

Francisco Morales
Narrator

Abner Arauza
Interviewer

November 17, 2010 & December 15, 2010

Francisco Morales' Home
Willmar, Minnesota

Francisco Morales -FM
Abner Arauza -AA

AA: This is Abner Arauza interviewing Francisco Morales in Willmar, Minnesota. We are interviewing on November 17, 2010 in his home. Francisco, thank you very much for agreeing to do the interview for the Minnesota Historical Society Oral History Project.

FM: Okay.

AA: I'm going to ask you some questions that are very obvious, but we'd like to record them for the purpose of this project. If you'll tell me your name?

FM: My name is Francisco Javier Morales Vasquez.

AA: And your parents' names?

FM: My father is Ruben Morales Diaz; my mother is Socorro Vasquez de Padilla.

AA: And where were they born?

FM: They were born in Mexico City.

AA: And they still live there?

FM: No, my father lives in Puerto Vallarta and my mother lives in Guadalajara, Jalisco.

AA: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

FM: We are four brothers and two sisters.

AA: And they live here or?

FM: Only myself and my youngest brother live in Willmar. The rest, they live in Guadalajara.

AA: What is your age and date of birth?

FM: My age, my date of birth is July 22, 1956, and I am fifty-four years old.

AA: Good. Good. Fifty-four years young.

FM: Yes. [Chuckles]

AA: Your place of birth. You were born?

FM: I was born in Mexico City. When I was two years old I moved to Guadalajara. When I was eighteen years old, I moved to Puerto Vallarta. When I was twenty-six years old, I moved to Willmar, Minnesota.

AA: Oh, good. Good, so you've been here quite a while.

FM: Oh, yes.

AA: What's your educational level?

FM: I went through two years of high school and then I had to quit and help my parents to raise the rest of the family.

AA: Okay, two years of high school in Mexico or here?

FM: In Mexico.

AA: Okay.

FM: Here, in the United States, I went to two years of welding, I went to one year of cosmetology, and that's it.

AA: And you still do any of that? Welding or?

FM: Yes, once in a while, but no, not much. I don't do that.

AA: The name and the ethnicity of your spouse, if you're married.

FM: I was married when I was twenty-eight years old, more or less.

AA: Okay.

FM: And my [ex] wife's name is Carmen Clementson Morales and she's from Eagle Bend, Minnesota. I have two kids with her. One is a boy, Jonathan Christopher Morales, and daughter, Laura Marie Morales.

AA: Okay. Clementson, is that C-L-E-M-E-N-T-S-O-N?

FM: Yes.

AA: Okay. [Chuckles] Tell me a little bit about your children, especially their education and occupation now.

FM: My children came out like my ex-wife, very smart, never have problems with them.

AA: [Chuckles] Great.

FM: They went to school at the junior high where I was working at that time, and I was really proud of them. Right now my daughter is going to Augsburg [college] in the Twin Cities. She's going to major in English and in Spanish. My son went to University of Minnesota, Duluth and he graduated in environmental science. He's living right now in Willmar, Minnesota, and he's getting married on February 25, 2011.

AA: Wow, congratulations.

FM: Thank you.

AA: Are you ready to be a grandpa?

FM: No, I'm not ready. [Chuckles] They're not ready to have kids yet.

AA: [Chuckles] Oh, okay. So, they're going to enjoy their marriage first for a while.

FM: Oh, yes. [Laughs]

AA: That's wise, that's wise.

FM: Yes. [Chuckles]

AA: What year did your family settle here in Willmar?

FM: Oh, man . . .

AA: Now did you come by yourself or did your brother come with you at that time?

FM: No, I came by myself.

AA: Okay.

FM: I came by myself, and that was twenty-six or twenty-seven years ago.

AA: Okay, so your brother joined you later on?

FM: My brother came to Willmar, but that was like fifteen years after I came.

AA: Oh, okay, so much more recent.

FM: Yes.

AA: What was it that influenced your decision to settle here in Willmar?

FM: Well, I came to the United States to try to get a better life. Where I was living, I had my job, I was working as a waiter and then I went to canine schools to train guard dogs.

AA: Oh, okay.

FM: But my wife came to Puerto Vallarta hunting for a husband and she convinced me to come to the United States.

AA: [Chuckles]

FM: And I said, "Why not? Let's try it." And I decided to come. And then after that I stayed, because I have my kids.

AA: Wow. Sure.

FM: And I didn't want, I want to raise my kids here.

AA: Okay.

FM: Yes.

AA: Okay, but now you said she wasn't from here?

FM: She was from Eagle Bend.

AA: Okay. How far away is that?

FM: Eagle Bend is sixty miles north from here.

AA: So what brought you to Willmar?

FM: She works as a social worker.

AA: Okay.

FM: And she found a job in this town, and that's why we settled here.

AA: Okay, well, very good. Now were there any adjustments your family made in settling in the area? And I know that probably your situation might be a little bit different, in that when I've asked this question before, both husband and wife were Latinos.

FM: Yes.

AA: But that's not the case here.

FM: No.

AA: So your situation and experience might have been different.

FM: Okay.

AA: What was your experience?

FM: Staying here?

AA: Yes, moving here to Willmar.

FM: Well, first, English language.

AA: Yes.

FM: Okay, it was really hard for me to get along and to do anything because I couldn't understand the language. I learned the language by listening to people. I never went to school to learn English. And I still don't know how to write it. I help myself to communicate, but that's it.

AA: Yes.

FM: To find a job, that was really hard, because everywhere I go they told me, "Go to Jennie-O."

AA: Oh.

FM: "Go to Jennie-O." I said, "No, no, no, no. I don't want to work in Jennie-O."

AA: Jennie-O is the turkey plant, correct?

FM: Yes, it is the turkey plant. And I used to hate that, because most of the workers in there are Hispanics, and I heard that they don't treat them right.

AA: Yes.

FM: You know, for that reason, I started looking for other jobs. I worked in the fields for a while. And then I worked for the Detox, helping those people who got into drugs or drinking too much, and I moved them from one hospital to another hospital in different parts of the state. And then after that I heard in the newspaper and the news on the radio that the junior high was having so many problems with the Hispanic kids. It was because they could not understand the culture; because they brought drugs, and guns, and gangs, and this and that. One of my teachers, when I was studying welding here at the technical college was the wife of the principal at the junior high.

FM: She convinced me to go and ask the husband about getting a job there. And I went to the principal and told him, "You know what? I need a job. You know, I think I can help you." He asked, "Well, do you have papers, do you have a title or something?" "No, I'm nobody." He said, "No, I can't give you a job. You know, you don't have papers, I don't know what you do." "You're right, you know, but I need a job." "Well, I can't give you a job." "Okay, let's do this. I work for you for the month of May for free. You don't need to pay me nothing. You just tell me what to do and I'll take care of that. And if you don't like it, fine. Don't call me. But if you like it, you know, you call me back to work." And I worked the month of May there, and through the summer I didn't hear from them until September, the second day of September that year. He called me and said, "Come to work." And I'll be working this for twenty-three years already.

AA: Wow.

FM: Yes.

AA: A couple of questions. You told me about what you did at Detox. But what did you do in the fields? What kind of work?

FM: Pick up rocks, detasseling . . .

AA: Corn detasseling?

FM: Corn detasseling, and then they choose different kinds of seeds with different chemicals, and I had to separate them, you know. I was a head of a crew that they sent to the fields, and that's what I did.

AA: When you went to work at the school, you said that they had told you that there were problems with gangs and behavior.

FM: Yes.

AA: Was that the case?

FM: Yes. They had lots of problems with gangs. They were bringing drugs. I took two guns. In all these years since I've been here, I took two guns away, and lots of drugs. I have stopped

fights between, and most of the time it's between Hispanics and themselves, or Hispanics and people from Honduras, or Hispanics and now it's Somalian people, and stuff like that. But I think being a Mexican, I show them some respect. And most of all the kids, they respect me. Why? I don't know. But I try to convince them to behave, to read, to study, to do well in the schools, and many did a good job, you know. But that's what I used to do.

AA: Was there a change?

FM: It has been a change. A lot. Yes, because most of the time when they had problems with some kids, often I used to grab the kids and go home and see them with the parents and talk to them and explain then what was expected in the school for the kids. And I tried to make the parents believe that they have to help us, the school, to be able to help the kids. And many parents, they helped me a lot.

AA: Yes. So they became involved.

FM: They became involved with the school. Some would just ignore it, or they don't care, or I don't know. But that's what happened.

AA: So showing respect for the students was a big factor?

FM: Yes. I think they needed to have a model.

AA: Yes.

FM: Somebody they can go and talk to. Somebody who's there to give them a hand or somebody who's there, in the same culture, explain to them what's going on, which way they should grab on it and follow it, you know. That's what I did.

AA: Now, most of the students that you mentioned, they're immigrants.

FM: Yes.

AA: Because you mentioned other countries.

FM: Yes. That was one of the biggest problems, too. They moved too much.

AA: Yes.

FM: You know they didn't stay the full year. Or some, they moved every month, they went out, came back, you know, and this and that. Many students moved a lot.

AA: Yes. And even among Latinos, depending on which country they were, there was friction among them?

FM: Yes. Yes, because some of them, they come from Texas and some are from here, and the gangs in there and here, they didn't get along, you know, and that caused lots of problems.

AA: What was it that they didn't get along about?

FM: No idea. Maybe just jealous, or because somebody looked at you bad, or because somebody talked to the girlfriend, you know, childish things. And you know how most of the Hispanics are. You know, "You're looking at me bad. Why are you looking at me?" You know, they start throwing punches.

AA: What experiences did you have in making the transition from one community that you came from, you know, Mexico to here?

FM: Well, when I was living in Mexico, I never heard the word racist . . . until I came to Willmar. And many people treated me like I was from a different planet, you know. Anytime I'd go to the stores to buy groceries, or buy clothes, or whatever, I felt like I was being watched. I felt like somebody was following me everywhere I went.

AA: By the clerks, by the store clerks?

FM: By the store clerks, yes, and the staff members. And like when I went to ask for a job, everybody's sending me to Jennie-O. You know, I don't want to work in Jennie-O. I think I have more knowledge than that.

AA: Yes.

FM: When I was learning the language, the English language, I had a hard time because most of the people I talked to were friends of my wife. Okay. And they laughed about what they were saying but I believed that they were laughing about me. And that made me so angry, that I think that same situation pushed me to understand and put more attention to the language. And that's the way I learned it, you know. But that's what happened to me here.

AA: So instead of intimidating you or scaring you, it created a challenge.

FM: Yes, yes. That was a challenge. And it still is, you know, because every day is a different situation at the school. You know, I have to find a way to deal with that. Nobody in the school tells me what I have to do. You know, I follow the rules, and I try to find the best way to deal with it. And that's what I do.

AA: Oh, good. When you first came here did you come here to Eagle Bend?

FM: No I came here to Willmar. Well, no, I went and I lived in the Cities for one year.

AA: Oh, okay.

FM: I went back to Mexico, and then she found a job here, and then I came and lived here.

AA: Was it different in the Twin Cities?

FM: I didn't notice, because I hardly went out.

AA: Okay.

FM: My wife and I, we were working as, we were, how do you say that? Designing closets and putting shelves in for some company. That means from the house to the work and that's it. Then come back.

AA: Yes.

FM: That means I didn't visit people, I didn't have friends, I didn't have nobody to talk to, you know. Just me and her and that's it.

AA: And at work?

FM: At work, yes. But the work, I mean, we were doing it ourselves. I didn't have worker partners or anything like that, you know.

AA: So you didn't interact much?

FM: No, not at all.

AA: How long have you lived at this address?

FM: At this address, I've been living for, let's see, I can almost say twenty years.

AA: Twenty years. And is it the first address you had in Willmar?

FM: By myself, yes.

AA: Okay.

FM: After five years that I spent married with my wife, I got divorced. You know, and since then I've been living here.

AA: So you've been here twenty-five years, twenty on your own at this address.

FM: Yes.

AA: Do you see? I know this question sounds kind of funny, considering what you've just told me. But do you see, in your mind, Willmar as your permanent home? Or are you still thinking in terms of, it's a temporary situation, and I'm going to go back to Jalisco or somewhere else?

FM: It's a temporary situation.

AA: Okay.

FM: Yes, I've been living here too many years, I have built my business, I have built this house, and I'm ready to go back to Mexico.

AA: [Chuckles] Good. Yes, probably nine out of ten people, they say that.

FM: After you come to the United States and live here and you learn that the culture here, you remember why you left Mexico. You want to go back. You don't need anything from the United States. Everything, we have it there.

AA: Yes.

FM: I have business, I have land, I have family, I have friends, I have work; I have everything I need. The only thing that's stopping me here, not going back to Mexico now, is my kids.

AA: Yes.

FM: You know, after that, I can go anytime. You know, I can sell the business, I can sell the house, and with this money I can live like a king over there.

AA: Very comfortably. Now you said that you have a business in Mexico.

FM: Yes, I do.

AA: Different than this one?

FM: Well, yes. I have a restaurant. Well, the family has a restaurant. And my father owns lots of land down in Puerto Vallarta. He's a member of the Indian community in Puerto Vallarta.

AA: Oh, I see.

FM: That means they give him land to work it out. And if we don't work it out, they will take it away from us. That means it's urgent for me to go back, because I'm the oldest and because I have responsibility and nobody else wants to do that.

AA: Is that an Ejido?

FM: Yes, it's in Ejido.

AA: Can you describe it?

FM: Ejido? It's just land that the government provides to the Indians who live in the hills or in the mountains. The government gives to this group of people lots of land, and they divide it in pieces and give so much to each member, and that's what my father got.

AA: So it's kind of like a cooperative as far as how they run it?

FM: Yes.

AA: Because they have to pay fees, right?

FM: Oh yes, yes. They have to pay, yes.

AA: They have to be present.

FM: They have to work the land.

AA: So there are some rules to the membership.

FM: Yes. If you don't work the land, they take it away from you and give to somebody else who wants to work it out. You have to pay your taxes, you know. And that's it.

AA: Interesting. So you maintain contact with your homeland, with your family at home?

FM: Yes.

AA: How do you do this? Email, telephone, personal visits? Do they come here? Do you go there?

FM: Every time I can, I go over there. Otherwise, they've been here maybe seven to eight times in summer, because they hate winter. I don't blame them.

AA: [Chuckles]

FM: But I communicate with them through phone, through computer, you know, that's the way I do it. And when we have a chance, we go for Christmas or summertime, or they come here.

AA: And you take your family?

FM: Yes.

AA: Your son and your daughter?

FM: My son and my daughter. *Every* time I go to Mexico, they have to come.

AA: How do they like it?

FM: They love it. They don't want to live here; they want to live down there.

AA: [Chuckles] So they're going back with you?

FM: Yes, but my son prefers winter because there are winter sports here and my daughter likes summer. I mean, she will be more as a choice to go to Mexico than my son, you know.

AA: Yes. How do they get along with their relatives when they are in Mexico?

FM: Perfect. Perfect. They get along perfectly. No, no complaints. No, it's not hard, you know, because I teach my kids to speak the Spanish language.

AA: Yes.

FM: And that means they communicate pretty good with them. They get along.

AA: And language is very important, but obviously it's not just language. So you must have also taught them traditions and culture and those kinds of things that are distinct about the behavior in an area and family.

FM: I taught my kids the same way that my parents taught me.

AA: Yes.

FM: Manners, respect, the language, the food, and the culture. And with that, they never have problems. And even my son went on a road trip with three of his friends all the way to . . .

AA: Friends from here?

FM: Friends from here, from the college, all the way to Brazil.

AA: Wow. [Chuckles]

FM: They were riding in buses, and this and that, and he said he never had problems at all. He got along with everybody, you know.

AA: Yes.

FM: I was kind of worried about that, but it went good.

AA: Wow. Now you said you'd taught him Spanish. What language do you use at home?

FM: Spanish.

AA: Mostly Spanish?

FM: Mostly Spanish.

AA: And when you're out in public?

FM: English.

AA: Why?

FM: Because nobody else understands Spanish, you know. And that was my crooked English because, like I said, I never went to school to learn English; I just tried to communicate the best way I could. But my kids, they speak English in the school and they learn their English in school. That means at home, we speak Spanish. That's the way they learned.

AA: Yes. Since you had your upbringing mostly in Mexico, obviously your Spanish is very good.

FM: Yes.

AA: Very correct.

FM: Yes.

AA: How is theirs?

FM: They: my daughter's is good. It's even, she even writes better than myself already. Okay.

AA: [Chuckles] Good.

FM: Because I have forgotten too many things and sometimes I have mistakes, you know.

AA: Okay.

FM: And abbreviation. But my son, if he practices for one or two days, he remembers everything.

AA: It comes back.

FM: Yes, it comes back.

AA: Now you talked about culture and traditions when you were talking about the things that you've taught your children.

FM: Yes.

AA: Describe what you mean when you say culture and traditions.

FM: Culture. Well, culture, like I said, man, well, how we used to, families, how they are so united.

AA: Yes.

FM: You know the kids live at home for many years. Even some families, even if the kids get married, they're still living in the home with everybody, you know.

AA: Yes.

FM: And I think that that's a culture thing. Because here you don't see that. They're eighteen and [snaps fingers] out of here.

AA: They're gone.

FM: You know. And the other one, I guess that, manners. You know, respect. And I think that would be it, you know.

AA: Give me an example.

FM: Anytime the adults say something, it has to be done, no question about it. If they have questions, they have to sit down and talk about it after they've done what the adult says, you know.

AA: Yes.

FM: For example, going to school, waking up early every day. You know, as soon as you come home from school; before you do anything else, do your homework. Go to bed early. Finish everything on your plate. Don't throw food in the garbage. I think that will do it.

AA: How would you define culture? What is included in culture?

FM: Culture. I can define it about the different kinds of foods, the way we prepare the meals. Food and, you know customs you have when you are living down there. You know, the food, the clothing . . .

AA: Right.

FM: When you celebrate birthdays or holidays. You know, that's completely different than around here.

AA: How is it different?

FM: How it's different is because over there I feel like we have more freedom or happiness, or we're trying to find an excuse to enjoy life.

AA: [Chuckles]

FM: Enjoy the suppers, enjoy the music, enjoy the drinks, you know, or enjoy the different families that get together. I think that's the way it's different.

AA: And you're passing that on to your children?

FM: Yes, I do. Yes.

AA: What do they think?

FM: They love it. That's why every time we go to Mexico, they're really happy because even they said when they get together with their friends and they have a party, it's not the same, you know. It's not because they're here, it's just people are more open to have fun down there or more easy to have fun with than here.

AA: Yes.

FM: Here it's so cold, and here people just take care of themselves and don't worry about the rest. Down there, everybody's worried about everybody, trying to please everybody. You know, around here you don't feel like that. I don't feel like that.

AA: So there's some dynamics, some passion missing?

FM: I think so. I mean, at Christmas here, you just stay in your house, and maybe a couple of friends or family members come, and that's it. Eat, go to sleep, open the presents, that's it. Down there, it's music, it's dancing, it's drinking, and it's getting together, its singing, stuff like that. You know, it's completely different.

AA: What type of relationships did you and your family have with your neighbors, employers, church, in the schools, around here?

FM: Myself, how can I say this? I say hi to anybody and everybody. And that's it. It's not like they invite me to their house, or to their parties, or reunions, this and that. It's just myself and don't worry about the rest, you know. I've never been invited to a different house.

AA: In twenty-five years that you've lived here?

FM: Yes. I live by myself, you know. I used to have a friend in here with me, but he took off. He got married, he took off. Otherwise, just my kids and I.

AA: So it's not friends; it is associates or acquaintances at work.

FM: Yes, Yes, that's right. I like the teachers, but I just meet them in school, and that's it. No outside. You know. I don't know why, but . . .

AA: And in those situations, how is the relationship? How do you get along?

FM: I get along with everybody well. You know, but like I say, it's just work relation. Nothing outside the school.

AA: Yes. When you were looking, I know why you came, from what you told me, I know how you came to this town. But was the acceptance of the community or non-acceptance of the community, did that affect your decision to stay?

FM: No, it didn't. Because my decision was work, and I tried to do the best for my kids, that's it. That's my only interest.

AA: I get the feeling that what you're saying is I don't care how they treated me.

FM: Yes.

AA: This is my home, I'm staying.

FM: Yes. Yes, exactly. And my house I used to have only this. From that door, that was the outside door.

AA: Oh.

FM: From that door to there. That's it. And now I've tripled it. And I never went to school to learn carpentry, nothing like that. I know how to put a nail and I know the rest. You know.

AA: So you did it by yourself?

FM: Yes, by myself and my kids. And I never asked, never asked, and never came somebody to help. No one. One time, when I was building upstairs, I got a snowstorm, and everybody knew about it, that I had it open and I had snow all over here, and said, "Yes, if you don't take it out, that will melt and that will ruin all in here." But nobody showed up.

AA: Wow.

FM: And I didn't ask favors from anybody. I just did it myself.

AA: So you had the roof off?

FM: Yes. That means I just, took off all the snow the most I could, cleared it up, dried it, and put up the ceiling, the roof.

AA: And none of your neighbors, or friends, or people who knew you were working on it?

FM: Nobody. That means I learned even by myself and taking care of my own problems, you know.

AA: Do you feel part of the larger community?

FM: No.

AA: Why not?

FM: [Sighs] because, how can I say this? I really don't know how to explain. I have done many things for people, many favors and stuff like that. But nobody has done anything for me. I opened the doors myself and tried to become somebody, but I never received anything from nobody. That means I don't feel like I belong to the community. I guess I'm here because of my kids, and because I'm working or taking care of my own bills, but after that, I don't think anybody would notice if I'm missing or not.

AA: So you're not, you don't feel part of the community because you feel, you're pretty self-sufficient and independent.

FM: Yes. Yes.

AA: And I get the feeling that that's how you like it. Or is that not the case?

FM: No. I would have liked to have had more friends. To let people know what my culture is or the way I am and for them to show me who they are. But it's so reserved here. And I don't know how to interfere in their lives, or join them, or stuff like that.

AA: To be included.

FM: Yes. I don't get that chance.

FM: Maybe because I spend time by myself in here, working by myself. But, I mean, like the people at the school, I know many times they get together in groups. They never ask, "Hey, Francisco, come over here." Never. And I know them, and I talk to them well, and I never have problems with anybody. After school it's just, no Francisco. I never asked why.

AA: So you don't know why.

FM: No, I don't know why.

AA: Considering what you've told me, how satisfied are you living in Willmar?

FM: I'm not satisfied. Like I say, I'm just living here because of my kids. Otherwise I would be gone.

AA: And why aren't you satisfied?

FM: Because oh, man. Because I feel like I am alone in this town. That's why. Because there's no friends, no family, no relatives. That's why.

AA: So you miss that part?

FM: Oh yes, I do. I miss the people, I miss the fun, I miss the food, I miss everything. Yes.

AA: What is the ethnic composition of the Latino community here? By that I'm talking about if you were to describe a picture of the Latino community, how many are from the U.S., from here? How many are from the U.S. in other parts of the country like Texas (as you mentioned earlier)? How many of them are from other Latin American countries?

FM: When I came here, there were twenty-five Hispanic families.

AA: Wow. [Chuckles]

FM: Twenty-five. Right now, I think there are thousands. They are from, the majority, I believe, from Texas and Honduras. That's the majority. The rest, they come from parts of Mexico, or from El Salvador.

AA: Wow.

FM: Yes. But when I was at school, mainly they came from Texas, many of those. Why? I don't know. Maybe that I heard too much about them coming because the Minnesota was the state that provides more help as welfare for the people.

AA: Social services?

FM: Yes. I don't know if it's true or not, but that's what I heard.

AA: So when you first moved here twenty-five years ago, most of the ones that were settling in were from Texas?

FM: Yes.

AA: Is that still the case?

FM: No. Well, some, because like I said, the majority is from Texas and from Honduras, its lots of people from there and here. But there are some who come from Mexico City, El Salvador. Dominican Republic, Brazil. That's it.

AA: Hmm. Of those that come from Texas, what percentage? Can you tell about how many of them are like from right along the border, let's say Laredo, Eagle Pass, McAllen, etcetera and how many might be from further in, like San Antonio and Austin? Because I know that it's different cultures in that geography.

FM: Yes, no idea. No, I have no clue on that.

AA: Okay. You just know they're from Texas?

FM: Yes.

AA: Good.

FM: And I know them because the kids at junior high, they talk about the parents. It's what I heard. That's what I said, you know.

AA: What issues have you seen in the past, here in this community that affects Latinos?

FM: That affect Latinos. Oh, boy. I don't . . .

AA: It might be in work, housing, education, and health services, any of those areas. Or even more, maybe, for example, even more subtle, like you said that when you moved here you were tried to be channeled over to the Jennie-O turkey plant.

FM: Yes.

AA: Just because you were . . .

FM: Hispanic, yes.

AA: Hispanic.

FM: But to hurt, when that's something that hurts them, I don't think there exists anything. You know, because . . .

AA: Well, not necessarily hurts, but that affects them. And it could be positive or negative.

FM: The only thing, I mean, I can see this in an education matter, okay. The only thing affects them is not knowing the procedures and rules that white people deal in here.

AA: Yes.

FM: And most of the Hispanic people come, they have their own image, their own rules, they say, "If I don't want to do this, I don't do it." And that's no matter what. And I think that's

what's hurting them. Not knowing that they have to follow the rules here. And more I think it's I tell them, "You come to the United States; you have to learn the rules here if you want to survive. If you don't want to have problems, you have to follow the rules here. Otherwise you have problems. You have to learn the language, that way you go to work, that way you succeed. Otherwise you can't." But hurting them, no, I don't think nothing will hurt them.

AA: At the beginning of our conversation, you mentioned that when you went to work at the school that there were gang problems, and students not wanting to succeed, and so on and so forth.

FM: Yes.

AA: Yet your son and your daughter did very well in school.

FM: Yes. Why? Because I was over them all the time, I was insisting, I was, I was working in the schools and I can get information from the teachers on how they're doing and how they're behaving. And if they need help in classes or materials, you know, I talk to the teachers and try to find help for them. I teach them to respect the teachers; it doesn't matter what they said. Follow the rules, learn the language. I think that helped them.

AA: Now that's very good, and I think that you were taking the right steps, and that's in the academic area. But your daughter was outstanding in forensics and speeches, in speech competitions. And your son was a state champion in pole vaulting.

FM: Yes.

AA: That's outside the academic area.

FM: Well, my son was involved in many sports since little. Okay, he was a cross country skier, he was a cross country runner, pole vaulting. He used to go out camping a lot. My daughter was more into speeches, poems, do some theatrical stuff for theaters, you know, she, my son always was more outgoing than my daughter.

AA: Yes.

FM: But they have their own friends. They went out, friends, and I mean I don't know, I just never had problems with them in both areas. I mean, outside the academics, outside the school and in the school, never problems. But I was really tough with them. Anytime they did something wrong, I was in their face, and very strict.

AA: Now that's in the schools. Outside of the schools, just in the community, the adults. I remember that there was some years ago and gee, I don't know how long ago. But there was a mobile home park [Elm Lane Mobile Home Park].

FM: Yes. Elm Lane. What do you want to know?

AA: What kinds of issues came out of that?

FM: Elm Lane was a place where most of the poor people used to live.

AA: Yes.

FM: I'm talking any kind of race, because there used to be some white, and some Mexicans, and, you know. But Elm Lane was a place where [there was] too much corruption. And many people of the town talked really bad about everyone in that place, in Elm Lane. Even I have heard that the police department was really disgusted with them. And somebody made a comment and said, "Just give them tequila and a bunch of rocks and they'll kill themselves."

AA: Oh.

FM: But there were drugs, there was prostitution, you know. I mean, that was tough, a tough place to live in. I never lived in there myself, but maybe I was lucky.

AA: When you say corruption, do you mean among the people that lived there?

FM: Yes.

AA: Or between the community and those who lived in?

FM: No, among the people that lived there. Too many drugs used to be in there.

AA: What percentage of the people that lived there were Latinos, were people of color?

FM: Oh, I'm going to say eighty percent. Most of them were Latinos.

AA: You described an attitude among the police department.

AA: And, or other city administrators, towards the people who lived there. Has that changed?

FM: Yes. It has changed. How can I say it's not anymore so much pointing the finger. I don't see that too much at all. But it used to be bad. It used to be really bad. And now, working in the school and knowing most of the policemen that are working here, they're nice, they're friendly. But if you do anything that they won't like or they don't accept, they'll get really mean.

AA: Yes.

FM: But they don't, I hardly hear any more about them making comments to the Hispanics.

AA: Do you have any sense for what brought about that change?

FM: No, I don't. I really don't. Maybe it's not much, it doesn't have so many problem people living in one single place, and they have more of a better way to watch them if they're living in town. They are not all together, they're dispersed. I think that helped a lot, the community, I think.

AA: So moving. Those families moving throughout the community among the rest of the community.

FM: Yes. Yes.

AA: How about the education here in this area? Now we talked briefly earlier, when you went to work there were gang issues, there were attitude issues, behavior issues, and some of that has changed. Is the change because of the community feeling like there's some roots here? So this is my home now, I feel more confident, so I better do well in school. Is it the school district really addressing issues in a better way so that there's more positive progress? What is?

FM: I think the change happened because some of those families that stayed here, they had kids, and those kids went to school, and they understand more of the culture. And those kids, right now, they have kids that are going through the same steps. That means, that's the only thing I see that changed everything.

AA: So now the parents know the rules and they can pass that on to the children.

FM: Yes, I tell you that, because most of the kids there I dealt with in those first years I worked in the school, now they're parents. And they have the kids in the junior high, and they tell them, "You know what? If you don't behave, you're going to deal with Francisco. Be careful of this guy."

AA: [Chuckles]

FM: And see me in the street, "Francisco! How's my kid doing?" "No problem." "Hey, you remember those days when you used to pull my ears?" "Yes." "You remember the day when you grabbed me from my ears from bullying a kid and brought me all the way to school?" "Yes, I remember." And now those kids are big and they have little kids.

AA: Yes.

FM: And that makes me feel really good. But I think those parents who stayed here and they have kids, they made everything change. Because in those days, they hardly spoke the language—everyone speaks Spanish. They sit in the class, and, "No, I don't know what they are saying. Well, how do I learn?" And all those kids, they know the language, they know the rules. They try to skip away, to break the rules, but there are consequences. That's what it is. That's what I think that changed everything.

AA: Yes.

FM: Generation to generation.

AA: Describe the relationship of the Latino community to the rest of the community now.

FM: The relationship. Well, I have seen and noticed that more and more white people talk to Hispanics because or they work with them, or they're in the same company, or they're partners, or they're friends, so they know each other for something. And I didn't used to see that. I never saw a white person talking to a Hispanic before, and these days I see more and more every day. I think that's the good thing about living in this town and trying to relate to American people, try to unite it. Become one group.

AA: You said that there are some Latinos or Hispanics that are now partners in business with white people?

FM: Oh yes, there are a few.

AA: Good.

FM: Yes. I know one that he's a mechanic. And he used to have a restaurant and he's now partnered with nobody, he's by himself. And then there's another one, he sells bread alone to the Hispanic stores. They are alone, they don't have no partnership. Myself, I don't have no partnership.

AA: For your [salsa making business] Francisco's Pico de Gallo?

FM: Yes. Yes, but there are quite a few people that are partnered with nobody. I don't know anybody who does partnerships, as a business.

AA: Oh, okay. You talked earlier about welfare and social services.

FM: Yes.

AA: How is that in the community, the delivery of those services to the Latino community?

FM: To my experience, I think social services should be more, how can I put it? More careful how they give the help to people, because I have experience with some families that they came only for the services.

AA: Yes.

FM: When they have a house, and a ranch, and big cars where they're coming from. And then they come over here and get free money. I don't see that as right. And there are other people who got food stamps; they were buying drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. I don't see that as right either. I think family services should be more involved with the families who are receiving the help. And

there are some families who need more help, because I have seen families that the kids are sleeping on the floor with maybe one or two blankets, that's it. Even with the time they're doing like that. There are some people that warm up the house with the stove instead of a furnace.

AA: Wow.

FM: When I came here, I met a kid at junior high in my first years that he couldn't, he didn't eat, because apparently they had no food. I went to the store, got groceries, bags, bring it to them. But I stopped doing that because as soon as I turned around, they gave me a kick in the butt. I said, "Forget it. No more." That's what happened.

AA: Tell me about the community organizations. Which organizations exist here that touches the lives of Latinos?

FM: I don't know any.

AA: Okay. So you're not familiar with any?

FM: I don't know if there exists one or not. I don't know.

AA: Because like there's the multicultural marketplace . . .

FM: I know the place, and it's just open, I believe, this year.

AA: Yes.

FM: And I don't know if anybody is using it or not, I really don't know. I know the guy who's running it, a nice guy, and I know he has some business apart, but I don't know anything else about it.

AA: That's Roberto?

FM: Roberto.

AA: Valdez.

FM: Yes.

AA: Are there Latinos involved in politics here?

FM: As far as I know, only Roberto and myself. After that, I don't know anybody.

AA: Have either one of you run for office?

FM: For myself, I got involved with the Chicano-Latinos from Saint Paul.

AA: Okay.

FM: Because Joe Gimse asked me to join them.

AA: That's Chicano-Latino Affairs Council?

FM: Yes. Why? I don't know why he asked me to join them, because I don't know much about it.

AA: Yes.

FM: And I have been to two or three meetings, I just sit in there and listen. I made a couple comments about what they're talking about, but that's it. And I have told them, "I don't know what the heck I am doing here. I don't know what you guys expect from me. I don't know anything about politics." That means I just stay in my house and don't bother about the rest of the world, and that's it.

AA: How are things mixing up between the Hispanics or Latinos that have been here for a long time and those that are newly arriving from other countries? Earlier you talked about the differences towards each other between the Hondureños, Mexicanos, and the U. S. Latinos. How is that working out now?

FM: I believe it's coming down a little bit. But I still know that some people that came from Texas, I know they have problems with people from Honduras because, no idea why.

AA: Okay.

FM: But this I haven't heard much lately. And in the schools, if I'm not wrong last year was a big time trouble with Texas, Honduras, and Somalians. And now it's coming down, too. Why? I really don't know, but I haven't heard much about it.

AA: If I was a friend of yours from Jalisco . . .

FM: Yes.

AA: And I said, "I want to go to the U.S. I don't know where to move to. You've lived in Willmar for twenty-five years. Should I move there? What can you tell me about it?"

FM: Oh, boy. Well, I would tell you this. If you don't have nothing to live for where you are, you can come over here and try it. But if you're going to come here, you have to learn the culture. You have to learn the language. Otherwise, you can't succeed. That's all.

Interview on December 15, 2010

AA: This is Abner Arauza on December 15, 2010 in Willmar, Minnesota. I'm interviewing Francisco Morales. This the second part of his story here in Willmar for the Oral History Project for the Minnesota Historical Society. Francisco, again, thank you for speaking to us for this project. Let's start in an area that you told me that you want to share more about your life as background to talk about the history, of your life and history in Willmar.

FM: Okay.

AA: So tell me a little bit about, well, where you were born, your background in Mexico before coming here and how you got here.

FM: Went to school over there. I worked with my father, working with aluminum, making doors, windows, stuff like that. And he went; by that time he was going to school to become a veterinarian.

AA: Your dad?

FM: Yes, my dad. And I was in junior high when I decided to ask permission from my dad to go to California as a *mojado* [wet] or wetback or whatever you want to call it.

AA: Undocumented immigrant.

FM: Yes. And then we went we met somebody in Guadalajara who was trying to help us go to California. We got in touch with this person, he was going to charge us two hundred dollars to transport us to California, but we had to drive all the way to Tijuana. We drove to Tijuana on a bus. We got there; we met this guy, middle of the night. We went in the mountains to meet him. And then we walked through the desert all night.

AA: Wow.

FM: And then every time they said, "Mosquitoes!" you had to hide behind the bushes . . .

AA: [Chuckles] Okay.

FM: Because the mosquitoes are the helicopters, you know. And we were hiding and hiding, and we went to this little town I think they call La Rosa or La Puerta or something like that. They told us to go into the garage. We went to the garage, and in the corner they put us to sit down. They threw us some sandwiches and our water. The same day, right away in the morning—I think it was four or five o'clock in the morning when we showed up, so maybe two hours after that somebody backed up in a car. Two of my friends, myself, and an older guy. "Jump in the trunk." We jumped in the trunk. We all squished each other back there. And then we start driving. We drove almost for five hours.

AA: Wow.

FM: And that was starting to . . .

AA: And you were in the trunk the whole time?

FM: Yes. We were trying to push the trunk is to breathe, because that was . . . terrible. If I need to move, everybody has to move at the same time—because we were so tight. We came to a place in California and they threw us in a house. And that house, that was humongous. In the back yard they had two trailer homes *full* of guys. And he would say, “You four, you three . . .” Because of all three guys, he would say that. The other guy, I don’t know what happened to him. And we stayed there. They gave us something to eat and then they gave us someplace to sleep, you know, in that trailer. But there were I want to say, fifteen guys between the two trailers. What we’re doing is putting the, how do you say that? *Las rayos de las bicicletas?* [Bicycle wheel spokes]

AA: Spokes.

FM: Spokes, the spokes to the rims.

AA: Yes.

FM: Calluses on the fingers, lots of calluses at the beginning, you know, because you had . . . they paid fifteen cents for every ring full with the spokes.

AA: Wow.

FM: That means the faster you work, the more money you get, you know. But for a week or two weeks we couldn’t do it. Just . . . the hands full of blisters. But after that we got it going, and we worked from eight o’clock in the morning to six o’clock in the afternoon *every single day*. Every single day. And they had a shop in the garage. And the garage was close to town because we used to drive like an hour from the house to that, the shop.

AA: And how old were you at this age, you said?

FM: I was sixteen years old. Sixteen, seventeen years old.

AA: And the others were about the same age?

FM: Yes. They were friends of mine, we were in school. We spent maybe two months. And then I moved to somebody else’s house because I couldn’t continue working there. I got a job in a junkyard. After that, I was in Guadalajara; I went to canine school to train dogs for guards, to be guard dogs. And then I went for eleven months to school for that.

AA: What were you doing at the junkyard?

FM: We were just selling, destroying cars. You're pulling the cars apart, doing mechanic work.

AA: And then you went back to Guadalajara?

FM: I went back after three or four months. I went back to Guadalajara.

AA: Now when you first left Guadalajara, coming to the border, you said "we". You said "we" because your dad came with you?

FM: No.

AA: Or because you were with the friends?

FM: We were three guys and I. I mean two guys and I.

AA: Okay.

FM: Yes, they're friends of mine. We decided, I asked my father, "Daddy, I want adventure." He says, "The door is big enough for you. Go ahead. Go with God." Okay, took off. Just we grabbed everybody, grabbed like two pairs of pants, shirts, and underwear, and then, "Let's go." You know, we didn't have no money, no food, and no nothing. You know, but before that day, we asked permission again to do the same thing. We went to Nayarit. We were transported on the bus and then . . .

AA: When you first returned to Guadalajara, did you have any money with you to take back home?

FM: No, because I used the money for the transportation, going back to Mexico. But before I did that, we went to Nayarit and we were having just a heck of a time two guys and I.

AA: [Chuckles]

FM: These same guys, we traveled on the top of the trains. Back and forth for a week, we used to drink coffee only. We didn't have any money. But then we started washing cars and doing this and that. We'd go and knock on the doors of the house asking for a taco, piece of fruit. But after I came back from California, I worked with my father. My father, he got his certificate as a veterinarian. And then I worked with him for a few years doing surgeries and taking care of animals. And he was in charge of a circus, and I helped him to take care of the animals and this and that.

AA: Okay.

FM: And then I went for eleven months to school for that. And by then I moved to Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco. At that time, I was living with my father, and we trained a dozen dogs for rich

people there in Vallarta. And we were charging three hundred dollars for a class. There were three different classes. And I was doing well. And then, after that, I was working as a waiter in a restaurant. That means between eight to twelve I was training dogs and twelve to one o'clock or midnight I was working as a waiter. But then, I met a woman who came from Eagle Bend, Minnesota. Fifty-four miles north from here, from Willmar. She went hunting for a husband and she found me.

AA: [Chuckles] That's pretty blunt!

FM: [Chuckles] Yes. And she told me, "You come with me and work hard," she said, "And in one year we'll come back to Mexico with lots of money to put a restaurant and a hotel." Whoa. Geez, why not? You know what the heck. I had to try it. And we came over here and the first thing I found out is that I could not work unless I had papers. And I couldn't have papers then because I wasn't American. That means I needed to get married.

AA: Yes.

FM: "Well," I said, "let's go get married." We got married in the [Twin] Cities. We worked on doing some remodeling closets and stuff like that. And then I worked there for, I think that was a year, more or less. I went back to Mexico. I came back. When I came back, my wife was a social worker and she found a job here in Willmar. And that's the first time when I came to Willmar.

AA: Okay.

FM: And since then, I've been here in Willmar. I work in . . .

AA: How did that marriage take place? Did you arrive and get married or did you get married in Mexico before you came?

FM: No. She went to Mexico for vacation is when I met her.

AA: Right.

FM: Then she came back over here and we were too much in love. And she told me to come over here to the United States with her, and she went back to Mexico, and we came together to the United States. And after we'd lived in Minneapolis, I went back to visit my parents again. And, she moved to Willmar because she found a job here.

AA: Okay, but let me back up a little bit. Because my question is, the first time that you came in, you told me that story about crossing in the trunk of a car and so on and so forth. So this time, how did you come across?

FM: This time I was twenty-four or twenty-five years old.

AA: So how did you actually cross the border though?

FM: Through, well...

AA: Just drive through? [Chuckles]

FM: No, I tried to drive through, but they found us. That means I had to go back. And then, you know, Mexicans, we persist a lot.

AA: [Chuckles] Okay.

FM: And then one day, I think that was in September, I'm guessing. It was getting cold, plus *lots* of fog all over. And I went around through, around the border through a farm, and I got into, I got a chance to cross. My wife crossed the border and then I just, without her stopping, I just ran, chasing the car, and got in the car. But we drove maybe five miles. They stopped her, they found me. They put us in jail for overnight. And the worst thing that happened to me that day is that they told her, "Why are you going to Mexico to find this kind of garbage when you can find a good man here?"

AA: Hmm.

FM: Oh, it felt so bad. But I went back to Mexico and then I got a passport. I went I came back to the border with my passport, I came into the United States, and as soon as I came to the United States, we went to the American Consulate. And tried to fix papers for myself.

AA: Yes.

FM: We got married and we got the papers. That was before the law says if you get married without papers, we don't follow that stuff no more. That was before then.

AA: Okay.

FM: Yes. I went to work in the fields picking rocks, detasseling corn, driver for detox. I went to welding school for one year and then cosmetology school. One of my teachers encouraged me to apply for a job at the school working with students. After working for a month without pay, they kept me. And I have been working there for 23 years already. But that was hard, you know. I had to show them that I was honest, I could do the job, I was sincere, I wasn't a liar, or a robber, or a drug addict, or this or that. And because at that time there was lots of pointing at people. You can go to the stores; you can feel people following you. And right now you don't feel that no more. You don't feel that, because I think people are getting accustomed to seeing other cultures around.

AA: Now is that happening because they know you personally or just because they know all Latinos better?

FM: No, I think because people are getting accustomed to see different people. Because it's still existing, people who get in trouble, you know.

AA: Sure.

FM: I'm not saying one color or another. Everybody, but it's like I used to put this example to the kids at junior high. On a whiteboard I used to put the one black dot, and say, "Turn around." And as soon as you'd turn around again, what's the first thing you're going to see? The black dot. That's what we are. That's the example I used to put to the kids. If you are naughty, they are going to be pointing to you right away. If you're not, they're not going to see you.

AA: Yes.

FM: They're not going to put, they're not going to notice you, and they're not going to be pointing to you. That's what I used to tell them. But it was good.

AA: By the time that you went and you started working at the school, you had already attended welding school and hair styling school. So you had all those years of experience.

FM: Yes, but I mean, at the school, at my job, it's not required for me to write. The only thing I had to do is to translate, and kind of report to the principal, to the social worker, or to the counselors, or to the nurse, or to the parents, what I talk about. And I never went to school to learn English. Right now, I still don't know how to write English. I can speak my English is really weird because sometimes I don't spell it right, sometimes I don't pronounce it right. Even lately, the kids tell me, "What are you talking? English or Spanish."

AA: [Chuckles]

FM: I say, "Well, you know what? You don't understand me. I can call the principal and there is plenty, they understand me." But I know I should learn English. But I'm lazy, I guess.

AA: Well, you speak English well enough, but you said that you don't write it very well.

FM: No, I don't write it. If I try to write it, I make many, many mistakes.

AA: So when you have to do reports, you tell somebody and they write it?

FM: When I was in cosmetology, I used to write my own notes from the teachers. But that wasn't in Spanish or English, that was the way I *hear* it. Because that's what I was writing. The students, they used to get in my notes, "What the heck is this? It's not Spanish, it's not English." No, that's the way I *hear* it. It's the way I write, it's the only way I understand it. That means I invent my own language in there. But that's what happened.

AA: So how many years now has this been going on that somebody else does the reports?

FM: What do you mean somebody else?

AA: Like when you have to do a report at school. And you sit down, you talk to somebody, and they actually write down?

FM: No, no, they don't write it down. They just . . .

AA: They just know?

FM: They just know the information from me. And now I don't even need to tell them, because I think I have built trust. I have built that, the work relation, you know, that they trust me now.

AA: Yes.

FM: Because I know the rules, because I know the procedures, because I know what to decide for what's best for the kids, talk to the parents. I arrange meetings. I help kids who need help, glasses, dental, and stuff like that. I find a way to find them help. And that means, I don't write nothing.

AA: Now, you said that you visit with the parents. I have a question about the parents. How do you see the parents and their attitudes about their children's education back then and now? The same thing? Is there a change? And if so, how is there a change?

FM: Back then, it was really hard because [sighs] I want to say, in those days, parents they didn't used to have enough knowledge. Or, they didn't care about the kids. Or they couldn't do anything about it. Because sometimes many parents, they used to come to me and say, "What you want me to do? The law doesn't let me punish my kids."

AA: Yes.

FM: "You complain about my kids, I complain about my kids. What should I do?" I said, "Well, the law is in your hands. You can ground them; you can take away things that they like." But they didn't do it. Now, these days, I think those parents who had their kids in the school then before, those kids grew up. Now they have the young kids, and they kind of understand and follow the routine that is going on around here. In some cases, it's a little bit easier, because now they know they have to get in touch with the school any time they miss school. They have to get in touch with the school when the kids misbehave. They have to come to school, you know, stuff like that. But still it's a war to bring parents to school, to help students, to help their kids to become successful in life.

AA: Yes.

FM: There still are lots of them needing that. And I think we need somebody, a leader, who has enough power to decide to go over the principals and says, "You know what? This day we're going to choose to bring parents to school." And that's it, because I can't do it. I can't do it

because I don't know if they trust me for that or not. To myself, I think I can do it. But I don't know. It's questionable.

AA: How long have you been at the school district?

FM: Twenty-three years.

AA: Wow.

FM: A long time.

AA: So you've seen a lot of changes in the students, the parents, the teachers, and the administration.

FM: Oh yes.

AA: What has changed between then and now that kind of pops up into your mind as a significant change, as a big change?

FM: Oh, man. Well, these days, more Hispanic people know English. Every day, they grow more and more and more. And like I say, those parents, they had kids in the school, and now those kids have kids, and they know English. I mean, it's not a lack of understanding right now, the way it used to be before. And other than that, I guess, parents understand that they have to work. They have to deal with the kids, and keep helping them. But there's still lots need of that, you know. But that's what I see as a difference.

AA: And in the school among the teachers or administration, anything different?

FM: No, I don't think so.

AA: So they just keep doing the same thing.

FM: Keep doing the same thing, yes. I think as teachers, it's just a routine. They keep doing the same things year through year, trying to teach the kids. And I think it's more, there's just more chances for kids these days. But, you know, the kids . . .

AA: For example?

FM: Well, they have classes for music, Spanish, Chinese language, and phys. ed.—the physical education, all the core classes. It's just more chances for the students to learn more. A chance to get into the computers, learn that stuff. And I think it's getting better but, it's taking many years.

AA: Another question. In the first part of the interview you mentioned that you get along well with your colleagues, your coworkers, and so on. But you see them outside of the school at the grocery store or church or . . .

FM: Yes.

AA: Somewhere. How is that relationship?

FM: How can I tell you? I get along with them.

AA: How about the experience of other Latinos in the community? What observations do you have about their experiences?

FM: For example, sometimes when I decide to go to church, because a meal is going on to raise money, or because there's a reunion, because at some of the churches, the Catholics or whatever religion, and sometimes I go, and I see lots of Anglos talking to Hispanics. But I don't know how much they relate to each other because I don't do that. I don't know why, I don't know if it's just me.

AA: Are there a lot of Latinos working in the school district?

FM: I'm going to say some. I want to say maybe thirty Latinos work in the school system.

AA: In what kind of positions?

FM: Liaison, paras [paraprofessionals], helpers, you know, no I don't think too many professionally working for the school system.

AA: Now in the first part of the conversation you mentioned that one of the things that drew the Latino population here was the type of industry that exists here. For example, the turkey plant.

FM: Yes. It's really easy to get in the turkey plant. And it is lots of help from the government. Something I don't agree with it, but I used to hear lots of people from Texas, they used to come over here and get financial help through family services when they have houses for rent in Texas.

AA: Does that still exist?

FM: Yes, I notice there is lots of help here in Minnesota and here in Willmar, you know, for families. Just like, let's see, I think that was a week ago, this family, they had a fire in the house, they lost *everything*. Well, right now they have a new house. They're getting money from the family services, they're getting money from different agencies, there was a race in the Willmar middle school to find out which grade between sixth, seventh and eighth grade raised more money for these people. There's thousands already billed. I mean this family's getting lots of help.

AA: How did they acquire the new house?

FM: I think that was through Habitat [Habitat for Humanity]. Yes, I think. I'm not sure. But they got a new house and, I see them there was a two, three days at the mall. And they bought new clothes, and they're feeling happy, and this and that. And I mean it's no problem for them now.

AA: Now, so if they're drawn here because of the industry, the turkey plant or similar businesses, they don't always stay there. Some of them obviously find other work. What other areas are they moving into?

FM: Well, most of them, they're still at that Jennie-O Turkey company. Other than that, they have this company, they make sandpapers. Other ones, they're I see more and more opening mechanic shops.

AA: So businesses of their own?

FM: Businesses of their own, yes. We have now one, two, three I think there are four Mexican restaurants now. We have two stores, two Mexican grocery stores. That's getting more business going on around here. Construction, there's lots of work here.

AA: Are there retail businesses hiring Latinos?

FM: I don't think so, but most some of the people, I know, they try to get business going on through their house, because they sell meals from Honduras, or Venezuela, or Mexico, or Texas, or this or that. And they sell meals to people who they know.

AA: Out of their house?

FM: Out of their house. And they're not bad. Yes, they're pretty good. I have tried them many times.

AA: [Chuckles]

FM: Different ones. They sell tamales.

AA: Oh, sure.

FM: They sell bread and they're pretty good. I buy it from them. But that's as much as work I have seen so far.

AA: But I imagine that the stuff that they sell out of their house, foods and other things is to *supplement* income rather than their only source of income.

FM: Correct. Well not always. There are some, they use it for income.

AA: That's the only?

FM: Yes, because they don't work, or they can't find a job, or stuff like that. I know that, because two of the families that I know, the kids used to work for me. And they talked to me about it. That's why I gave them jobs, to help them to help the rest of their family.

AA: Sure.

FM: They try, you know.

AA: Yes, every new group that starts to settle in the community has some difficulties adjusting and getting accepted.

FM: Yes.

AA: Now the new group are the Africans, Somalis, for example. How is relationship playing, especially with the Latinos that have been here for, like you, for fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years?

FM: Oh, man. I, geez, how can I tell you that, to me, it's no problem. Because the only relation I have with the Somalian people is the relation I have through the school. And most of these people, they know me. They know me because they have been to school.

AA: Sure.

FM: Or talking to the kids or talking to teachers and I had to be present. Other than that, I don't know. I mean, they have their own jobs in town, they are opening new businesses, I don't see them getting involved with anybody other than themselves, because many times I see them getting together on the corners of the streets, a bunch of Somalian people, and they just talk. And I haven't seen other people talking to them or getting involved with them. Nothing like that. You know, I don't, no, no concerns.

AA: So maybe that's just a sign that they're getting adjusted and getting to feel comfortable here.

FM: Yes, I think so. There is lots of talking about the Somalian people driving in town. Because supposedly they don't know how to drive, and they're making many mistakes, and this and that.

AA: [Chuckles]

FM: But, you know, it's okay, I guess. They don't bother me.

AA: Well, good. How about the children in school?

FM: Which children, the Somalian children?

AA: Both the . . .

FM: It is they get along okay. Once in a while, first, that age of kids is really, really hard. And I believe anybody who tries to say something different, they will be wrong. Because when I remember I was that age, I was terrible. And I didn't know if I was going or was staying or nothing like that. And I'm guessing that kids these days are in the same situation. And most of the time, because they don't understand the language of the other kids, they believe that they're talking about them.

AA: Oh, okay.

FM: It's something that happened to me, too. And I'm guessing the same thing for the kids, you know. "He's talking about me, and he's looking at me and laughing and talking in Somalian." "How do you know he's talking about you? You speak Somalian?" "No." "That means, how do you know?" You know, but that's the only problem I have seen at the middle school, that they don't understand the language, they have to complain. And that, I don't see no difference, or no special preference, or nothing like that at the schools.

AA: Oh, good. It looks like progress.

FM: Yes. I think so. We're just getting accustomed to dealing with different cultures around here. First it was Hispanics, and then after the Hispanics it was the people from Venezuela, and then after that the people from Honduras, now the people from Somalia. They're welcome. But yes, we have to deal with their culture, their customs, and their language.

AA: Yes. Are any of those customs intermingling?

FM: I don't think so.

AA: So Latinos keep their culture and the Somalians theirs, and the other groups their own?

FM: Yes, I haven't seen any mix. It's still everything separate. Even from parents of students, still separated, because I and, well, not everyone. I have seen some Hispanic kids that they get along with Americans and Somalians. And these same Somalian kids together with the Americans and the Hispanics. But that's very minimal.

AA: Well, good. Any other observations about how through the years Willmar has been impacted by Latinos? What contributions, what achievements?

FM: I just know there are more and more students from different parts of the world. They're getting more education, they're getting professions, and that's it.

AA: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

FM: You're welcome.