LD: Wow.

JG: The agency really had to overcome so much barriers—not that people wanted to keep CLUES from growing. What was not known is that the growth of the community, the foresight of having La Escuelita and HACER, were profound contributions to the legacy of predominantly Rafael Ortega, who said, “We need to do this and get out ahead of this.” Really, in many ways, what I have seen as my tenure at CLUES is to fully realize these services. Through our strategic plan that we, then, had by 1997, we had worked very assiduously with the leadership of HACER and with the leadership of La Escuelita. We recognized that CLUES needed to return to its roots of work it began in those days that I used to remember from the stories my wife, Raquel, would share with me, in terms of the life of the agency and its impact and the direct services—never talking about clients. I want to make clear, but just the sense of the vibrancy of the agency as a direct service provider. We helped in many different ways that we could support the leadership of HACER and support the leadership of La Escuelita to become their free, independent 501c3 organizations.

One of the projects that I thought would be good for HACER is that we did a phenomenal job that just really, I think, took the broader community. . . by awakening the community with research that I think was done, I'm going to say, in 1997. It was HACER's work on the growth of the Hispanic community in Minneapolis. Their research showed that the Hispanic community, the Latino community, in Minneapolis had grown notably in South Minneapolis by one hundred eighty-seven percent.

LD: Wow. In what kind of a time frame?

JG: I think 1990 to 1997.

LD: Okay.

JG: What this showed was that the contributions of the Latino community in terms of economic development, in terms of. . . It was about that time frame. Really, where I felt I could help was help find the funds to help support HACER in, really, just more of a complimentary to do what we could. We had a phenomenal roll out session of the research at the, then, Minneapolis Foundation, which was unheard of. It was really establishing. . . Well, I won't say establishing. It was furthering the research context that CLUES has *always* had from Donna Sherlock, to Rafael Ortega, to myself. We've all spoken to, you know, research. This is where, for me, my own educational background could lend itself well to the contribution.

What was interesting for us back then. . . The staff person—thank God, she's still with us—at CLUES, was Cindy [Unclear]. Back in 1997, 1998, in South Minneapolis, Cindy said, "Jesse, what are you doing about health care?" I said, "What do you mean what am I doing about health care?" She said, "Our people don't have anywhere to go in the west metro area. This is what it feels like." I said, "What are you talking about?" I made three calls, literally, within that day or a couple of days. I called the clinic, I'll say related to government. I won't say which government. I said, "We're wanting to see how we can advance access to health care for the west metro Latino community." They said, "We don't know if we can help. Can we do that? Aren't your people illegal?" I said, "What do you mean!? We're talking about the Latino community. I didn't say undocumented people."

Another clinic said, "Well, we would help you if your people were refugees, because we have federal dollars for refugees." I was finding in my own direct work that this was going to be *much* tougher than I could ever have imagined.

For 1997 and 1998, I remember meeting with people. There was a gentleman named David Doth who was the commissioner of Human Services. . . and just, really, if you will, being persistent, if not pestering him, to help us with this issue. In the waning days of the [Governor] Arne Carlson Administration, we had a meeting with him and Ann Barry. They committed to help us with a \$50,000 grant to do research on health access. We were able to negotiate that HACER would be involved in that. Now, I wasn't directly involved with HACER, but I was interested in HACER being successful. The Department of Human Services, the Department of Health, the University of Minnesota, La Clinica, CLUES, and others, in 1999, were able to help support HACER to develop what I would call landmark research. The report, I think, was "Minnesota's Public Health and Health Care Access Issues Facing Minnesota's Latino Population," HACER, 1999.

This was three years before the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies would respond to the Congress' concern on how diverse populations were treated by the health industry with their landmark Health Disparities Report of 2001. We were so far in advance in taking research and saying, "Here are the issues." It was so classic when you think in terms of the journey of CLUES from the graduate students in the late 1970s that saw a need and, then, through research were able to create CLUES. There we were looking at the issue of health access and public health issues facing Minnesota's Latino community, and again, through research now with HACER that was born from CLUES, conducting research that just, really—I remember the roll out of that report—making a *huge* difference.

Well, by 2002, we had done a second research project going into *tremendous* detail on opportunities for improvement. I remember that the research was really distressing. We needed to push forth. It was people like Senator Paul Wellstone that we asked to help us. I'll just say I had the stewardship of that issue, to be out in front of that on the health care access issue. It led to, I think, some really cool innovations in health care. It led to holding people's feet to the fire. It led to being unwavering in looking for ways that could ameliorate the lack of health care access. Certainly, we know health care has always been a tough issue for all people. I think what the 1999 research did was to establish that there was compelling, empirical research that lent itself to policy formation and to direct action.

When we moved from our Minneapolis office to the Coliseum Building in South Minneapolis, we helped and played a supportive role for La Clinica to open up a clinic at Lake Street. We were pleased that though La Clinica couldn't sustain that, Hennepin County opened their East Lake Street Clinic that serves *thousands* and thousands and thousands of Latinos. We're very proud of that. We created the model. We could show that multiple agencies could best serve our families, and that through the spirit of cooperation, which is a hallmark in my view of our community, we could leverage the resources that we had to serve this *demand* for services, which still exists. The growth of the community is such that we've never been able to catch that demand curve, so we're always thinking about how to advance through cooperation the sense of, as now we call it, Family-Centered Services for spirit, mind, and body. We're helping children and families advance wellness and health and prosperity.

Those early years at CLUES were exciting in that we had no road map to follow. We wanted to further realize CLUES in terms of the depth and meaning in all of our services, and to honor those who had contributed to the agency. You know, this is the community's agency. I'm pleased to see the kind of representation that we have. In those early years, it was a defining moment when we saw that health care would be kind of the long twilight issue among other issues that we would have to get out ahead of.

LD: That spirit of cooperation and the kind of refocusing of CLUES.

JG: Yes.

LD: Your focusing on CLUES' original mission, I believe—correct me if I'm wrong—kind of led to the move here to this building?

JG: Yes.

LD: Now, you have several different agencies in this building.

JG: Yes.

LD: Tell me a little bit about that. Was that around the same time when the idea began?

JG: Let me tell you exactly how this happened.

LD: Okay. [Chuckles]

JG: In our 2110 Nicollet Avenue facility, it was September, October. . .

LD: Of?

JG: I'm going to say 1997 or 1998, about that time frame. It had rained later in the fall and things were kind of frozen. So it must have been October, I'll say. We had an all staff meeting that was going to be in the basement. We couldn't have it in there because, you see, it had flooded. It had rained the night before. The carpet was totally *bad*. I was still new to CLUES, so I'm going to say 1997 is probably the year. I asked if we had a shop vac [vacuum]. Somebody said we did, and I said, "Great. I'll go down there and I'll start cleaning that," It was important for me. . . I just was used to doing the work, but it was important as the leader to demonstrate that. Now, I never really thought about it till late, but I could have been electrocuted.

LD: [Laughter]

JG: It never dawned on me. I'm plugging in two inches of water. I'm using the shop vac in like real nice Italian leather shoes and a nice suit—they were totally gone—thinking, Lord, I know you have a plan for me here.

LD: [Chuckles]

JG: I'd been at the Red Cross and, not to romanticize, but I had been a presidential scholar with Mrs. Dole, and I'd met with Mrs. Dole in her office. From her office, you could see the White House. And there I was—cut to the next scene—with a shop vac totally immersed in water. But I got into one of the rooms—not to say anything bad; it was a building and we were doing the best we could at the time. But there were mushrooms growing out of the floor and wall. I couldn't believe it. It was like, you know what? This is *not* dignified. It was right there and then that. . . You know what? I had worked at Red Cross. I'd worked at MEDA. I'd worked at United Way. There was a certain esprit de corps. There was a certain threshold of excellence that I was used to.

Now, that's not to say that wasn't case for CLUES, because there'd always been a spirit of excellence in terms of the quality of services. We just needed to get a facility that could honor the quality of those services.

LD: Yes.

JG: It was right there and then that I said, "What would we need to do to get to a better facility?" So two things. . . Our first effort was we *had* to move our staff. I had to shut down operations for the summer, because the air conditioning didn't work, and it was over 105 degrees in the. . . There was just no way we could provide services. It was undignified. We leased a space and wanted to build out at the Coliseum, but, nevertheless, we leased a huge amount of space. It was about 22,000 square feet. We developed our Minneapolis operations there, a beautiful facility. La Clinica was there. I think La Oportunidad eventually came there, and other proprietors. It was a really, really *huge* success.

Meanwhile, in Saint Paul, we knew our community was growing. Again, we were driven by research by HACER that showed the growth of the East Side Latino community. I remember reading the research and thinking, my goodness, we should look at the East Side. Lorena, at the time, it was saying that for every one Latino on the West Side, there were two Latinos on the East Side.

LD: Wow.

JG: While the growth rate of the Latino community back then was approximately fifty percent, on the East Side, it was a hundred ninety-five percent.

LD: Wow.

JG: The people coming to the East Side were predominately newcomers. That's where CLUES has always excelled.

I literally remember driving up East Seventh Street in St. Paul. We had a professional firm helping us, and they did a systematic approach. I remember driving up and seeing this location. At the time, it was a NAPA Building. There was a *huge* parking lot and kind of a dilapidated building. I think it had been an auto sales showroom for Fiat *many* years before. I just saw it as an affirmation—I'll put it at that—that this would be the location that would be best for us. Then, it turns out that we were able to purchase the land.

At this time we were developing our relationship with the Consulate of Mexico in Chicago. There were many, many times where our staff was helping our clients access the Consulate of Mexico in Chicago. I thought, my goodness, wouldn't it be great if we could have such services available here. So I believe May 7, 2004, was the groundbreaking ceremony, and our honorary guest speaker was Honorable General Consul, Carlos M Sada of the Consulate of Mexico in Chicago. I had spoken with

Honorable General Consul Sada about our pursuit of a facility here and was made aware that His Excellency Vicente Fox was going to be in Chicago for the opening of a new consulate. So we worked towards—it may have been 2005, now that I recall—arranging for Consul Sada and others to meet with Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty. The governor was prepared to invite His Excellency Vicente Fox, to Minnesota, and Consul Sada carried that request back through the chain of command. That was the same day and it, apparently, was a fifteen minute meeting. You know, as a result of that, our great hopes of seeing His Excellency Vicente Fox come to Minnesota were realized. It wasn't just us. There was a whole community behind that. I think the groundbreaking ceremony for the facility helped people to see how we stage and leverage our work to be a narrative of Latino contributions. It helped build a sense of connectedness, the sense of this international scope of who we are. And there was the realization that, at the time, Mexico was the number two trading partner of the United States of America, so it was good for business. Vicente Fox came here. We'll have to double check the dates, but I think it was June or July of 2005. So the groundbreaking ceremony had to be May 7, 2005.

We knew that there was interest in opening a Consulate of Mexico. We were most respectful of submitting a proposal in cooperation and at the leadership of the (then) mayor Randy Kelly of the City of Saint Paul. We were most proper in providing materials. Then, the decision was made by Mexico. We were ecstatic and overjoyed that the sense of threshold of service and relationship. . . It is among our greatest honors for this facility to serve as a site for the Consulate of Mexico in Saint Paul and our collective interest in helping the communities that we serve achieve a better life.

LD: There's another organization here, as well?

JG: There has been, yes. Health East opened up, a wonderful state of the art primary health care clinic, very vibrant for many years. We were very excited about their contributions, as well. There have been some changes in the health care industry with the terrible recession. It's my understanding that they had closed a number of clinics, including that clinic last year. We are excited about the space because we think that will lend itself *very* well for our own coordinated care services that will integrate wellness services and primary health care services and human services all centered around children and families. You know, it's an opportunity for us to further realize our mission. We are, actually, growing out of space. So it's a relief that we have the space in order to build our services. We salute Health East. We think the world of Health East. They were great partners, and we continue to work together with them and others in the health care field.

LD: Let me go back. . . After kind of refocusing, HACER and La Escuelita became independent organizations?

JG: Yes.

LD: The refocusing kind of brought about this building, etcetera. Tell me now what is the core mission and what are the core services that CLUES provides?

JG: Thank you so much, Lorena. Our mission is to enhance the quality of life for the Latino community in Minnesota. We very much have affirmed the mission. We have a set of operating principles that we continue to affirm. The top four are dignity, respect, trust, and understanding, all of them being very crucial and critical in the direct service to our people. By the 1997 plan, we refocused to deepen what we call the core services of CLUES.

Today, CLUES has Rule 29 Mental Health outpatient clinic services in our Minneapolis and Saint Paul offices. It's a full array of mental health services we're able to offer our community. In addition, we are a Rule 31 outpatient chemical health facility. So we are helping people through outpatient services with chemical health related issues, sobriety, and living without the usage of alcohol and drugs.

We also have a *beautiful* facility in Dakota County, which is on the cusp of Ramsey County, for our Aging Well services. It's a gorgeous facility. We just love this facility and how we are serving our Latino elders with a whole array of day center services. It's a licensed facility, as well.

CLUES is so honored to also be a provider of welfare to work services in both Ramsey County and in Hennepin County. Through our welfare to work services, we now are serving people from sixteen different languages. CLUES has always had a record of serving non-Hispanic clients in many of our services. Fifty percent of our clients are non-Latino. What we've seen in just an amazing growth in the richness of English as a second language, so this has been a broadening of services within, notably, Ramsey County.

We've moved our education services, our employment services, and our Learn Together Program and our financial literacy and housing services into what we call the Economic Advancement Services. What we really want to focus in on is the hopes and dreams of the families that we're serving. We need to learn that and to build a plan and strategy to help people fully realize the American dream, fully realize what can we do to help accelerate prosperity. So that's a different mindset than what I think you see from other human services providers—not necessarily in the Hispanic community. I think it's an evolution in human services to think in those terms. We also have family services that are providing case management services throughout the metropolitan area.

In addition, at the facility, with the Volunteer Attorneys Network, [Volunteer Lawyers Network] I believe their title is, we have Linea Legal Latina, which is a pro bono legal service. It's the first private bar hotline in the United States of America. We thought that with the kind of footprint of people that we attract and draw to the facility throughout our four state area, we would see an increase in the legal needs. We work very closely with all the legal providers, but I think Linea Legal Latina, through their services here in Saint Paul and their services in Minneapolis, provide ready-set legal services for people overcoming a full array of issues. That's independent from CLUES, but it's a wonderful way to compliment CLUES. So there is our mental health and our chemical health services, and I've mentioned our Aging Well Services, our Family Services, and then our Economic Advancement Services.

There is one of our other divisions that I am *very*, very thrilled and excited about. From those early formations of research, we worked very closely with Blue Cross Blue Shield and ClearWay Minnesota on landmark research in tobacco. It was a qualitative analysis, a quantitative analysis, and, then, looking at how we would begin the journey of tobacco cessation, led by Doctor José William Castellanos, a medical doctor from Colombia. We have a phenomenal program called the Family-Centric Health Promotion Program. It's nationally recognized. That program has won national awards. It touches the lives of over thirty-eight thousand people with advances in better health. So that's an important new, added feature. Because we work so closely with health care, we are always looking to see what new ways we can find to create coordinated care platforms that can better serve individuals and families than what we have in the past? We're excited about those services that are on the forefront.

Our ESL services remain strong and are a critical part of the agency. Again, you know, that's basically the same footprint as when I came to CLUES. Then, we helped to refocus CLUES back to its core business. Since 1995, we've been committed to what's called the logic model, or an outcome-based framework. What that means for us in human services is that we're driven by outcomes and evaluative plans to achieve those outcomes. So we have a high institutional commitment to learning, to applied learning, and a tradition and a history of looking at methodologies to assure that we best serve people. What the logic model means for us is that it guides how we organize our services to assure that we're making a difference. There's an evaluative component. There's pre- and post-testing. There's customer feedback. I think for me, personally, again back to Doctor Edwards Deming, it is bringing a framework built upon the quality of services that were extraordinarily high when I got here. We wanted to do this to increase that quality and continue its commitment.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that throughout the journey from the first Board of Directors to the current, CLUES has always had a vibrant and highly contributing Board of Directors who guide the agency in policy. The Board, through so many of our eras, has had the wherewithal. When we went after the capital campaign, \$6.2 million capital campaign, our Board was there. They were very strong. They helped lead the charge. I'm very grateful to the Board throughout the history of CLUES for having this sense of care, the diligence of best practice, and of transparency and accountability.

CLUES, for many years—I must say this; I'm so proud of the fact—has posted our Service Operations Accountability Report, called the SOAR Report, every year online. We've posted our audits online as well as our [Internal Revenue Service Form] 990s. What I learned from the Red Cross, from Mrs. Dole, was the sense of we want to be the best stewards of the generosity of the American people. What I felt, you know, learning from her leadership, is that's what I wanted to contribute in part to CLUES is a sense of transparency and accountability. I know that our first web page, I think, had the Macarena with the spinning sun.

LD: [Laughter]

JG: I know. [Chuckles] We've come a long way since then. But even back in those days, we figured out how we could upload these reports, which were not easy to do. We were right on the edge of the technology curve. To this day, you can go back for many years and find those reports online. I think in the land of ten thousand non-profits, those are some of the things that we think are critical. As soon as I got to CLUES, we submitted an application to the Charities Review Council of Minnesota, because I felt it was important that we operate at a threshold of best practice non-profits. For us, we want to operate at the highest threshold of care, of stewardship, of effectiveness—and we're a Latino agency.

LD: Tell me, now, how many folks you have on staff.

JG: I believe, right now, we've come to seventy-seven.

LD: If you don't mind sharing the budget. . .

JG: No, that's fine. I think it's \$6.5 million operational budget with a capital budget totaling \$7.2 million.

LD: Is CLUES now the largest Latino agency or non-profit agency in Minnesota?

JG: It may be. I'm not exactly sure.

LD: It's definitely one of the largest.

JG: Yes. I know that in 2007, and I believe in 2004, we were listed among America's top twenty-five Hispanic agencies by *Hispanic Magazine*.

LD: Okay.

JG: I think they looked at balance sheets and things like that.

LD: So it's not just big in Minnesota. It's quite large nationally.

JG: Yes.

LD: Kind of stepping back. . . The growth of CLUES, obviously, reflects the growth of the community, which you kind of mentioned before.

JG: Yes.

LD: I'd like to kind of end the last part of the interview talking about that. I think you have a fantastic viewpoint from your families coming here, and you've really seen the growth and evolution of the Latino community.

JG: Yes.

LD: Talk to me a little bit about. . . You seem to have a very firm grasp on the numbers.

JG: Yes.

LD: So we can start there.

JG: Okay.

LD: Tell me what do you know of the growth of the Latino community? There really has been an explosion.

JG: Yes.

LD: Was the curve kind of small?

JG: Yes.

LD: You said the first thousand, two thousand people to—now, the 2010 census, is over two hundred thousand?

JG: Two hundred thousand, yes.

LD: So what has that growth been like? Has it been in spurts? Has it been continuous?

JG: Throughout the 1990s up till today, it's been continuous and it's been significant. The future. . . I think, Lorena, that's what you are alluding to.

LD: Yes.

JG: What does our community look like in the future? Let me just say what 2030 looks like from various different research sources. For the Latino community, some forecasting models suggest our community will triple in size to about six hundred thousand in Minnesota.

LD: By 2030?

JG: By 2030.

LD: Okay.

JG: All diverse communities in Minnesota will grow by seventy-seven percent. Now, a couple of other statistics that come to mind that I've been speaking about lately are that the growth of the cost of health care in Minnesota in 2004 was \$30.8 billion dollars. In the previous twelve-year growth rate annualized was approximately seven point four

percent. By 2030, that growth rate from 2004 will grow to be approximately \$230 billion, which is eighty-five plus percent of our GDP [gross domestic product] in Minnesota. The fastest growing age group that I've been speaking about to the public is the eighty-five and above at a hundred fifteen percent.

Now, some other concerns ahead. . . Half of all educators retire by 2020. There's a decrease in the projected growth rate of our graduates. Two different analyses show that we could lose between three hundred fifty thousand and five hundred thousand jobs simply because we're not producing enough people with baccalaureate degrees.

Right now, Minnesota ranks approximately fourteenth in terms of per capita income. I met a fellow a number of years ago who is an historical figure. Tor Dahl is chairman emeritus of the World Confederation of Productivity Science.

LD: Oh, Tor Dahl. I know him, a brilliant guy. Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt.

JG: No, no. I helped him review the productivity plan for certain a country. For me, he's been a mentor like Dr. Edwards Deming. For me, the two people that have profoundly impacted my view. . . number one, Dr. Edwards Deming, and number two, Tor Dahl, in addition to my family. My mom was my role model, I will say. So from a productivity standpoint, these trends show that we will be facing some of the most significant demographic trends we've ever experienced in Minnesota. There are significant potential losses before us.

Now, I want to say this, too. In my estimation, from our original work where we were ahead of the country in many ways on that 1999 health research, all disparities whether educational, health care, housing, economic, *all* disparities that we face as a society are indicators of the sub-optimization of our true productivity potential as an economy, as a people, and as a democracy. So what are the biggest issues before us? Overcoming the fear of recognizing that disparities are the sub-optimization of community in a way that means people are not fully realizing their economic and potential, but more importantly, that inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

So we have to evolve over the next twenty years to say, "How do we advance the ability of people to care for one another?" Edwards Deming believed that if we truly knew the sub-optimization that would result from competition and the economic reward that would come from cooperation, we would no longer say, "Lead us into competition," but, "How do we nurture cooperation?" The work of Tor Dahl profoundly says in his research that when you advance freedom, safety, and fairness, a regression analysis at the ninety-fifth percentile says you then will advance the productivity of a people.

Our people, Latinos, have contributed greatly in the last century. I can speak to that by the vitality and the life contributions of my family and so many Latinos that I've known throughout the years. I'm humbled to say that.

Our future will be determined by the narrative that we seek and that we choose. That narrative *needs* to be that we all have to recognize that in the richness of our diversity, we are still bound to one another because our human natures are, in fact, one and the same. If our human natures are one and the same, then the opportunity to promote impartiality, humanity, and universality through cooperation can lead us to examine how we fully realize the hopes and dreams of every person in Minnesota right now. Our future and our economic future is going to be closely tied to the ability of *all* diverse communities to advance education. We know that Latino English-speakers in the Saint Paul Public Schools have among the lowest graduation rates of any category. We have to turn that around. We know that we've lost ground in education. So, for us, we have to figure how we fully realize opportunity and how we support one another in overcoming those disparities? That is not a future of competing groups against one another. Minnesota has to figure out how to develop a game plan that says, "By 2030, if we begin our work now with the richness of diversity, and we hold our goal to be world class in competition with global competitors, that's the opportunity. It's that kind of vision where we can go as a state that can make a difference.

Twenty years goes by pretty fast. I really believe that our future is going to be determined by our ability to recognize that we will succeed through cooperation and through providing the necessary guidance and resources and wherewithal in education. We have to overcome great barriers in education and great barriers in health care to better serve children and families and individuals. That is the greatest opportunity before us, because those are the greatest challenges that we've ever faced and that we will ever face. When we look at the future biennial budget deficits, they're frightening. They're very frightful. Rather than having that lead to competition and devolution of discourse, we have the opportunity to think it through as cooperation among many groups. The reality is that we have all a great role to play to marshal the wherewithal.

The guiding value, for me, is the most noble value that really, I think, is the measure for all societies throughout all time, and that is to advance the ability of people to care for one another. That, to me, is a hallmark of a civil society and a caring society, as well as a prosperous society.

LD: That's well said.

JG: Thank you.

LD: It's quite a life mission. Of course, if there's more that you'd like to talk about. . . I'm really interested in all of this work. Where do you find your satisfaction?

JG: That's interesting. We had an all-staff meeting earlier today. You know, for me, it is hearing from our staff. Staff has come up to me and said, "I wanted to work at CLUES for many years, and I love working at CLUES." Where I get energized is how we make a difference in the lives of our community in quiet ways, not dramatic ways. What are the quiet stories that we see of people overcoming such great pain or the complexity of situations where people through their own wherewithal and a the help of a dedicated staff

overcome just insurmountable odds? To me, when I hear of how we make that difference, I'm just really taken by it.

I'll give you an example. This was one of my staff many years ago, but it's an example. She was speaking on the radio about the issues of wellness in our community and issues of isolation and what were the signs? She was announcing that we had a Latino support group that summer. Well, at the end of its session, she was asking participants about the quality of their experience. She said a woman raised her hand and said, "Listen, I have something to say." What she said was that the day Janet Jacinto, then our director of Mental Health Services, was on the radio was the day that this woman had committed to end her own life.

LD: Oh, my gosh.

JG: Leaving her small children and husband in the wake of that. It just happened that Janet was on the radio.

LD: Wow.

JG: She said, "It was as if you were talking right to me when you were explaining that these are the indicators. This is what I had. "So," she said, "rather than take my life, I called CLUES."

LD: Wow.

JG: That, to me, is what it's all about in terms of making a difference. You know, I think about my own beloved grandmother, Maria Gomez, whom I loved so much, and about the Jewish store owner that made a difference. That mother's choice for a better life with God's grace will affect the future generations of her grandchildren.

Now, that's not the situation of all of our community, but when life's situations happen, and where there are acute situations and someone who is not exactly sure where to turn to, CLUES throughout the years, ever since it was begun, has always had this sacred trust to be available, to be of service. For me, we stay rooted and grounded every day on quality, on the initiative, on system checks, and all of the background work. Ultimately, what I want to elevate and champion, if you will, is the family having a picnic on the grassy hill with the sun before them. For a family to have that joy and that serenity and that peace is the goal of the journey and is what we strive for. That's the end in mind.

It's through the dedication of staff who just have a tremendous sense of wherewithal. That's where I energize. That's where I find my sense of direction - in the legends and lore of the difference that the staff of CLUES has in making a difference quietly. We don't promote that. We don't say much about that, but, for me personally, that is really where I've been energized so much.

I think for me, also, it's looking at how do we innovate and how do we better serve and perpetually look at refining that which we do. That's really come about through, you know, the disciplined knowledge of people like Tor Dahl and Edwards Deming, that we implement this sense of systematic approach in what we do with heart and with professionalism and with a sense of it's possible for us to fully realize the hopes and dreams that those graduate students had way back when of an agency that would be perpetually available.

I guess the last story I'll say about this is that when we were looking at focus groups. . . Everything we do is always with a focus group with our community.

LD: Yes.

JG: We had a focus group at Sacred Heart Church [Saint Paul, Minnesota], which is about two blocks away from this facility on the East Side. We invited the community for an input session. We thought we'd have twenty-five people. Within two weeks, we had sixty-five people in the church.

LD: Wow.

JG: We asked them, "Where do you think we should be?" They said, "Anywhere on the East Side, we'll find you." But there was an elderly gentleman who said, "You know, build on the East Side. I can't wait till you build your building, because then I can bring my grandsons and say, 'See, that's our building. That's for us.'" Really, that, to me, is the most noble of all that I'm excited about is making that difference and quietly being there. Those are the stories that you really always will have with you in terms of contribution and legacy.

LD: How many folks do you serve today?

JG: Well, I think our SOAR report would say that we touch the lives of about thirty-eight thousand to forty thousand people and direct service is some portion of that. We keep it in those broader numbers, but those divisions are. . . We probably quadrupled the size, as we've had to throughout the years. . . We've had a very [unclear] and measured growth. Financial performance is critical. There's a very strong financial discipline at the agency—thank goodness—as there's always been. We're a growing community so there's always a demand, more demand than what we can provide. We're always very mindful about that quality experience, as well.

LD: We talked about the numbers in 2030, etcetera.

JG: Yes.

LD: I would see that as those are the challenges before you.

JG: Yes.

LD: What are you most proud of as far as the contributions of the Latino community here in Minnesota up to now?

JG: Well, I think, for me, what I'm most proud of is a couple things where we can serve as a means for people to fully realize their hopes and dreams. We are a vibrant community of well over eleven, twelve plus communities. There's a sense of who we are within the cultural context and lineage. You think about the contributions in the arts and medicine and economics and helping, such as on Lake Street, moving into, at the time in the late 1990s, a dilapidated area making it, now, very vibrant. I'm very proud of our community in commitment to family and commitment to one another. When we know that parents realize the *power* of education as a means of accelerating their hopes and dreams, the *great sacrifices* that they make for their children and that we can help them achieve that, not only is it a win for that set of parents and for the child, but for everybody else in Minnesota. Really, education is going to be the key to our economic vibrancy as a state. What I'm very proud of is that our Latino community has contributed *greatly* in every aspect of society and in the Armed Forces. At one point, I think the last count was thirty-eight Congressional Medal of Honor recipients. It's my understanding that two actually live in Minnesota. Our contributions have been great, and they continue.

LD: Well said, again! Thank you so much for this wonderful interview!

JG: And thank you for the opportunity

May 8, 2012

This past summer in 2011, I was truly honored to have been selected among the 100 Latinos invited to attend the first-ever Hispanic Policy Summit hosted by The White House. The highlight of the summit was a presentation made by Honorable President Barack Obama in which he made a profound impact on me with regard to winning the future by America reclaiming our leadership in academic excellence and the full participation of all members of society in fully realizing the America Dream. Hence, a new career focus on where I seek to make a difference for the betterment of society.

Over the next twenty-five years Minnesota and the United States of America face an historic shift in our demographics, perhaps more significant than the past 75 years. We will begin to experience the retirement of the aging boomer workforce. For instance, by 2018 96% of all jobs vacated by retiring Boomer workers will be filled by "Generation U" – namely the generation of working adults who are "Unretired". The fastest growing age group in Minnesota by 2030 shall be the 65 and above age group growing at a rate of 225%. Today China and India produce more baccalaureate degreed people in the sciences alone than the United States produces entirely for ALL baccalaureate degrees.

I am honored to share with you that I am one of 17 authors from throughout the world who have authored individual chapters in the book “Innovative Voices in Education, Engaging Diverse Communities (Eileen Gale Kugler, Executive Editor, Rowman & Littlefield Education Publishers, 2012). I wrote a chapter on the power of family aspirational values on student academic success. The family is the primary human social organization for society. Where the family goes, society soon follows. From my view, all children, individuals and families have an infinite capacity to learn and grow. Full participation in society requires the full participation of all people in education for Minnesota, for our Country and for our world. Therefore, thanks to Honorable President Sue K. Hammersmith of Metropolitan State University, when the opportunity arose to work for my alma mater, while having been accepted into the Doctorate of Business Administration degree program earlier in 2011, I saw this as an important next step in my life work to help advance the ability of people to care for one another.

I see the impending issue of the skills gap that is before us in an ever increasing manner, requires the best of our thinking on how we accelerate academic achievement and advance educational attainment so that we change this looming crisis to one of profound opportunity and prosperity for all people. Metropolitan State University as of this writing is among the few comprehensive urban universities that I know of in America that has zero educational disparities gaps in graduation rates among Diverse and Caucasian students. The university is a national leader in educating the working adult and takes an innovative approach in creating customized degree programs in meeting the educational needs of both the student and employers. We have to achieve this success of zero disparities in high school graduation rates and college completion rates nationally in we are going to successfully overcome the skills-gap issue. We also are going to have to value life-long learning as a necessary society value so that we perpetually continue to learn and grow. I believe we have the hope, and resolve as a people, as a democracy and as a society to achieve these aims so that future Americans will look back to us in setting this course in fully realizing a better future for many generations to come.

Jesse Bethke Gomez