

Alberto Monserrate
Narrator

Lorena Duarte
Interviewer

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Alberto Monserrate - **AM**
Lorena Duarte - **LD**

LD: I am Lorena Duarte and I'll be conducting the interview today for the Latino Oral History Project for the Minnesota Historical Society. Today is Wednesday, the 29th of December 2010. I'm here with Alberto Monserrate at the offices of LCN Media in Minneapolis.

First of all, Alberto, thank you. I know you're very, very busy. On behalf of the Historical Society, I just want to thank you for taking the time to be part of this project.

AM: Glad to help.

LD: If we could start off, could you give us your name and how to spell it, please?

AM: Sure. My name is Alberto Monserrate.

LD: Could you give us your date of birth and your occupation, please?

AM: July 17, 1966, and for occupation, I am a Latino Media owner.

LD: Jack-of-all-trades. We'll get into all of your many different hats.

AM: Sure.

LD: First of all, let's start with where you were born and a little bit about your family, your parents' names and if you have siblings.

AM: I was born in Middlebury, Vermont, kind of by accident. [Chuckles] I only lived there for two weeks. My dad, whose name is also Alberto Monserrate, was going to school at the Middlebury College in Vermont. So that's where I was born. My mom's name is Maria Alycia Suarez.

LD: Where did you grow up?

AM: I grew up mainly in Puerto Rico. After I was born, we moved to England for six years where my dad went to school. He had a scholarship to go to school at Oxford, England; so I lived there for six years. Then, we moved to Puerto Rico where both my parents are from.

LD: Do you remember that transition? Do you remember going to Puerto Rico or are your first memories in Puerto Rico?

AM: My first memories are in England, the first six years. So I do remember the transition. It was a complete change of worlds. We always spoke Spanish at home and we had traditions from Puerto Rico at home. But England was a completely different world. I went to school for a year there and we wore the uniforms that they wore there. A lot of people looked at us strange when we got to Puerto Rico, me and my sister, because when we were going to school, were speaking English with British accents.

[Laughter]

AM: Then, we adapted fairly quickly to Spanish, because we spoke Spanish at home. It was quite the transition – culturally and the weather. It was the complete opposite culture, because in Puerto Rico we're being loud and happy, using a lot of our expressions and our emotions and in England being so guarded culturally and not quite as expressive.

LD: Yes.

AM: So, it was a big change.

LD: You grew up from the age of six to when in Puerto Rico?

AM: Eighteen.

LD: So you have a sister?

AM: I have actually a full sister, Carmen Monserrate, and I have three siblings from my dad. My dad remarried, so I have Monika[?] Monserrate, [unclear] Monserrate, and Manuel Monserrate. Two of them still live in Puerto Rico, and one lives in North Carolina. Carmen, my full sister, lives in Minnesota.

LD: What was growing up in Puerto Rico like? What were you like as a kid? What did you like to do? Did you like school? Sports?

AM: I think up until middle school, I was very good in school. I was very much in sports. My best sport was swimming, and I swam a lot. It's a good place in Puerto Rico for swimming.

I also played basketball and I was in wrestling. I changed quite a bit in middle school, and I wasn't quite as dedicated to school. I definitely got a lot more into entertainment,

going out with friends, and was very much into music, I remember - all kinds of music. My teenage years, my high school years, were very difficult, because of a lot of the problems in Puerto Rico that I got exposed to. I went from straight A's to barely getting through school...

And I was getting into quite a bit of trouble from time to time. Growing up in Puerto Rico was a combination of a lot of fun. I spent a lot of time on anything that had to do with the beach. In high school, even on school days, I spent quite a bit of time on the beach. Our school was right across from the beach, actually, so it was very fun - a great environment to be in a lot of ways. I never really realized it then. It just was kind of the way it was, but, also, it was very dangerous there. So I was exposed to the consequences of drugs for a lot of my friends. I was very exposed to crime. We lived in a neighborhood where there was a lot of shootings and a lot of killings.

LD: Was this in San Juan?

AM: This was in San Juan, Puerto Rico and [sounds like At-er-ray], Puerto Rico. The apartment building we lived in was a middle class apartment building, but it was right across the street from one of the most dangerous housing projects in Puerto Rico. It was called Las [sounds like Lee-oh-lahs], which, years later, got torn down and actually got occupied by the National Guard. Crime was just so completely out of hand there. There used to be a drug war between Las [sounds like Lee-oh-lahs] and another neighborhood that was a few blocks away, so we, from the eighth floor, saw a lot of the shootings that were going on. I remember that the cops did not want to go in at night. They would go in during the day to investigate or pick up bodies and stuff like that. So I was exposed to that. I had a number of friends that got killed and a lot of acquaintances got killed.

There was really this combination... I have a lot of really good memories growing up there. I really got immersed in the culture. Puerto Rico has a lot of music and culture that I definitely was a part of and I really enjoyed. After I moved to Minnesota, I realized you really don't have to live that way. It doesn't have to be that dangerous. You don't have to be walking down the street with attention. If you see another young male that's looking at you and you look at him too long, they're going to beat you up or there's going to be a confrontation. Or if you don't look at him, you're going to get attacked because you're looking away...so all that constant attention of being on the street was something that I kind of took for granted. It did bother me enough that I was probably since I was in my early teens always thinking of going to the United States—I always heard it was calmer here—with a little bit of fear that it wasn't going to have the culture that I so much liked and the warmth. That's one of the things that contrast from England to Puerto Rico, I really liked that warmth of people. So I was a little worried that people were going to be cold in the United States—not just weather wise.

[Laughter]

LD: At eighteen, you left Puerto Rico and where did you go?

AM: I came directly to Minnesota. I had an aunt that lived here. I had an uncle that lived close to Boston and an aunt that lived here, so either it was my uncle or my aunt, and my aunt won. But, really, she wasn't here very long. She actually ended up moving later on, and so I ended up pretty much by myself at the age of eighteen.

My mom had made a comment - she said, [words spoken in Spanish]. "I love you a lot but you're not safe here. I don't want to happen to you what happened to your friends."

I really came here wanting to do something. I knew I wanted to do something with my life, and Minnesota, I felt, was a really calm, good place to do that where I didn't have a lot of distractions like the violence that was going on in Puerto Rico.

I came in with a Pell Grant and not a lot of money. I, actually, worked while I was in high school to save money to eventually come here. I knew I had my Pell Grant. I didn't realize until I got here that I had to pay out-of-state tuition, and so that became a big struggle over the years with finding extra financial aid, extra scholarships. Eventually, I became a resident, because I was independent. The only way it ended up working out in the end was going to school at night and, then, working during the day. I worked at a number of cafeteria jobs and different manual jobs at the U as a student.

LD: The U of M?

AM: The University of Minnesota, yes.

LD: Let me just back up really quick. What were your first impressions of Minnesota?

AM: My first impression was that it's very quiet. Everything was quiet. That really impressed me. It was very clean, very orderly. Everything was just so organized. So I had very much a sense of calm when I moved here. Going to the University of Minnesota, to the U, I realized just how big it was. I wasn't intimidated by the size; I was actually very excited about the size. I was very excited that just about every day I met somebody from a different country, from a different place. Those were my first impressions, I remember.

LD: You came in the late 1970s?

AM: It was 1984.

LD: Sorry. I'm not a mathematician.

[Laughter]

LD: Did you meet a lot of Puerto Rican people or Latino people? You talked about the feeling of culture and leaving that behind in Puerto Rico.

AM: That was very tough. It took me, literally, two years. The Latino population was very, very small in Minnesota at that time, and at the U it was even smaller. From time to

time, I'd see a Latino or hear a Latino, but actually meeting somebody took me a couple of years. I remember after I did meet Latinos, it was kind of funny. I was at one of the college bars that's still around, the Big Ten, and I heard a group of what looked like students, and they turned out to be students. They looked Latino and were speaking Spanish, and, on top of that I recognized the Puerto Rican accent.

LS: [Chuckles]

AM: I got very excited. I was together with a number of friends that were from Minnesota, and they were kind of looking at me strangely, because I got very excited. I went up to them, and I started talking to them, and they got very excited, too, after I started talking to them. They became very close friends over time. As a matter of fact, one of them is the *padrino*, the godfather, of my son Carlos. That was a very exciting moment for me. I had really kind of given up on any Latino experience up until then. I had kind of resigned myself. If I was going to speak the English all the time and I was going to be corrected by friends about my accent, I might as well just get rid of it, after getting completely immersed in the language. It gave me a chance to understand the teachers better. I was pretty good at English already. I remember the professors speaking, and it was too fast. I had a hard time taking notes in the beginning, so I really kind of focused on that and learning as much as I could about being Minnesotan. At that point, being in Minnesota, all the people I knew were really people who were white or from the suburbs. I started going to football games and just had a total cultural and language immersion.

One of the things that really struck me after I met Latinos and I started hanging out with them was the constant stares that we used to get for speaking in Spanish, and actually being confronted about it. It's something that never happens anymore. I can talk Spanish with somebody just about anywhere in Minnesota and they're so used to it now. But, *then*, people would look at you and, several times, we were approached and told not to speak in Spanish. "This is America," we kept hearing. I had that experience before when I was going with Latinos and we'd go out as college students do. We got a very negative reaction, especially from Anglo men when we would ask Anglo women to dance, for example. The first few times that I experienced how, it didn't seem like we were quite welcome yet. I was especially surprised because it was coming from really young people.

Then, I had a pretty negative impression, also, when I was working at the cafeteria at the U. There was an employee who was Anglo. He spoke Spanish very well, and we started talking in Spanish as often as we can, and we had an angry supervisor tell us we couldn't do that. We were not even dealing with the public. We were in the kitchen. And, then, finding out later on from a supervisor, that their supervisor had told them that they should keep an eye on me because I was Puerto Rican. "Just so you know, he's Puerto Rican, so keep an eye on him."

I didn't really experience any of that for the first couple years. It was just all of a sudden, I went through this transition that I think a lot of immigrants go through where you never

really think about race when you get here. Then, you kind of get sensitized to the issue as you go over time.

LD: Right. What did you major in at the U?

AM: I majored in sociology with an emphasis in what was a major there called Criminology Procedure. I basically majored in a professor named Joel Samaha. He was a professor at the Law School, but he taught undergraduate criminology classes. I was a psychology major originally, but I didn't like the Psychology Department at the U. It was completely different from what I expected. It ended up being a lot more emphasized on genetics and more of the biological aspects of psychology. So I took this class with Professor Samaha. That, then, turned into another class and turned into another class. I think I ended up taking four or five classes with him. Then I decided to switch my major to that. Crime had impacted my life so much. Even me thinking the psychology major was more of kind of a search on wanting to find out more what motivated crime. It really had an impact on me. So it ended up being an opportunity. My goal then—that changed later—was to eventually go to law school to be a criminal lawyer.

LD: When did you graduate?

AM: I never graduated. I have my senior project basically written but never turned in.

[Laughter]

AM: I want to make that clear so there's no misunderstanding about that. I was at the U from 1984 to 1989.

LD: What did you do then?

AM: Part of the reason I wasn't able to finish my senior project was one of the things that struck me when I started working at the U - my paychecks compared to Puerto Rico. I kind of got sucked into that, partly because of need, but partly because I just could not believe that I could make twice as much. The cost of living in Puerto Rico is probably even slightly higher than in Minnesota, but salaries are half or less. Unemployment is probably twice what it is here even in current circumstances. So that paycheck really motivated me. When I started working days and going to school at night, I switched jobs. I started doing more office type work, and then I started working at the Radisson Hotel at the University of Minnesota. I worked full time, but I worked nights from eleven to seven. I did all the daily accounting for the hotel. On top of that, I started taking some hours at a bank, at TCF [Twin City Federal] bank. I guess I was a stereotypical immigrant.

LD: With two jobs.

AM: I actually ended having three jobs. [Laughter] So I just got really busy with work and I got married, my first marriage, and then got very involved with politics. My third

job was an unpaid job, but it ended up requiring a lot of hours. I was state chair of the Minnesota Young DFL [Democratic Farmer Labor Party]. So between those three things, getting back to that senior project, I was never able to convince them that I didn't have to take a class.

LD: [Chuckles]

AM: It was always during the day and I could just write the paper and turn it in. I had the topic and everything and actually had developed quite a bit of it.

Then, I just started to work. Those three jobs became unsustainable, working full time at night, and, then, having a lot of hours during the day. Then I took a job at the Minnesota State Senate for a session. I paged in the Minnesota Finance Education Committee and in the DFL caucus. I was very involved with the DFL Party then, and that job at the DFL caucus gave me an opportunity to learn a lot of really interesting things. I was hoping it would become a permanent job, and that didn't turn out. I had not even looked for a job. I was just assuming that after the session, I was going to get hired.

For the first time in my life, I found myself unemployed. It was a very frustrating few months. There was another recession then, not quite as bad as the one we're involved in now, but there was a recession. I, basically, spent months looking for jobs. I went to temp [temporary] agencies; they couldn't find anything for me other than the food service. I started doing accounting temp jobs, and then I got hired at Dayton Hudson doing collections in Spanish, which was a very, very challenging job. That was a period of time when I was very, very frustrated. I thought about going back to school, but then I thought how do I make up for the paycheck? At that point, I'm married and I'm thinking about kids and stuff like that. So I went through a really frustrating period.

What saved me finally, and what really started my career in finance, in the investment world, was that I had applied to get into IDS [Investors Diversified Services] financial services. The company is now called Ameriprise. I had turned in two résumés. My struggle always when I was doing temp jobs and when I was trying to get into IDS was that I didn't type. This is back in the days when you typed on typewriters, and I never took a typing class. I always had my papers in college typed by somebody else. I'd usually pay somebody else to type my papers. So I kept not getting jobs because of that, and I was trying to get a customer service job at IDS financial services. For some reason, I had not put in my résumé that I spoke Spanish.

LD: Ah ha.

AM: I decided to do that, and I went to CLUES [Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio] Chicano/Latinos job fair. I've always been very kind to CLUES job fairs in promoting them because that's how I got my first career job.

The next day, I got a call from somebody and all she really wanted to know is if I really did know Spanish, and I said, "I just want to warn you, if this is a customer service job

you're talking about, I'm not going to pass the typing test if the typing test" and she said, "Forget about the typing test. We need your Spanish. We need you to study for your securities test as quickly as you possibly can because you're going to have a lot of questions about people's investments, their 401(k) plans."

That was my first stable job, after I had really gone through months of frustration. My self esteem was pretty low. I was thinking I went to college. I worked in the Senate. I've worked in accounting, and I can't get a job. So I was wondering what was wrong with me for a while. That was a great feeling when I started working there. That started a six-year career in the investment world. After struggling a bit the first year and a half, I had a supervisor who was Latino, fortunately, and who after a year was told to fire me, because customer service wasn't for me. He said, "Instead of firing you, I'm going to coach you and I'm going to get you out of this, so you can get promoted. My prediction is, eventually, you will be at a pay level and a position higher than I am."

That turned out to be true. He really helped me understand the corporate politics and just, basically, how to perform in a corporation in a way that they would appreciate. The department managed 401(k) plans for large companies. The company was growing a lot, but it was, also, struggling financially quite a bit. It gave me an opportunity to grow because of the company's growth, and also I think I tended to be good at managing and at increasing productivity. So it ended up being a really good environment for me. I had really good skills with client service. Eventually, I got to the point where I was managing accounts like Liz Claiborne and Domino Pizza. When one of those accounts was leaving the company, it was my job to turn them around and manage their portfolio and their whole administration. That was a really good opportunity for me to grow.

LD: You were there for six years, so between?

AM: My transition was between 1988, 1989, and 1990, and, then in 1990 to 1996, I was at Ameriprise.

LD: In that time, were you still connected to the Latino community or did you notice any changes?

AM: I originally wasn't. As a matter of fact, it became kind of uncomfortable being Latino to the point that I'm a little embarrassed about this now. When anybody asks me what my name is now, I say, "Alberto Monserrate." I spell it completely and I pronounce it the way it was intended originally. But for a while I became Al Monserrate. Al Monserrate was, basically, to avoid the conversation.

LD: Yes.

AM: For example, I had clients who I'd never met and I'd talked to them on the phone, and the moment they found out I was from Puerto Rico, it was just a bunch of conversation that I didn't want to get into. There would be comments they would make like, "Wow, you're pretty articulate for being a Puerto Rican," things like that.

In order for me to keep my focus on service, I wanted to avoid the anger that I got from working with some clients. There was a client of ours who had a lot of employees in Puerto Rico and was always complaining about Puerto Ricans. For a while, she didn't know Al Monserrate was a Puerto Rican and when they found out it was very awkward for them after they had said many things about Puerto Ricans. I just brushed it off and I was focused on learning as much as I could.

I was very interested in learning about money. My dad made a comment to me when I moved from Puerto Rico that always stuck with me. He said, "There's two kinds of people in the United States. There's those like me who worked their whole lives and will never make any money. Then, there's this group of people who are very successful. They lose everything and they're making it all back. Now, they're both starting from zero. One knows something that the other one doesn't." His parting advice was, "Go find out what that is." So I was always very intrigued about money, how money worked in the United States, and I wanted to learn as well from people I considered were the experts on money in the United States. That became kind of my goal.

There were barely any Latinos working there, or any people of color. Period. I just kind of brushed it aside. I had a mentor there who was the vice president, who was African American, and who really helped me. He had advice like, "When people are talking about when they were growing up and your turn comes, just be careful about what you say about when you were growing up. They want to hear stories similar to theirs. They'll get uncomfortable if you talk about when you were a teenager and there were shootings going on around you and stuff like that." What to say and what not to say was very helpful. He made a comment to me that also was something that I took very seriously. He said, "When I was hired as an African American executive, I knew that if I performed, the next time they were going to hire an African American, they were going to think about me. But if I didn't perform, the next African American they were going to hire, they were going to think about me, also. That's the same responsibility that you have on your shoulders. How they hire Latinos in the future will be based unfairly, but on how you perform."

LD: Right.

AM: "So you have a responsibility not just to yourself but to everybody else." I took that very seriously. I've always been very conscious in Minnesota to not fulfill stereotypes people might have and then reinforce positive stereotypes.

I did start to get involved with the Latino community, actually, at the request of Ameriprise—IDS - or by then it was American Express, I think. They were kind of stuck on their philanthropic giving to the Latino community. So, they started asking me and they started asking me to get more involved. I was already feeling that needed to connect. I had a group of friends, socially, that were Latinos. Most of them lived in the suburbs. They had lived in Minneapolis when they were new, and they got professional jobs and moved to the suburbs. But I started connecting with the West Side of Saint Paul. I started

connecting with Latino non-profits. I joined the Board of La Oportunidad Incorporated, which is a non-profit that's still around. As a matter of fact, I hired the current executive director who is still there.

LD: Eloisa Echávez.

AM: Eloisa, yes.

LD: I interviewed her as well.

AM: I thought she would be on the list. I was chair of the Board of La Oportunidad when we hired her.

Then I just started getting more and more involved. My involvement in the corporate world lasted a few more years, but it was kind like the beginning of the end for me in the corporate world. I was a lot more fulfilled by my community philanthropic work than I was with the investments. I like finance and I like investments.

In 1996, I decided to take a big step. I've always been very performance driven, including for myself, and I got frustrated that if I did a really good job and the person next to me did a mediocre job—if they did a bad job, they got fired—the only difference was a few thousand dollars in the bonus. Our salaries were pretty similar. So I decided I wanted to take a full plunge and go 100 percent on performance, and that's when I decided to become a financial advisor fully on commission. That was a pretty drastic change. I originally went independent. I joined a financial advisor that worked in the same company, who decided to go independent.

It also gave me the independence to get even more involved. I started getting involved with education then. I had already reached the conclusion by 1996 that the most important issue in the Latino community – and the biggest actual issue for the well being of the United States—is achieving a lot higher degree of equity of educational achievement between people of color and the broader community. I saw the results for the Latinos, for African Americans, and some others like the Hmong community, for example. The achievement was considerably less, especially in Minnesota where we have such good achievement rates for white middle class students.

So I saw two trends. One, what was going to happen in the Latino community as the world became a lot more technologically advanced and more global, and where information was becoming the commodity. I was very concerned about where we were heading. Back then, my solution was to help start charter schools.

So right around the time that I decided to go 100 percent on commission, I had saved up some money to allow me that. My son was born in 1994. Actually, right around that time is when I started getting concerned about education. I was concerned about it, but that is when I decided to actually spend extra time on it. Also, when you have a kid, you start thinking about those things a lot more. Then, my daughter Alycia was born in 1997. So

when I told my wife then that I was leaving the paycheck—she wasn't working either; she was home with the kids for a period of time, had decided to stay home with the kids—it was pretty scary. Fortunately, I had a very good credit rating then. I had always been obsessive about saving money. I always worry about money running out, so I was always wanting to save.

That was really kind of my first entrepreneurial plunge. It was very difficult to be independent. I was spending a lot of time building my practice, and, at the same time, helping start the school called Twin Cities Academy, which is a school that, later on, turned out to be very successful. I decided I can't do both. I can't support a family, build a business, and spend all the time I'm spending on community stuff.

That's when I decided to join Prudential Securities as a financial advisor, which gave me the opportunity to live off of commissions and be performance-based, but with a bigger name, with a company and with support staff. Again, I was the only person of color, the only Latino—I think there was one African American assistant that worked there—in an office with about fifty financial advisors. Again, I was faced with all the jokes, the stuff that you just listen to and you put up with if you want to be in the corporate world. If not, you're seen as a militant. You're seen as a trouble maker. So I was always very conscious of just being quiet. It gave me the opportunity, also, to continue my non-profit board work and my philanthropic work. Things worked out very well. I was there till 2000. I built up a successful practice. A substantial amount of my clients were Latinos. We served high net worth individuals. We took accounts only of \$100,000 or more. That was a huge discovery for me, the amount of Latinos who actually had \$100,000 to invest and that would recommend me and build my business for me through recommendations and through being happy with the work we were doing. That got my entrepreneurial juices going. [Chuckles]

About 1999, I got into a full research mode. As a financial advisor, the main thing I did was invest people's money. I picked stocks for them, picked mutual fund stocks and different kinds of investments. There was a lot of exciting things happening in media then. That's actually when media stocks were going off the roof, just growing. There was a lot of really interesting things happening. I got to know the finances of media companies very well and I also started seeing that the Latino community is growing and nobody knows it. I had learned a few things now that I'd had ten years of financial business management background. I started putting some lessons into practice. I said, "I want to do something entrepreneurial. I'm already not feeling fulfilled." Beating the S&P 500 by two points was just not fulfilling enough, and making wealthy people wealthier was not fulfilling. It was interesting. I liked it.

I've told this story many times. It is very true. I started staying late at night. I just really looked forward to talking to the cleaning crew in Spanish in this office that had absolutely nothing to do with the Latino community, other than my clients, which they advised me not to go after. I remember being told by somebody who was thinking it was going to be good advice, "Wealthy folks, our clients, are white fifty-five-year-olds and have big beer bellies, so don't waste your time with the clients you're going after. You're

not going to make enough money.” I made a deal. I said, “You know what? You let me do it my way. If I don’t perform, fire me. If I perform, I’d like the corner office.”

LD: [Chuckles]

AM: It was hard and it took longer, but it worked. I was just getting to the point where I needed a change.

When I started researching the Latino community, I first noticed the amount of people who had money. Then, I started noticing that the community was growing, and I started visiting Lake Street [in Minneapolis], for example, and I was just overwhelmed by the growth.

LD: Talk to me a little bit about that. From your first days when you didn’t see anything, what was the growth that you were seeing?

AM: In the research I started doing, knowing people who were in business, I discovered there was this group of pioneers. One of them was the founder [Mario Duarte] of our paper, *La Prensa [de Minnesota]*.

LD: Who I also interviewed.

[Laughter]

AM: There was this group of pioneers. Him in *La Prensa*, [unclear] Rodriguez in [unclear], Rudy [Rudolph] Trujillo with Trujillo Tax Services, and a number of people who had started businesses, and they were doing very well. There was really no competition for them. The community was just growing everywhere. So I started visiting. There was nothing out there about the Latino community. You could already go to the Internet and research the community in Chicago and New York, all the big cities, but in Minnesota, there was nothing. So I did old fashioned research. I interviewed folks in the employment agencies asking for trends in employment. Employment agencies were starting all over the place that hired, primarily, Latinos to go to work.

Then, as I went to Lake Street I’m noticing, literally every week, it was just another block becoming Latino. It was so fast. It was very exciting, also. It really was kind of like one of those frontier type things, a new frontier. People were making money doing it in the community.

But I also saw just incredible needs. In Chicago, New York, L.A. [Los Angeles], Houston, the community has many generations. The West Side of Saint Paul, obviously, has several generations and has a history, but it was still pretty small. What was happening in Minneapolis was completely new and it was completely unorganized. So I saw a lot of needs emerging, and people not knowing where they could go.

I also started noticing that, where the West Side of Saint Paul had probably still a majority of Latinos who were born in the U.S., a lot of the Latinos moving into the Minneapolis area, and also starting to move into Saint Paul, were not only immigrants but were undocumented and came primarily from rural Mexico – and a lot of them with very limited education. Fifth, sixth grade education was kind of the norm of what I saw. So that brought a lot of challenges.

I started seeing a lot of men, young men, a lot of them working in temp agencies, making actually pretty good money. Back between 2000 and 2002, we had this huge labor shortage in Minnesota. People were desperately looking for employees, so pay wasn't even that big a factor. You could actually come here undocumented and the day you got off the bus, you were being hired at ten dollars or more, which was a lot more than people were making at home. I also started noticing that a lot of these young men had families back home and I noticed a lot of problems related to the fact that they were missing their families. I started noticing a lot of excessive drinking, because of them feeling lonely, and also hearing constantly stories from folks worried about the disruption it had caused to the kids by not having a father figure back in Mexico. They wanted to do everything they could to bring their kids here, bring their families over. A lot of times, marriages fell apart, and then they started new relationships here. So I saw it as very disruptive.

I also started seeing a lot of the kids that were coming here really having some serious problems in school. Ironically, I kept hearing school was tougher in Mexico or wherever they came from than it was here, and people saying that they were doing okay there where it was tougher. When they come here, they weren't doing well. I also saw overwhelmed teachers, overwhelmed principals, overwhelmed administrators, who were frustrated—and not just in Minneapolis. I saw it in Colombia Heights also and other places in the inner ring suburbs where teachers or administrators were saying, “We were teaching kids all along and it was working. I was a good teacher.” And they were. I know some of them taught my kids. My kids didn't have the issues that a lot of immigrants have. We were more involved with our kids' education. We valued education more. We had a stable situation. Even though my wife and I got divorced, we still had a stable situation for them.

LD: And the language.

AM: My kids spoke English from when they were little.

These teachers were frustrated and saying, “Whatever I'm doing is not working, and it worked before.” So I started noticing more and more of that, a big interest in teachers teaching kids of color in the Latino community. I also saw a lot of frustration with African American students. They were really wanting to do something about it, but not knowing what to do. That kind of became an obsession of mine. I've always said I'm an idealist, but I'm a pragmatic idealist. I am a lot more interested in what works nowadays than in what should work. So I started focusing on just learning what was happening. It was always parallel. As I was building the business, I was always researching and finding ways to learn what worked. I was convinced, I was completely convinced, I have no

doubt in my mind that no matter what circumstance you came from or your family or what your background was, you could learn at the same level as a wealthy kid, a white kid from the suburbs. I have never doubted that. It was this quest to find how it is done. How do we do it effectively?

When I was doing the research, I really was exposed to the huge problems in the Latino community. A lot of people don't talk about what I discovered talking to folks at CLUES, such as, for example, the damage to mental health to a lot of people in the community who are stressed out because of family division or the fear of being undocumented. That was definitely the reality in Minneapolis. This is how many undocumented people were feeling, and people were not realizing how stressful that is to a person to be constantly worried about getting deported.

LD: Yes, of course.

AM: The more time you spend here and the more your kids are growing up here, the bigger that fear grew. Most people I talked to were undocumented. They don't worry so much about going home themselves. They're more worried about, "What are my kids going to do? My kids don't even know this country."

LD: Yes. You were talking about your research and your entrepreneurial urges kicking in. What followed that?

AM: In early 2000, I talked to a number of people, and I felt that if I wanted to do something in media, I was looking at what my strengths were and everything else, too. I wanted to do something in Latino media and pretty much in the big cities that had already been done. Big companies were already running Latino media.

I saw an opportunity then for what I call these emerging markets in the Latino community. I originally had more national ambitions for the business. I saw a lot of places like Minnesota where the immigration to the United States was changing. Latinos were moving not so much into the traditional places like New York, so we saw a huge growth in places like North Carolina, Kentucky, and Arkansas. There was all these states that traditionally had not had a lot of Latinos, or where the Latino community was growing, and those communities needed to be served.

I actually did some research, and it was really valuable, on the cycles of Latino media. Some of it went back in history in the bigger cities, for example *La Opinion* in L.A., but I also researched markets that were a little bit mature. What I noticed was this cycle in media where you started with the pioneers. It was usually an entrepreneurial person who was working on something else and saw the opportunity. It was print. It was usually a newspaper publication, usually a weekly. Then, all of sudden, the market got flooded, so in the next cycle was there were ten plus weekly Latino publications varying in quality. After that cycle, right around that time, a radio station in Spanish would start. Then, radio would also become very competitive. Eventually, what would happen is that a few companies would survive. A lot of times what I was noticing around the country was that

the pioneers all tended to be of the same age. Unfortunately, we've seen several of those pioneers in other parts of the country that have passed away recently. So they were either leaving the day-to-day work to their second generation or younger people were coming in and buying and taking over.

I also noted that it was extremely tough to make it financially. This was really a labor of love. Maybe some net worths were growing during the boom days, but operations were barely getting through. It was very tough hiring people, to pay the kind of salaries, for example, that a journalist would make in a mainstream media outlet. We didn't have the problems we have now. Traditional media was still booming. The Internet was just starting to really take hold. We hadn't had the disruption yet. I could tell from researching that the media outlets that were there were struggling financially and that the traditional independent publication always struggled making that printing bill and a lot of times struggled making payroll.

I thought there was a great opportunity to consolidate in one place the radio and print and other things. I also saw this when I was talking to potential clients, potential corporate clients. They would tell us they wanted an experience that was more similar to what they were buying in the mainstream media. A lot of it was stereotypes that they had, but they wanted to buy Latino media, do some advertising with their media, and they were afraid that the person who was answering the phone was going to speak English or they didn't understand the language, not language as in English, but the advertising language. When they were negotiating, it was just not the experience. So those were things that I remember.

We started in 2000. In March 2000, I quit my job. A lot of people when I was at Prudential Securities advisors were worried that I was going to the competition, so there was all this discussion where I was able to have a transition out of there. When I told them I was going to start a Latino publication, they just wouldn't even believe me. They couldn't think anybody would be that stupid to leave what was a comfortable job. I was even offered a partnership with a veteran that was going to be retiring. That would have meant a really obscene amount of money for me. I was just a lot more interested in doing something more fulfilling. There was no understanding. I think my mom was pretty crushed when she found out.

LD: Why?

AM: Well, she was all happy. Her son, you know, he was in the United States, working for a big corporation, the dream, you know. Then, he is doing what? She couldn't even understand what I was doing. It was very tough. That started a period of a couple of years that were incredibly tough. That's when my first marriage fell apart, which is not hard to understand when I spent 100, 120 hours a week and brought no money home. [Laughter] Blind faith is quite a stretch in that kind of situation.

We decided to start. I had a vision that eventually I wanted to have a company that Radio Rey and *La Prensa* were part of. We actually started—it never quite worked out—

brokering ads for them. It was very tough to do. From the very beginning, we had this vision when Latino Communications was founded that we were going to have Latino print and radio in one place. That was incredibly tough to implement, as expected. First of all, getting people to sell their business is a very emotional thing. It really has much less to do with money than it has to do with a *baby* that you've brought to the world. So it's very tough to let go. Everybody understood. It made sense intellectually, but emotionally, people couldn't take the plunge. So we went through a period...

We started with *Vida y Sabor* as a monthly magazine. We had done research, and I talked to Mario Duarte also, and he had said that he had heard that there was a gap in entertainment news, especially with younger people. So we decided to start that.

We also were going to start, since nobody wanted to, buying Radio Rey was not an option. We decided to start a radio station. We had an investor with deep pockets who was willing to buy a Minnesota radio station. We got all the way to signing a purchase agreement with a radio station, and we hired engineers and those engineers told us pretty much that South Minneapolis was not going to be reached because of the downtown.

[Chuckles]

AM: After the engineers did the research—due diligence is one of those lessons I learned in business that's very useful—we decided not to do that.

Then, our investor ran out of money. The Internet bubble burst. This was a person who heavily invested in the Internet. All of a sudden, I faced in the summer of 2000 the fact that I had no investor, and that my co-founder [Miguel Ramos] decided to leave the business. I had two choices. Either I had to figure a way to raise money and keep the business going or go back to do what I was doing before. I never took that second option. One of the things I learned as I was building my financial practice was that when you're doing something really tough that you believe in, never think of a backup plan, because if you think of that backup plan enough, you're going to take it. I really focused. I didn't even allow myself to think about it.

From 2000 to 2002, *Vida y Sabor* as a monthly magazine sounded like a great idea. We started inserting 10,000 copies in *City Pages*, I remember. [Chuckles] It ended up being extremely expensive. It was just a money hole. Starting in the summer of 2000—our business started in March—I drew no salary for a year and a half. I put all my savings into the business. I charged about \$80,000 onto my credit cards, destroyed my credit rating, which was perfect before, got separated during that time, was sleeping for a while—I didn't tell anybody—on the couch of one of my friends in a not very safe neighborhood. He was a person who allowed me to stay without having to pay rent for quite a few months. Everything I made I sent to my kids. I had come from a background where my dad didn't pay child support and I knew how tough it was on my mom. I always wanted to make that a priority. That really was for a couple of years a really tough period of just really blind faith and a lot of persistence.

I hired staff. I laid off staff. By then we had *Vida y Sabor* and we had the yellow pages, *El Directorio*. I had grown to about eight or nine staff. We started with three of us - two of us volunteering full time [Chuckles] and then a part time assistant. Then, we grew to about seven or eight, and, at one point, in early 2002, I had to lay off everybody. The person that had started part time, I had to tell her that if she was going to stay, she was going to have to work for free for several months. In exchange, I'd give her a percentage of the business, but if she wanted to leave, that's fine. I'd stay by myself. That was kind of our low point.

Then the persistence started paying off. I still had not been able to convince anybody to join and we had *Vida y Sabor* and the yellow pages directory.

That's when I started a relationship with Milestone Growth Fund and Esperanza Guerrero-Anderson who was the president of Milestone and was a big believer in what we were doing. We did start a process that actually ended up taking almost two years. I was asking everybody I knew for money. When I ran out of money, I wanted to keep the business going, so I was asking everybody for money. So I started the process of asking Milestone, and they kept giving me some advice. They assigned me one of their consultants who is now my mentor, a former executive of First Bank and Honeywell. They started working on a business plan. They made me go through this process that made the business stronger as we went. We actually didn't own, originally, all of *Vida y Sabor* and the directory. They said, "You have to own 100 percent of that and, then, we'll fund you. We won't fund getting 100 percent of that." So I did that, raised money from friends and family by then. Then, I go back to Milestone and they said, "No. That's not enough. You need to get a newspaper, but we will fund that if you find one."

So that started about a year process of conversations with Mario Duarte from *La Prensa*, and Juan Carlos Alanis from *Nuestra Gente*, as it was called. *La Prensa* was a bilingual paper and *Nuestra Gente* was the only all-Spanish paper then. I finally convinced Juan Carlos Alanis to sell 49 percent of the newspaper, and I went all excited over to Esperanza Guerrero at Milestone. She said, "I'm sorry, but it has to be 100 percent or we're not going to fund you."

LD: [Chuckles]

AM: And they had a deadline. "If you don't get 100 percent by this date, we will fund it, but you've got to have an agreement on paper. If you don't get it, we're done." Well, they knew we were in financial trouble. I already had talked to my attorney and my attorney said, "If they don't fund you, I've got the bankruptcy papers ready." It was kind of movie-like almost. I went for a long drive with Juan Carlos Alanis. I was determined that he was going to sign those papers by the time we got to the parking lot.

[Laughter]

AM: We drove for about two hours, and we got in the parking lot and he still hadn't signed. Finally, I said, "Juan Carlos, there are times in life where you just got to do what you know is right, but you don't want to do it." So he signed the papers.

I went to Milestone, and they funded. In 2002, that was really the beginning of us emerging from kind of the ashes almost and being able to implement our vision.

We still had no radio, and that was a big frustration, because I knew in the cycle of advertising that eventually radio took advertising away from print, and the crazy competition between papers made it very tough. Eventually one or two emerged from that, but radio ended up taking over, and if you had TV on top of that it cannibalized things ever more. I already knew that the cycle was getting to the point where I wanted to do something with radio, but it wasn't happening. There was just no way. This is not a market with a lot of licenses compared to the demand for them, and they're extremely expensive.

But we were able to do a number of things. One is we were able to integrate *Nuestra Gente* into LCN and start a [unclear]. Actually, they had more revenue than we had, at that point. It was tough merging the cultures. They had a different way of doing things than we did. But, all of a sudden, we had money to do things.

The other thing is we decided to take *Vida y Sabor* from a monthly magazine that was failing miserably financially to a bi-weekly that was not glossy. I wanted to have more of an alternative weekly style than a magazine style. People's expectations of a magazine are different - we're talking about *People Magazine* type content. Those are companies that have millions of dollars.

LD: Yes.

AM: So fulfilling the expectations of an alternative weekly were easier than a magazine. My staff was completely opposed. I actually ended up being the only person who was in favor of that. That was the favorite thing everybody had was this monthly magazine they came up with. But we prevailed with it. It went bi-weekly. We didn't spend as much money as printing that glossy and, then, it became profitable right away. So there was this whole transition of things. We were able to do a lot of things with *Gente* that we weren't able to do before.

It just started this growth. We actually turned a profit for the first time in the beginning of 2003. Then, things became more comfortable. I was able to collect a salary, and all of a sudden it was a more positive environment. We were able to hire people I would have wanted to hire before. I could hire them full time. Then, pretty much between 2002 and 2005 what we did was grow, grow the business. I kept doing a lot of philanthropic type stuff on the side, sitting on boards of directors of non-profits, but I really was focusing most of my energy in just building the business.

I had this vision in my head of what LCN looked like. It was real interesting to be able to see that vision that I had – to just walk through and see it, you know. That's one of the things I've always done in my life is just try to visualize what things look like and where I want to go. So that was a very nice period, to be able to fulfill and build the vision.

LD: As LCN was growing, the community was growing. Tell me a little bit about that. Certainly, as you're serving on boards, etcetera, you were able to witness not only the growth but what that meant as far as needs and, also, what the community was contributing. Talk to me a little about that time, about what that was like.

AM: The community, I felt, was always contributing an awful lot. It was adding flavor to the culture. As I said before, I had a lot of fear when I moved here about losing that whole flavor and that warmth that we have in the culture. So it was contributing in that way. But I also saw an insatiable appetite that businesses had for employees. They kept complaining that, "If we don't hire a Latino immigrant, the person I'm hiring is somebody I have to constantly bail out of jail or I don't know if they're going to show up." There were so many employment options when we had the economic boom. So I thought they were contributing in that way.

I also saw Latinos starting businesses left and right and creating a lot of jobs and, all of sudden, contributing taxes. Lake Street had kind of become a project of mine. I was very involved with Mercado Central from the beginning. I was actually hired as a consultant for a while. I always, you know, had many jobs.

LD: [Chuckles]

AM: I taught a class to Latino entrepreneurs. A lot of those were the first tenants at the Mercado Central, the first members of the cooperative, like Manny's Tortas, for example. Pancho Villas was another restaurant. For several of those businesses, I taught them how to write a business plan, a class in Spanish. Then, at the end, they qualified to apply for loans, micro loans. So I saw it all firsthand, very much first hand, since I was actually a tenant at Mercado Central, too. That's actually where LCN started with just two desks. I saw how this Lake Street community changed.

Everybody, every non-profit, and every government agency that had to do with Lake Street had tried for years to revive this area. This is where buildings were boarded up. It was extremely dangerous to come down here. I remember people that I knew before the revival of Lake Street said when I was going to go to Lake Street, even during the day, "That's nuts. Why would anybody go to Lake Street?" Then, fast forward a few years, and you couldn't rent commercial property on Lake Street anymore. When you talk to some of the older folks, older white folks, and you'd ask them what they thought about immigrants moving into the area, they say, "My property value had been going down and down and down for years, and, all of sudden, my property value is a lot higher than it used to be. There's new energy." I saw that contribution. I've studied economic development during the years, and I was very much a believer that you turn around

neighborhoods that are empty and have a lot of poverty through business, starting businesses, people who rent spaces that nobody else wants because they're very cheap.

LD: Yes.

AM: Then, all of a sudden, positive things happen. It's not perfect, obviously. There's still crime, but the negative elements move, because they don't like to be around positive stuff. That was very exciting to be a part of that. When I first came here this building was just full of asbestos. It looked like a war had happened here, this huge gray building. I saw the partnerships, business, non-profit, government partnerships involved in reviving this. All those folks deserve credit, but the entrepreneurs who risked everything, who spent the money on getting this going, were not given, I thought, enough credit. As a matter of fact, in the tough times I don't feel they were supported the way they should have been. I saw the contribution there in making neighborhoods better.

Then, the whole migration from the Latino community to the suburbs and how I felt that enriched also the suburbs. You have, all of sudden, north and other suburbs where the Latino community is growing. We kind of follow it with our distribution. [Chuckles] We saw the Latino community growing in one more place, so we'd send our distribution van over there and kind of followed around the growth all over the place.

One of the things as a former financial advisor and as a student of economic history, I was getting worried that we were getting into a bubble. One of the things I noticed was the advertising from real estate agents and mortgage companies was insane. They all wanted color ads in the paper. We had this weekly debate on do we add an extra page in color because there's so much of a demand and what was the cut off in us deciding how many more? We couldn't just add one more page to be printed; we had to add more than one. They were advertising on the radio, everywhere, and everybody was buying homes. It was such a happy experience. People were fulfilling the American dream of buying a home, but I started getting a little worried about the ARMs [adjustable-rate mortgages].

Back then, I didn't know what was happening behind the scenes. I just thought mortgage companies became friendlier. [Chuckles] The government is maybe helping also with programs, but as a student of economic history, I know what can happen. I had lived through the Internet bubble as a financial advisor. I had been told many times that was going to happen by old timers. I kind of saw the same thing happening in housing. I was very concerned about what the consequences of that would be.

LD: Right.

AM: I remember telling our staff, "Don't rely too much on this." It got to the point where instead of them having to go out and sell advertising; they were actually sitting taking orders from all these real estate folks. I remember I started warning folks. I told them about my experience as a financial advisor during the Internet bubble and I said, "This is what it's feeling like, so you should go out there and start diversifying your clients, because this is not going to last." Nobody believed me then, just like nobody did

on the Internet bubble. It was like, “Come on, you’ve been saying this for two years and it keeps going up.”

The year 2005 was a year that was key for a number of reasons for us. One is that I saw it as the beginning of the bursting of that economic bubble, and also it turned out for LCN that we went to the next step. That was going after the big prize that we always wanted, which was bringing *La Prensa* into the family, starting radio at the same time, and also facing the realities back then of the Internet and how that was going to change media. I realized we were going to need more money to do that, which was uncomfortable for me. The debt that we had gotten into for the first period of survival, we were paying that down, and I was feeling good about that. But I knew that in order to grow, we were going to have to get more money. I was also, I guess, kind of quietly a little nervous about what was coming.

And there was something else that was happening politically. I think Republicans were starting to have a little bit of a hard time electorally, and I started hearing some noises about anti-immigrant sentiment. I’d been told by an old wise friend of mine many years ago that Latinos were going to eventually become a huge part of the United States and were going to be accepted as part of the fabric, but, before that happened, we were going to go up in tough times, and anti-immigrant sentiment was going to create some pretty ugly things.

So that was a key period, exciting because we were able to do some things here, but, also, I was nervous about...

LD: What was coming.

AM: What was coming. The year 2006 actually ended up being the year where a lot of things happened.

LD: Talk to me about that time around 2005 – 2006 when *La Prensa* came. I know because I came into the family. [Laughter] And you started radio. Talk to me then about from then to now, 2006 to 2010. What has that generally been like?

AM: Very difficult. Exciting at the beginning. Integrating *La Prensa* into LCN was very exciting. It built a lot of credibility for our company. *Nuestra Gente* and [unclear] were very well known in the Latino community, especially in immigrant communities, but not very well known outside. So, all of a sudden, we had a name that people outside were recognizing and knew about it and it had a very good name. When we integrated, we dealt with the reality that the cycle was happening exactly the way I had predicted. Radio and the competition between print newspapers had gotten to the point where consolidation needed to happen. Financially, it was impossible to keep it going the way it was. It was a great opportunity.

I had always admired Mario and was asking him advice all the time. We were competitors for a while, and it was strange because we had very tough competition with

other people, and I felt *La Prensa* for a long time was our main competitor, but it was very respectful. It was very different than the other competition we often saw in the Latino community. By the time we talked about merging *La Prensa* into LCN, there was a lot of mutual respect. When you talk about mergers, these are very emotional situations, very tough situations. It's just a lot easier when you have that mutual respect. I've seen other mergers, you know, that are not done that way.

Then, starting the radio was tough. We started from the beginning. It was extremely expensive. We had an initial investor that committed a certain amount of money. They wanted to be majority shareholders. I had my financial projections for radio going back to 2000. I went back to the computer and hard drive and found those projections, and I knew it was going to be expensive to start radio from scratch. We tried one more time to convince Radio Rey, and they wouldn't come to our family. Milestone Growth Fund wanted to fund buying Radio Rey but not starting something from scratch. Again, I had to get creative about convincing people to invest. It actually ended up being a little bit more expensive than we predicted. I knew we were going to lose a ton of money for a while. Going from the relative comfort of having become profitable to merging a newspaper, there's always all kinds of issues you have to deal with and decisions that have to be made, while at the same time spending the amount of money we were on radio, it was kind of like startup again.

LD: Yes.

AM: It wasn't the best feeling going through that.

LD: It's called La Invasora?

AM: La Invasora, 1400 and 1470 signals, 1470 in the suburbs and 1400 throughout the Twin Cities.

On top of that, we were losing money and losing money. Whatever profits we were making in print were completely going into this, and all savings were being absorbed. Fortunately, we didn't get into the credit card game.

Then, the immigration thing starts getting worse and we start seeing some signs, originally anecdotally. The national economy, surprisingly, was not picking this up, but I was starting to hear people were losing their homes because their adjustable-rate mortgages growing to levels they couldn't afford. Then, the anti-immigrant sentiment starts. It was coming from everywhere. It was coming from the Republicans in Congress wanting to pass laws that made it a crime to be in the country without documents, to [Governor] Tim Pawlenty wanting to pass anti-immigrant laws and having a press conference with Latino gang members in the background and pictures.

That was when La Invasora was born. One of the things I always felt was that I'm going to be hardnosed in business while I build this, but once this is built, we're going to do stuff for the community. That's what it's really for. I'll never make the money that I

made as a financial advisor. If I wanted to make money, I could have just stayed there. This was really about creating a voice for the community and doing some things in the community and doing it in a financially feasible way.

What started in 2006 was a surprise in just how hard, how tough it was, what it did to the psyche, what it did to Latinos as they were hearing all this anti-immigrant sentiment, the fears among undocumented people. They came with a different set of rules. The rules, basically, were that nobody was enforcing immigration, that employers were hiring left and right, this economic boom was going to go on forever, that Minnesota was a place where you could move, and, in one or two years, you could buy a home, and your kids could go to what some people thought were good schools. It turned out it wasn't working out for them. All of a sudden, the rules changed and there's this anti-immigrant sentiment. People are starting to lose their homes. Then, we started seeing it on Lake Street, also.

It, also, was one of the most exciting moments in time—I can't remember the exact month—in 2006 where, without knowing, we contributed to the largest march in Minnesota history.

LD: Right.

AM: A white old timer that was at that march told me that the only thing he thought was comparable in front of the Capitol was when Hubert Humphrey died.

LD: That was about 40,000 people, right?

AM: It was about 40,000 people, and we expected, at best, 5,000. La Invasora got very involved, just like radio stations got involved all over the country. It was not only La Invasora; all Spanish radio stations in Minnesota were constantly convincing people to march. This was organized in about a week. I remember La Invasora was just [unclear sounds like la mach, la mach, la mach]. It was night and day promoting it. One of the things we asked as a condition of really promoting this was unity. Even then, the Latino community has always had its divisions, so there were these divisions about strategy and what the march should be like, and, again, it happened very quickly.

I think we printed about 2,000-3,000 t-shirts that had “La Invasora” and said, “We're not criminals. We're workers.” We're in front of the Saint Paul Cathedral waiting for people to get here, and people were not getting there. I'm like, oh, wow, nobody showed up.

LD: [Chuckles]

AM: We weren't even running out of t-shirts. We were, like, wow, we've got all these t-shirts. What are we going to do? It was late. I always joke about *Hora Latina*, Latin time. And then these buses and people just started emerging out of nowhere and, all of a sudden, we had 40,000 people. We ran out of t-shirts pretty quickly. What was surprising to me was the percentage of Latinos. We took tons of pictures for *La Prensa*. That was

some of the best coverage we've had, this sea of people. As a matter of fact, if everybody who tells me they were in that march was actually there, we probably had about two million.

LD: Yes. [Laughter]

AM: I was struck by what looked to me, visually, and I see it in the pictures, more than 90 percent were Latino. The thought of anybody gathering 40,000 Latinos...even Los Tigres del Norte, one of the most famous bands in the community, will at best get 10,000 Latinos in one place. What struck me, also, were the working people there. There were the usual students and the intellectuals and the activists who were also there, but the amount of people who were taking off of work from a restaurant or a factory to show up for that was incredible.

That was another trend that was interesting. I remember meetings organizing around Pawlenty and about the anti-immigration where you would expect twenty people to show up and, all of a sudden, two hundred people would show up for the meeting.

It was very exciting and La Invasora was part of that. We were recognized. That's kind of how La Invasora was born, at that march. It was kind of like the birth of La Invasora. Radio Rey was very established at that point. Everybody told us there was absolutely no way to take their number one position, and it was a very tough battle that we went through, very competitive, very aggressive. People started listening to us, I felt, more because they started feeling we were giving them a voice, that it was representing the interests of the community.

Fast forward to 2007. The economy is really starting to hit then. We start seeing the trends where advertisers are migrating towards online and print is less attractive to them. I've always been very strict about managing financially in a responsible way, making sure that we manage well. I learned a lesson in business: cash is king. You always have to manage cash, you know. Don't fool yourself with accounting gimmicks. You have to have more money coming from sales at the end of the month than you had before. But it became harder and harder to do. The radio station was really what saved us, because it grew so much and it had so much acceptance and advertising started to flow. We lost money for quite a while, but it really ended up being the hope we had, business-wise.

That met with the reality: we knew the economy was collapsing in the Latino community. Economists surprisingly didn't know until really the fourth quarter of 2008 when [President Barack] Obama was elected. That's where everything kind of fell apart. But we saw the signs. The signs, basically, were really around real estate, people losing homes. Then there was the anti-immigrant sentiment - people being a lot more nervous about hiring people who were undocumented. Employers were telling me, "I'm really nervous when I hire a Latino. I'll tell you this. I just don't know in the end. The government wants to turn us into immigration agents. I get these papers. They look right, but I'm worried if they're not. I'm nervous about hiring Latinos." I knew that was affecting also Latinos who were U.S. citizens and Latinos who had their documents in

order. I remember that's when we started seeing with the newspapers and the publications that the sales were going down.

We had to get creative. That's also a time when events started becoming a lot more a part of our business. That was another thing that saved us - promoting our events through the radio, especially. We also had the newspapers. That's when we started Lake Street Festival. We got more involved with Minneapolis Cinco de Mayo events, and we had music events, smaller music events in Latino venues. That ended up really complementing our business. Basically, we found a way to adapt to the situation.

Then, we started a process that I think we're, finally, implementing now business-wise, which is migrating to the digital world and reaching Latinos in a different way than we were before.

The years 2007 and 2008 were very tough. Staff-wise, we stopped growing. We also had a number of people who worked with us and either their visas expired or their spouse's did. So we started an experiment that worked very well, with some of our employees going to El Salvador. We're now three, four years into that, and we have at least four people and they've hired support staff down there, so we probably have seventy people working for us from El Salvador. It was frustrating that we I had always felt we were going to be growing forever and were going to be hiring forever. As an entrepreneur, one of the things that drives you the most is hiring. Creating jobs is just a great satisfaction.

Eliminating jobs is about as opposite to your nature as you get. Having to explain to folks who saw the radio station growing but the print going down further and further, that it requires a lot less people to run a radio station than it requires running a newspaper. So that was a painful transition. Also, we needed to develop more expertise. We needed people who knew more about managing business, a larger business because we had grown quite a bit. It was painful, and 2008 was even worse. Then we had clients going out of business. The real estate thing completely disappeared, completely. We actually got to the point where we had absolutely no realtors—that's changing now—no realtors, no mortgage bankers as clients, absolutely none. Car dealers were a huge part of our business. That disappeared completely in 2008.

LD: Wow.

AM: Then, you have to go out there and get new types of clients. Psychologically, inside the company, it was very tough for people to adapt to that transition and keep hearing the crazy things I talk about, like how do we adapt and how do we need to move forward. A lot of people were probably pretty close to losing faith, but fortunately were sticking with it. The Lake Street miracle started becoming the Lake Street nightmare for a while. It survived. The businesses that survived are very strong now. But, all of a sudden, we see properties on Lake Street rapidly starting to lose value again, and all the tenants really struggling financially, and then the property taxes were doubling and tripling because of the previous increases.

LD: Right.

AM: So you have, all of a sudden, either tenants or some of the Latino building owners barely able to keep their businesses. You see people in early 2009, Latinos, who had built businesses and who literally got millions of dollars in loans with their credit completely drying up. That's when we had consequences in the Latino community.

LD: Talk to me about those.

AM: The consequences were, you know: people are moving back to apartments, losing their homes. They're frustrated. They're not finding jobs. Then, there's all this talk about leaving, going back to Mexico or going back to Latin America. I never was able to verify, there seemed to be a lot more talk about it than reality. We'll see the census figures - I haven't seen the census figures yet. We predicted very well in 2000. The census was predicting there was going to be about 100,000 Latinos in Minnesota. We predicted 150,000. I was actually quoted in the paper on it, and it ended up being 143,000, I think. It's a lot harder to predict this time, but I have a feeling that it definitely did not grow the way it grew between 1990 and 2000. Some people even suspect that the community might have shrunk.

The problem is that at the same time some people are leaving, the war breaks out in Mexico. Not only has the economy been very difficult there, but the violence has really scared people. So now you're seeing a situation where Mexico is, potentially, turning from an economic migration to a political refugee migration. One of the things that was interesting is in the last couple of years—before that the migration tended to be rural—we saw more urban Latinos who either came from Mexico City, the capital, or came from big cities in the United States, came from Chicago, Texas, L.A. That was another change that we saw. It was devastating to see the broken dreams and the frustration.

More and more Latino people are voting more as more people become citizens. I think the applications for citizenship before the 2008 elections doubled. So you see a lot of involvement, but you also see a lot of disappointments. The Immigration Reform comes. People are all excited. It seemed like it was going to pass, but we were never able to hit that magic 60 percent of the Senate, sixty votes. So people get their hopes high and, then, they got discouraged. Politically, I noticed people getting a lot more involved, supporting Obama, supporting Democrats in 2010 and repeatedly being disappointed, the highlight of that being the Dream Act recently not passing. People are becoming very anti-Obama. They're becoming very anti-Democratic Party. They were very anti-Republican already, which, basically, means they have nowhere to go.

LD: Yes.

AM: I saw, first, an awful lot of activity. I started my radio show also in 2008, *Cara a Cara*, which is really the first primetime political talk show that we had in Spanish radio.

LD: That means face to face.

AM: It means face to face. It gave me an opportunity to connect directly with listeners and callers about what they're thinking on a number of issues. I noticed very much that, okay, we're skeptical. We're a little cynical about politics. We come from countries where we don't have a lot of trust in our political leaders. So we're giving trust, but getting constantly crushed. That combination...

I do think some people left, but I think it was more talk than reality. I think a lot of people were talking about leaving and never did. I have seen recently, also, people who did leave coming back. I think we're in a period now where people are very politically discouraged, and they're in a tough situation, but the people that have stuck with it are kind of starting to live again.

We saw a big cut in spending in the Latino community. We noticed it in the businesses and we noticed it in our business, not necessarily because people don't have money. There's always been poverty in the community, but it was highlighted by people wanting to save money because they didn't know if they were going to stay or not.

LD: Right.

AM: Let's wait to see what happens with immigration reform. So, all of a sudden, the spending stops, even from those who could, those who were still employed. Then, we see unemployment dramatically growing in the community, more people available to work those jobs that nobody wanted, and, then, business getting tougher.

One of the things that has happened under Obama, too, is that audits of companies have dramatically increased - immigration audits - which is having a quiet, devastating effect on Latino employment. What I see now, after a very tough period, is that all of a sudden people are kind of resigned and they're like, okay, we've got to live. I'm starting to see some movement. I think the country, in general, is moving to a more positive sentiment economically. I think that we're at a point now where people are kind of resigned that nothing is going to happen with immigration. They don't have a lot of choices of where to go.

LD: Right.

AM: As a matter of fact, I feel that some of the tough immigration laws in other states, like in Arizona, also contributed to a new wave of people coming to Minnesota.

So that's really where we're at. I think business-wise we survived. We actually were up in 2009 and kind of flat in 2010. We somehow found a way to keep going.

LD: In the midst of all of this—I really want to make sure we get to this before we wrap up—turmoil, you decide to run for the Minneapolis School Board.

AM: Yes.

LD: Tell me about that. Tell me your motivation and what that process was like.

AM: Well, something happened that changed my workaholic habits or, let's say, shifted my workaholic energies,. My daughter got sick a few years ago. It was a tough situation. She had a tough disease called scleroderma. She went through chemotherapy. It was a very tough thing. Her mom was [pause] I have a hard time talking about this. It was very tough on her mom, so I knew that I had to step up and spend less time at work.

I started a process of looking for a general manger that would run the day-today operations. It didn't work out very well. I hired two different people, and it didn't work out very well. Marian Sanchez, my wife, had been in the business for a long time. It was actually my mentor who said, "I think you've got the person right there." So she [Marian] was able to take the day-to-day operations while I was going through that tough period.

Then, when my daughter got better—she recovered very well—I started looking at how I wanted to spend my time. I got to the point where I wanted to leave something behind. Contributing something substantial was important to me. I felt that the day-to-day operation was in good hands and I could focus, and what I really wanted to focus on was strategy and leadership and leadership development within the business, and, then, the whole strategy of how do we adapt to the digital world?

But I had other interests. Education had been a huge passion of mine for a long time. I kind of went back, but I decided not to go back to the sixty or seventy hours I worked before. I thought I could still work, maybe, forty hours a week and do some other things with the rest of my time. I usually don't know what to do with my free time, and Marian starts getting frustrated when I have too much time on my hands, because it's not fun to be around me. So I had to get busy somehow.

I got involved with a number of charter schools. I was on the founding board of the KIPP Stand [Knowledge Is Power Program], which is a charter school in the Basilica [of Saint Mary] in Minneapolis, and then also with Hiawatha Leadership Academy [Minneapolis]. I joined their board and became board chair right away. I hired a principal for that school. It just gave me an incredible amount of satisfaction. This is a school that started from scratch. The *Star Tribune* recently published, less than a year ago, ten schools in reading and math that beat the odds with high poverty rates, which is 85 percent free or reduced lunch or more. Hiawatha Leadership Academy was listed as one of the top in reading and math. It's an elementary school. Seventy percent of the kids are Latino, about 25 percent African American, and 95 percent have free or reduced lunch. These are the kids that a lot of people have given up on.

LD: Yes.

AM: The proficiency rates for these kids in third grade with the state tests were at, I believe it was, 69 or 71 percent, which is about twice as high as their peers in traditional

schools in Minneapolis. So I had a lot of faith, but actually seeing it and having been involved as the board chair was very satisfying. I was getting to the point where I was volunteering about twenty hours a week. I was on a number of boards, so it really became like I had two full time jobs. One was LCN and the other one was my volunteer work. I got a chance to travel all over the country visiting schools where the kids were actually performing with proficiency rates of 90 percent plus and where the learning gap was disappearing. But I grew impatient when I started doing more in-depth research. First of all, a very low percentage of charter schools perform well in urban high poverty areas. At the pace that we're going, we maybe put a dent on the learning gap in the year 5012....which was a little bit too long for me.

I started realizing that if we really wanted to have an impact, we needed to do it in a district setting, the traditional public school setting, and then we needed to do things differently, because they didn't have the political flexibility to hire the principal they wanted and hire the staff they wanted. Hiawatha went through extensive national searches to find a principal and the teachers. Once they were there, very little firing needed to happen, just because of the quality. These were people who had experience. You have great teachers that do a great job teaching white middle class kids that don't have the same success with low income students of color, not because they don't want to teach or because they don't believe in it. It's because they just haven't learned how to do it.

LD: Yes.

AM: It's a different set of skills. It's a different way of teaching.

I had been recruited to run for the Minneapolis School Board for about four years. The reason for me to run was that we need Latino representation. There had never been a Latino on the Minneapolis School Board. There had only been one Latino on the Saint Paul School Board, Gilbert de la O, who was one of the pioneers who opened doors for the rest of us. To me, it had to do more with having a real impact.

In January 2010, I actually also promised myself I was never going to run for office. It just didn't seem to go with me. My personality is that I like to say what I think and I'm very opinionated, so I didn't really think that that was going to be the way for me to go. But a number of school board members called me in January and told me they weren't going to run for reelection.

There's something happening in the United States and in Minnesota right now that a lot of people are focusing on: the learning gap. You have the business community. You have the teachers unions all over the country coming up with innovative ways of teaching. You have the Federal Government, the state government, everybody focusing. So I thought this was a good time for me to try to have a bigger impact.

Also, I felt very passionate about ESL, English as a Second Language for immigrant students, not being represented or not being prioritized enough. They had become over 20

percent of the enrollment in the district. It turned out that Hussein Samatar, who is a Somali-born African American, was also running with that huge interest in immigrant students in the immigrant communities. So I saw a very good opportunity for him and me to join in that effort to prioritize. I went through the process. It was a fairly quick decision. On January 6 started the conversations and by the precinct caucuses which are at the beginning of February, I was out campaigning and trying to get support to get the DFL endorsement. I really decided to run because I felt I would have a bigger impact. I had a couple of people that meant a lot to me who said, “This is a time for service. It’s not next year; it’s now. So you have to do it now.”

It was a huge sacrifice. At Hiawatha Leadership Academy I had to resign as board chair, and, eventually, resign from the board because of potential conflicts of interest. I also had to resign from the Board of Citizen’s League, which is something I also enjoyed quite a bit, because of the time. Then I basically started a process of shifting what had grown to maybe thirty or forty hours a week of volunteer time into focusing on being on the school board, and also making even more adjustments and doing some more delegating at LCN so I’d have the time. I’m realizing this job is going to take - regardless of what it should be - probably twenty-five or thirty hours a week.

LD: The school board?

AM: The school board, for about \$1,000 a month. Making sure that there was enough stability in the business where I could still make a living in the business and have people feel I’m contributing enough to be able to do that. It also gives me quite a bit of flexibility—being that I’m CEO of the company and one of the owners—with my time. I’ve gotta do what I’ve gotta do. I’m measured by my business partners on my performance, but it gives me time to adjust my time to the needs. So I decided to do it. A lot of people don’t realize you go through ten, eleven months of campaigning, twenty, twenty-five hours a week on average, no pay. Not only do you not get paid for that, you need to raise money.

LD: [Chuckles]

AM: The money that you raise for school board races now, every two years, it breaks a record. I think this year it ended up being right close to twice what people had spent in the past.

Then, dealing with a lot of the political realities, there’s a *lot* of people who depend on that \$650 million budget. A lot of people have very strong opinions about their schools. I did not realize the amount of anger that just about every stakeholder, internal and external, had towards the district and how pervasive it was. People didn’t feel stakeholders were engaged enough in decisions that were being made, very tough decisions, where schools were being closed. People were being let go because of very difficult financial decisions that the State has made - the Pawlenty Administration.

There will be two things I remember about Pawlenty: the anti-immigrant sentiment and the defunding of public education, to the extreme of borrowing from kids to balance the budget. So that's created some very tough decisions.

A lot of people didn't feel they were engaged. School Board members are voted for. They represent taxpayers and people weren't feeling that they were being represented, that they were being listened to. That was an eye-opening thing for me. Equity is my big priority, and we are working towards that, but I know we have to repair a lot of relationships first. We have to repair relationships with our parents, community people, and with our staff. There is a lot of animosity between administration and staff.

That's an area that I've tried to address. I ran with pretty much equal support from unions and from education reformers, people who usually you can't even get in a room together. Both financially and in volunteering, they supported me about equally. A lot of people saw me as a person who could, maybe, bridge the gap. We're stuck on education. Last year, the State of Minnesota did not pass an education bill, because they were stuck, reformers fighting with the unions. I'm hoping to be able to be the kind of person that comes in and tried to bridge that. It's already been tricky and difficult. [Chuckles] And I haven't even been sworn in yet.

LD: [Chuckles]

AM: To keep that balance - to me, it's very important. I feel we've had an approach before to kind of force people into changing a culture. I think my responsibility as a school board member is to lead and inspire our employees in order to implement the vision that we have for them. So I'm hoping that's where we're moving towards. I think in the end that will have a lot more of an impact on kids.

I'm concerned. I talked to a group of Latino teenagers and the answer I get when I ask what they want to do when they grow up is "Mechanic," which is a great profession and a noble job. But, I know we have a lot more variety in what people could do than being auto mechanics. I go to some of these high-performing schools I visit, and I talk to the same demographic group, and I hear, "Engineer," and "Doctor," and "Lawyer," so I think we have a lot of work to do.

I think we need to move to a culture of believing that every kid can. I don't believe that most people feel people of color are inferior. I feel that they just truly believe that the situation at home or the disadvantage they have with language is too much for teachers to overcome—and it pretty much is in some ways. But we've learned there are things so that we can get around that. Kids are sponges. I've seen kindergartners in Newark in a neighborhood that's a lot tougher than North Minneapolis, where 100 percent of the kids were African American and low income, and these kindergartners were reading at the second grade level. Every chance they had to read, their hands were up and they were excited and smiling. They have these brains that just are total sponges for learning and information. Somehow, we just decided that's too tough to do. I guess that's where I believe this is going and that's why I'm doing this.

LD: As we kind of wrap up, talk to me just a little bit about your hopes for the school board, for the business, and for you personally. What do you hope to be doing in the next few years and where do you see yourself going?

AM: I'm committed to a four-year term, and I won't decide until four years from now whether I'll run for reelection or not. I've come in pretty much wanting to do as much as I can in four years. If I feel the job isn't completed, I'd run for reelection. If I feel the job has been completed—I have absolutely no political ambitions—I would be more than glad to move on to my next stage. My vision is that we form an administration/teacher/union partnership that will improve learning dramatically with at-risk kids and that will be a model for the rest of the country. I think that a lot of efforts to improve equity around the country are stuck, and a lot of times get stalled in elections in a way that paralyzes things. I've always said, "If you want culture change, you have to persuade. You have to have to convince people." Part of convincing is having them engage in the process of finding a solution to the problem. I have a background in small business doing that. I have a background in corporate doing that. I don't see why, just because somebody is represented by a union and involved with collective bargaining, we can't treat each other with the same mutual respect and collaboration. I think that's where we need to move. It might sound idealistic to some. I think there are some examples around the country where there's progress there. I do see a more collaborative effort in Saint Paul, for example, than I see in Minneapolis.

I hope that we move in the next year or two beyond the animosity that's been created and the low morale that we have with our employees. I hope we increase time for kids that are behind and we do it in a creative way that's sustainable for teachers. I hope that we find a way, a mutually agreeable way, to evaluate teaching and what's effective and what's not, and give the tools to the teachers so that they can feel they are succeeding in what they're doing. I have a vision for school board meetings where we actually discuss positive things instead of meeting after meeting where people are yelling at the school board members and the TV cameras are capturing all this anger and animosity, and that we're a model for the country where we've made a substantial dent on the learning gap. I'm not really so concerned about the learning gap, to be honest with you. If our white middle class students greatly improve their learning and there's still a gap somewhere, I'm okay as long as everybody grew. If Latino, African American, and Native kids are graduating at much higher levels and, once they graduate they can find employment or fulfill their dreams, that's good. I don't think everybody has got to go to college, but everybody deserves a chance to. Nobody should not go to college because they can't for some reason that has nothing to do with their effort. My interest is not just local. My interest is to, hopefully, present a national model that can be replicated. That's really it. I'm really hoping all these things that I've learned over time I can put into practice.

It will probably be the biggest challenge I've been through, but I have a history of people telling me it can't be done. I was told by teachers in high school I was never going to graduate. Then, I was told I was never going to go to college that I was never going to get through college that I would never survive in the financial industry, that I would never be

able to be successful in starting a business. Now I'm hearing I won't be successful on the school board. Maybe I'm becoming a little too self confident, maybe a little arrogant about it, but I think I can make a difference. I wouldn't be doing it if I can't.

Business wise, I really hope to transform LCN into truly a twenty-first century, global business. The vision for LCN is that I want our employees to work wherever in the world they want to and to live wherever they want to and to still be able contribute to LCN. I want to know that *La Prensa*, *Vida y Sabor*, and *La Invasora* are names that are respected by our community and by the community at large, and that they are effective ways of reaching the community. We need to continue the work that we do in the community, with immigration, with educating people on education, all those things that we do. We'll be in homes. We're just starting this big campaign. We're going to be doing a lot of texting from now on. We're going to be reaching our audience through texting. They're going to be able to participate more. We're actually going to be offering our clients' products and selling them at a big discount, which, in this economy, is a huge deal. They're going to use the Internet to buy these products. It's going to be combined with radio and print and everything else.

Our websites have a lot more video. *Vida y Sabor* and *La Invasora* will be looking more and more looking like TV online. I really hope that we continue what we're doing and that we preserve those names that we've worked so hard to preserve and that we do it in a way that's viable, that the owners get some return on the huge investment they've made, and that we have people that are happy to be here, and, like I said, work from wherever they want to. We probably employ as many people as we did years ago, in one way or another, but there's a lot less need for space in this office. The space has shrunk. We will always have a central area.

As far as me in the future: This whole experiment with education has been a big learning experience for me and I'm very satisfied. Marian, who is originally from Peru, and I have this guilty feeling that there's a lot more need there in South America and Latin America than there is here, especially in the area of education. So our plans, once my kids graduate from high school—that's getting closer and closer; my son graduates in two and a half years and my daughter graduates in four and a half—depending on what happens with the job on the school board, we are looking at splitting our years between Cusco, Peru, and Minnesota - and guess which time of the year we'll be in Peru! [Laughter] We'll be avoiding snow as much as we possibly can.

Then, I'm very interested in either participating with a foundation or some way...probably more from the foundation point of view rather than the hands on, but really looking at funding. It's interesting, in Peru, El Salvador, and Mexico, I hear the same things about some students that I hear here.

LD: What's that?

AM: That native kids can't learn. They're not smart. There are family situations, in Latin America, and it's even worse than we see here. They actually say because they're native,

there's no way they're ever going to learn. It's a culture that can't learn - the same exact nonsense. So we need the same type of approach to education with high expectations, with teachers that are trained to teach kids. I actually see that as the biggest, most important issue in Latin America right now. We see India and China growing the way they are and funding and fueling education. Here we complain about being too tough on kids when in India you're graduating engineers students in two and a half years with engineering degrees that are comparable to MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] and, in one year they're making a lot more money than their parents ever made. They're buying their parents homes, the first home they've ever owned. In Latin America, we're just not emphasizing education the way we should, and it's the same exact argument... I've actually seen some videos in Mexico where they're interviewing the head of the teachers union and the head of the minister of education, and they're having the exact same debate that we're having here.

I don't know if it's going to be five years, or ten years, but that's kind of where I see myself - still having a connection with Minnesota, but spending half of our year in Peru doing that kind of work and, hopefully, doing some consulting also on different things that I've learned along the way.

Then, traveling. We've already done that—somehow, with the schedules. [Chuckles] Marian and I managed to travel for close to three months last year, and, this year, about five weeks, always connected, which I actually like. People tell me, "You've always got your phone. You've always got your laptop [computer]." It gives me peace of mind. I wouldn't be able to travel unless I did that. I know if something happens, I know about it. I deal with it and I move on and get back to looking at sites and views and stuff. That's really where I hope to go.

I hope that the work that I do here will impact the Latino community and will take us to the next level. I have this kind of vision of kids with native backgrounds working in an office with the latest in technology and dealing with people all over the world but still preserving native cultures.

I'd love to see in Peru, for example, folks from native backgrounds going from talking in English with somebody in India and, then, moving to Quechua when they're talking to their peers. So how do we preserve that? I'm hoping to see the same thing here where we preserve our culture but we also move into the new world in a way that people are fulfilling their dreams and their potential.

I also hope to be very involved with immigration reform. That's been very frustrating. We continue to rally people through the radio. I think I'm very critical of my political party, the Democratic Party, very frustrated with their inability to even get this Dream Act, so I'm hoping for better, and very vocal about it. I hope I'm not the only one.

[Laughter]

AM: I'm hoping for us moving into a civil rights movement period that's similar to what we saw in the 1960s. I don't believe that just getting people to vote and getting people to call their representative in Congress is going to work anymore. Then, we go to a period of a lot more direct action. I'm very encouraged by the DREAMers [Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors], these college students that were working towards the Dream Act. I see a commitment there that's very similar to the commitment I saw from African Americans in the 1960s. I think that's something I definitely want to be a part of and I want to spend more time on.

I've just had it. People from my party are worried and they're already talking to me behind the scenes, "You've got to support Obama." Latinos are worse off under Obama than they were under [President George W.] Bush, I have *no* doubt in my mind. All you have to do is go out on the street. On Election Day, I walked around with Congressman Keith Ellison. It was eye opening for him. I translated a lot of conversations. We spent about three hours around Lake Street. I was very impressed by him wanting to do that. He was even shocked by the number of negative comments. About half the people were eligible to vote and every single one of them had somebody close who could vote. The animosity against Obama, against the Democratic Party, is even worse against the Republican Party, so Latinos are not becoming Republican, but they've had it. There's more people that have been deported under Obama than were ever deported under Bush. The job situation is a lot worse and there's no hope anymore. Some people will say, "Obama got everything through. It just wasn't the Dream Act." Well, for people in the community, that's everything. That's jobs. That's education. That's everything. That's their whole entire life.

We're going to have to do what we need to do. It's going to be those of us who are U.S. citizens who, I think, are going to have to take the brunt of it, because we don't want people deported en masse that are involved. I guess that would be kind of like my last thought on this whole thing.

In this next period of time, I probably see our staff's involvement growing, because our staff is ridiculously committed to the cause. This is a very activist crew - *everybody* at all levels. When we talk about the Dream Act, when we do our radio-thons, every single person is involved to the fullest. I think we're going to see that. I hope other Latino media joins us. I'm encouraged so far by what I see in *Revolucion* [unclear?], some of their activism and some of the radio stations around the country. A lot of it is going to have to be done from Latino media to educate folks and to get people to places. I think, eventually, we're going to be accepted. Well, they don't have a choice. [Chuckles] It will get to the point where, you know...

LD: The numbers alone.

AM: The numbers will determine. Ten years, twenty years from now, I'm not so concerned, but short term I am. We can't have this sub class in this country that is not going to leave, that you're not going to be able to deport. Other than putting rifles on the

head of every undocumented person and, literally, walking them outside the country, I don't think they're going to be happy with anything else.

LD: Yes.

AM: Obama's obsession with compromise: he's compromised everything and gained absolutely nothing. I don't know how that will be received. I'm not very optimistic, but because there are so many other victories in the Progressive Movement I don't know if people are committed enough. I think that something is going to have to be done by us.

LD: Right.

AM: Hopefully, people will join in as we go. I think we're more than capable of doing that. Other than César Chávez, we don't have our Martin Luther King.

LD: A couple of people that I've interviewed have mentioned that - who is our new César Chávez?

AM: There's some talk about Luis Gutierrez. He's been very quiet since the Dream Act. He was making a lot of threats before that. In the Pew Center poll, I think he was number two among recognized Latino leaders. Sonia Sotomayor was number one. Jorge Ramos from [*Noticiero*] *Univision* was way out there. I don't know if it comes from that or if we just have thousands of leaders out there who do this. But I think right now, it's a little difficult. People are so cynical right now. It's like every time we ask them to do something, they do it and it doesn't work.

LD: Yes, yes.

Well, I know how incredibly busy you are. I really appreciate you taking this time to share your story, which reflects the story of the Latino community in Minnesota for the Historical Society really as a way of making sure that our community's voice is heard and our story is told. So on behalf of the Historical Society, I just want to thank you so much for this time.

Is there anything else that you wanted to share, mention, say?

AM: I've said a lot. [Laughter]

I appreciate it. When I first moved to Minnesota, it seemed like we didn't even exist, even though there was a substantial community. So to see this effort to include Latinos in the history of Minnesota, and also helping people who need to do really important research by giving them information is important. That's why I was willing to spend time on this. I'm a big advocate of the fact that sometimes you spend time on stuff that will later save a lot of time. I think that is one of those things.

LD: All right. Thank you so much.