Porfirio Diaz
Narrator

Abner Arauza
Interviewer

February 24, 2013
Minnesota State University Moorhead Campus
American Multicultural Studies Office
Moorhead, Minnesota

Lideres Latinos Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

Profirio Diaz **-PD**
Abner Arauza **-AA**

AA: This is Abner Arauza in Moorhead, Minnesota. I am interviewing Porfirio Diaz Martinez. It is February 24, 2013, and I am interviewing him on the MSUM campus in the American Multicultural Studies Office. Porfirio, thank you so much for giving us time for the interview.

PD: My pleasure.

AA: As a matter, you know; just to set the background, give me your name and ethnicity.

PD: My name is Porfirio Diaz Martinez and I am a hundred percent Mexican. Both my parents were born and raised there and so was I.

AA: A hundred percent. That sounds proud. [Chuckles]

PD: [Chuckles] I'm very proud of my heritage, yes.

AA: Good. Let me have your parents' names.

PD: Ah, my mom is Maria Cruz Diaz and my dad is Porfirio Diaz, Senior.

AA: Okay, so you're?

PD: So I'm Junior, yes.

AA: You're junior. Okay. Where were they born?

PD: They were both born in the same town in Guanajuato, well; they were born in the city of Moroleon, Uriangato, which is kind of like Fargo-Moorhead. It is two cities combined.

AA: Okay. And it's called what?

PD: Ah, Moroleon.

AA: Moroleon? M-O-?

PD: Like Leon. And then Uriangato.

AA: Okay, in Guanajuato.

PD: In the state of Guanajuato.

AA: Guanajuato. Okay.

PD: Yes. And which is I would say, in a personal car, about three to four hours north of Mexico City.

AA: Oh, okay. Okay. Right in the heart of Mexico. Do you have brothers and sisters?

PD: I do. I have an older sister, Susana Franco, she's married now. And I have two younger brothers who are twins, Alexander and Obed.

AA: Okay. What are their ages?

PD: Ah, they are fourteen, and my sister is twenty-four.

AA: Okay. Now, what is your age and your birthdate?

PD: I am twenty-three and I was born on September 11, 1989.

AA: Where were you born?

PD: I was born in Moroleon, Guanajuato.

AA: Oh. Okay.

PD: Where my parents were born.

AA: So before they came here.

PD: Yes, yes.

AA: Was all your family born there?

PD: Ah, no, not my brothers. My sister was.

AA: Okay.

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PD: My sister's older than me. She was born there, and so was I, but my brothers were born here in Fergus Falls.

AA: Okay. So your family has been here that long.

PD: Yes.

AA: What is your education level?

PD: I received my bachelor's degree at Concordia, from Concordia College in Moorhead.

AA: Oh. Okay. Good. And your major?

PD: International business, and focusing on management.

AA: Okay, international business. So that means you have an eye for?

PD: For traveling, yes.

AA: Okay.

PD: Yes, I want to.

AA: And does that have anything to do with Mexico, back home?

PD: Not necessarily. Since I was younger, I've always liked the idea of traveling and doing it in the business world, and I think I would enjoy that.

AA: Now, what year did your family settle in Pelican Rapids?

PD: It was the winter of 1997, which was one of the worst.

AA: Okay. [Chuckles]

PD: So I got here and I was amazed. I mean, I didn't know what snow would be like and it was very tough for me. And my sister, too, but it was tougher for me to accommodate in the different culture, and I disliked school so much that I would cry every day, and I'd want to go home every day. I did not enjoy it. I missed back home a lot.

AA: Okay.

PD: Because I got here in first grade. But then after that, I got here for like half the year and then into second grade. I really liked my teacher, so that made it better, and after that it was just normal from there.

AA: So you were six when you arrived, five?

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PD: I was seven.

AA: Seven. Okay.

PD: Yes. I enrolled in first grade.

AA: What didn't you like about school?

PD: And like for most of the Latinos when we get here, mostly people from Mexico.

AA: Yes.

PD: We would get dropped down a grade, so we could pick up on English.

AA: Oh, okay. So regardless of what grade you were in in Mexico, you were dropped down.

PD: You would drop down a grade when …

AA: And primarily for language.

PD: Yes. Yes, when we got here.

AA: Okay.

PD: So like my sister, she got dropped down a grade. So I would have technically been in second grade when I got here.

AA: Yes.

PD: But they dropped me down to first grade.

AA: What didn't you like about the school?

PD: My teacher was a little hard. And just like I said, I missed family back home and a completely different culture. I couldn't communicate with the teacher or my classmates. There at the time when I got here, in my classroom there was just one girl who could speak Spanish. Not fluent, but like, I mean, I could understand her. And that was it though, everyone else there didn't speak Spanish at all.

AA: Sure. Was she Mexican also?

PD: I think she was born in, she doesn't live in Pelican, she moved when we were in like fourth grade, but I knew who her parents were. She was Latina.

AA: Okay.

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PD: But that's definitely changed in Pelican though. Now you see classrooms with probably one third Latinos, and the other third Somali, and then the other third white people.

AA: Wow.

PD: So it's really neat to go in there, in the classroom, and see that big change from when I first got here.

AA: Yes. Yes. Do you think first grade would have been different for you if?

PD: If we were…

AA: there were more kids…

PD: Like if I would have come now?

AA: Yes.

PD: I think so. I also think I wouldn't have learned English as fast.

AA: [Chuckles] Yes.

PD: If there would have been a lot of Hispanics around, and then that would have made it easier for me. So I think it would have taken a little bit longer for me to pick up on English.

AA: So coming when you came here had its disadvantages and some advantages.

PD: Yes. Yes, I didn't like the food.

AA: Yes.

PD: The weather, everything.

AA: How about your sister? How did she take to school?

PD: See, for her it was different. She had about three friends from back home that were here already when we got here.

AA: Oh.

PD: In her grade.

AA: Sure.

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PD: So it wasn't that bad for her. She had actually someone that she knew and I think that made it easier for her. So I think it was a little bit hard for her, too, but not as tough as it was for me, I think.

AA: How did your family hear of Pelican Rapids and what made them decide to come here?

PD: Primarily it was economic reasons.

AA: Yes.

PD: Well, my parents heard it from an aunt who still lives in Pelican, Magdalena.

AA: One of your aunts?

PD: One of my mom's aunts.

AA: Okay.

PD: Yes, we moved to Minnesota in 1997. So I think my dad must have applied for our green cards in, I don't know, maybe 1994 or 1995.

AA: Okay.

PD: And then we had our appointment in Juarez, I believe, maybe 1995 or 1996. And then we got our green cards and I think two months after that is when we came, we came up.

AA: So to get a green card you have to have a destination where you're going to go?

PD: To be honest, I'm not sure.

AA: Okay.

PD: I think maybe you do. I think you have to do a destination.

AA: Okay.

PD: I mean, I was so young that I don't remember.

AA: Yes.

PD: If that was the case.

AA: But your family knew that you were coming to Pelican?

PD: Yes.

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AA: Yes.

PD: And you do need a reference of someone who's here when you're applying for to get your residence of the United States. And so my parents used my aunt. Well, my mom's aunt, in that case.

AA: So when your family arrived here. Well, I guess, first, how did you actually physically get here? Did you drive, just the family?

PD: We drove.

AA: Just the family or several families together?

PD: When we did, it was just, well, we drove with the aunt, with my mom's aunt.

AA: Okay.

PD: They went down to Mexico, her and her husband, and we drove back with them in a van.

AA: Sure.

PD: All the way from Guanajuato, which is about a three-day drive, I mean, if you're stopping and sleeping overnight at a hotel and things like that.

AA: Yes.

PD: It's about a three-day.

AA: Was your aunt from Guanajuato also?

PD: Yes.

AA: Same town?

PD: Same town, yes. I would say, for the most part, a lot of families are related in Pelican Rapids.

AA: So, Moroleon is taking Pelican Rapids over?

PD: Yes. [Laughs]

AA: [Laughs]

PD: Moroleon and Uriangato together, yes.

AA: Yes.

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PD: It's mainly Uriangato.

AA: Oh.

PD: But now in the past years there has been quite a lot of people from different parts of Mexico moving in, and a lot of people from Guatemala and El Salvador.

AA: Sure.

PD: Also a lot of people from Texas, too, have been moving in.

AA: Oh, really.

PD: But for the most part, all the people that are from Mexico most of them are related. Not everyone, but a lot of them are family related.

AA: And from the same town.

PD: And from the same area, from *el estado* [the state] Guanajuanto, yes.

AA: Okay. Are there actually other cities in Mexico that are represented in Pelican?

PD: That are represented in Pelican? Let me think. [Pauses] Yes.

AA: Yes.

PD: Oh, yes. There's plenty of families that are from other states in Mexico.

AA: Yes.

PD: Some from Michoacán, and Guerrero, things like that.

AA: How about from Texas? Where are they coming from?

PD: As I mentioned to you earlier, mostly from the Valley. [The southernmost tip of Texas is known as the Golden Valley, or the Valley.]

AA: Okay.

PD: Right now I coach a kid in soccer that his family is from Brownsville [Texas]. He was born there.

AA: Okay.

PD: And they moved up here.

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AA: Okay. Now I know that the Texas-Mexico border has kind of a unique situation in that it's like a fluid border. They may be Mexican citizens but actually live on the US side, simply because that's what they choose to do and they don't have to show proof of anything, and go back and forth. So the families that you say from the Valley, are they actually Texans? Or they are Mexicans that?

PD: Well, the ones that I know, they are actually Texans.

AA: Okay.

PD: Were born in Texas. And then they moved here.

AA: Okay.

PD: The ones that live in Pelican that I know of.

AA: Wow. Do you know how they hear of Pelican?

PD: Mainly through family members, too.

AA: Okay.

PD: Yes

AA: Yes, because that's probably the most common, but I know that some companies will advertise down there.

PD: Yes.

AA: Or send even recruiters to find workers to come up here.

PD: Yes.

AA: So it's always interesting to find out how people that are settling especially like in Pelican Rapids, you know, how they find out about it.

PD: I know a family, a pretty big family that they used to live in California and then they moved out to Minnesota, and they've been here for quite a bit, too. Probably about ten years.

AA: Okay.

PD: So they've settled in quite well.

AA: And they were *Californianos* [Californians, from California, like saying Minnesotans] rather than Mexicans?

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PD: Correct.

AA: In California and the. . .

PD: Yes.

AA: Wow. Was there a support network in place when your family arrived? And I guess since, you know, I mean, you've got to stay somewhere. So was there a network that helped to find housing, jobs, health services, schools, etcetera? You know, and by network I'm referring to any formal network like mom, dad, so on, and so forth.

PD: Yes.

AA: I mean the aunts, uncles, and so on, friends, or agencies that provide specific services.

PD: Well, all the support that people would get when they got here was basically family or friends from back home.

AA: Okay.

PD: You know that's how you would get your support. Like in our case, it was around we got here, and we had a place.

AA: Sure.

PD: We lived with them for [sighs] oh, I don't know maybe three, four months, and then we moved into an apartment. So that was that. But as far as agencies go, there was a lady named Graciela Kretchman. Ah, she lives in Fergus Falls now.

AA: Can you spell Kretchman?

PD: I believe it is K-R-E-T-C-H-M-A-N.

AA: Okay.

PD: She did a lot for a lot of the Hispanic families when they were moving in here. I believe that she was paid, I believe, by our local church in Pelican Rapids.

AA: Okay.

PD: The priest would pay her to help out all the families that were starting to move in.

AA: Yes.

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PD: I think, she was, by far, the person who's supported most of the Mexican families that were moving in. I know for my mom's case, when she was pregnant with my brothers, she would bring her to every appointment that she had at the hospital, due to my dad working, so he wouldn't be able to get out. I mean she would do that, the interpreting part, also the driving part. She would provide families with clothing, with clothes. And, you know, she did a lot. So I think and that was for every family that moved in, too. She did a lot of work. Ah, right now she doesn't do as much. She just does it on her own now. You know, if someone asks her, she'll gladly help people out, but she doesn't work as much as she used to back in the day. She just interprets for some people now.

AA: So the church is no longer involved?

PD: Yes, it's no longer involved now.

AA: Okay.

PD: But back in the day when we got here.

AA: Yes, sometimes in some areas churches reach out to newly arrivals.

PD: Yes.

AA: What church was this?

PD: This was Saint Leonard's Catholic Church in town.

AA: Catholic Church.

PD: Yes.

AA: How about other churches?

PD: There was a . . .

AA: Any others that were involved?

PD: Not that I mean, not that I know of. I can think of another one. It's a Baptist church, but I forget the name of it.

AA: Okay.

PD: There was a lady also. Rosa Salas. She did a lot for people, too, helping them with food and clothing. She did a lot, too, for people. Through that church, also, she was not from Saint Leonard's but from the Baptist church. I can't recall the name.

AA: Okay.

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PD: So it was mainly the churches. There was a Social Service but then that didn't come until later on. But not many people reached out to it though. I know that it's helped out a lot of the Somali community.

AA: Sure.

PD: The Lutheran Social Services in town.

AA: Oh, okay.

PD: That's helped out everyone else, too, but for the most part, I think, it benefits mostly the Somali community a lot.

AA: Was Lutheran Social Services in Pelican at the time you arrived?

PD: I'm not sure. I was so young that I don't know.

AA: Okay.

PD: It might have been.

AA: I'm wondering if Latinos just didn't go there.

PD: I think so. It could have been there.

AA: And even if it was there or if it or what.

PD: It could have been. But I mean, since I remember, it's been there for a while since I was probably ten. So yes, it's been there when my family got there.

AA: Okay.

PD: So that's as much as I can think of support that, you know, that we got. Other than that, yes, like I said, it was mainly friends and family.

AA: How did your dad find a job?

PD: The biggest employer is the West Central Turkeys plant.

AA: Yes.

PD: You know, and it's labor, so they basically hire pretty much anyone.

AA: Sure.

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PD: And well, that was part of the reason why we came here, because my aunt, you know, she was pretty sure that there was a big employer here and that they would hire. So that's why.

AA: Now you say that they're the biggest employers, so that means that there's other places where Latinos are now finding work?

PD: It's around the area. In Pelican it's the biggest employer, though. They are, there are Hispanics, Latinos working other places in town.

AA: Sure.

PD: But, you know, most of the time you speak English. And a lot of the Mexican families, I mean, the parents, you know, a lot of them don't speak English fluent. So a lot of them, I would say maybe ninety percent, more than that, work at the plant.

AA: What other communities?

PD: I know that a lot of families from Pelican Rapids, they do drive to Perham. There's quite a few factories over there that they work at, too. I believe it's Frito Lay and some other companies that hire, too.

AA: How far is Perham?

PD: Perham is about a thirty minute drive from Pelican.

AA: Okay.

PD: And I know people commute every day. Also, a lot of people commute to Detroit Lakes to work at, I believe, it's at a greenhouse, flower greenhouse.

AA: Sure.

PD: And then also some people commute to Park Rapids, too, which it's about an hour drive.

AA: Wow. Do they commute as a group?

PD: Yes. Yes, they usually carpool. But for the most part though, everyone stays at the plant. I believe, it's one of the employers that pay the best out of all around the area there.

AA: So when families arrive they already know to go look there.

PD: Yes. Yes. And I know a lot of people, for the most part when we got here, you know, many people were just basic line workers at the plant. I know a lot of them have, you know, supervisor titles now, and so they're moving up, too.

AA: If they're in supervisors' positions, it's because they have been here a long time?

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PD: Have been here a long time.

AA: Or skills?

PD: Skills for the most part, kids that went to high school and have learned English.

AA: Oh, language.

PD: Language.

AA: Yes.

PD: Yes, if you can't speak English fluent you will never get a supervisor position.

AA: Yes. So when did these families start arriving in Pelican?

PD: When we got to Minnesota in 1997, from the top of my head, I can count, I would say thirty families probably were here.

AA: Wow. And now?

PD: Now, I would say, close to two hundred families. I feel like after we moved, then people, you know since 1997 then people started coming. And quite a lot.

AA: Okay.

PD: It was during, I think a lot of it has to do with there was an amnesty in, I think, it's nineteen, well, when my dad applied, I believe it was President Reagan who did this.

AA: Sure.

PD: And that's when a lot of, you know, a lot of the dads that were working in the States for quite a bit, that's when they got this, the opportunity to do it. So that's how my dad got to become a resident and so did we.

AA: Yes.

PD: And now, now all of my family, now we're all citizens, so we all took the citizenship test.

AA: While you were here?

PD: Yes. I took it when I turned eighteen.

AA: Wow.

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PD: Same with my sister, and then my parents took it about two or three years ago.

AA: Now your family came as a family when you came here.

PD: Yes.

AA: Whereas in some places, you know, the dad comes or a brother, you know one member of the family. And gets settled in and *then* brings the rest of the family. How about out in the community? Are they more like your family? Or they are more like straggling in?

PD: The majority like my family. They would come as a whole and then, you know, they would just settle in. But there are a few families where I have seen the dad come first. He works and gets a place to live and then brings the family.

AA: Sure.

PD: But it's most common to just travel as a whole, bring the whole family with.

AA: And they come like one family, per family, or do they come in groups, or two, three families together?

PD: No, it's just usually per family. Since everyone has different appointments in Juarez for when they get there.

AA: Okay.

PD: Get to come here and all that stuff.

AA: What factors influenced your family's decision to stay in the area? I mean, once you came in, and they kind of looked around and got a job.

PD: Yes, we always joke around about *why Minnesota*. [Laughs] Especially last week or whenever the two storms in within like a week were.

AA: [Chuckles]

PD: But I think they're just comfortable now here.

AA: Yes.

PD: And, you know, there's a lot of Latinos around. And I think that's the main part that they're comfortable with, that's why they decided to stay here.

AA: Okay.

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PD: But it is in my plans to move, to move out of Pelican to go to a bigger city. But for in my parents' case, you know, I think they'll stay here until my brothers' graduate, which is for about six more years. And I think for a lot of the families, well, will stay around the area in Pelican for quite a bit, probably their whole lives.

AA: Yes.

PD: I think, yes, you know, that the turkey plant is right there. I think that's a factor, you know, and provides what a lot of families need. So I think that's one of the main factors.

AA: Now you said your parents will probably stay until your brother graduates. And then?

PD: Then they want to stay until they graduate college, which is quite a while a way.

AA: Oh, okay.

PD: And then they plan on retiring and opening something up down in Mexico, so that they can, you know, live life. And that's their plan anyway, to go back and live there.

AA: So they still dream of back home.

PD: Yes, yes.

AA: [Chuckles]

PD: Yes, they do.

AA: Yes.

PD: In my case, I mean, I was born there, and we go back every other year. And I love it. I love family. I still have my mom's parents there. And I have plenty of aunts and uncles and cousins and stuff. But I just see my life here, you know, it's easier.

AA: Okay.

PD: I've gotten accustomed, I've gotten Americanized.

AA: Now if. . .?

PD: I don't see myself living there.

AA: Yes. If I was to meet your dad and your mom, and I say, "Where is home?" Would they say Pelican? Would they say?

PD: [Chuckles] I think they would respond as in Mexico.

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AA: Okay.

PD: If you were to ask me, I would say here. And if you were to ask my brothers, obviously, here—they were born here.

AA: Sure.

PD: But that's interesting, because my friends and I were talking about it the other day. When you ask some of these kids, "Where are you from?" A lot of the times, you know, they give you an answer of, "Oh, I am Mexican." But, you know, really they're Americans, they were born here.

AA: [Chuckles]

PD: They are of Mexican descent.

AA: Okay.

PD: It's just; you know that it's interesting how some kids still answer, "Oh, I'm Mexican."

AA: Sure.

PD: If they ask you, "Oh, where are from?" "Oh, you know, I am from Mexico." But they were born here, but they are of Mexican parents, so I think that's neat in a way, you know. I'm proud of it and they don't forget where their parents came from, so that's a good thing.

AA: Sure. Can you think of a couple of experiences, I know you were very young, but if you can think of a couple of experiences that stand out in making your adjustment from coming as a result of coming from Guanajuato to Pelican Rapids?

PD: I have to think about this one for a little bit.

AA: Okay.

PD: [Pause] I would say definitely, you know, in the food. That was a big thing for me, making adjustments there. Making adjustments in school. School was different, very different, to learn all the English, all the grammar, which was pretty tough for me. But, you know, when you're a kid, you pick up at everything when you're young.

AA: Sure.

PD: So it was easier for me to learn English that was also an adjustment, an adjustment I had to make. Just all the culture things, you know, the American ways. Just so many things are different than from back home. Even when we were in high school, middle school.

AA: Okay.

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PD: You know, Latinos your all friends were always touching each other. And, you know, that you're showing love, you know, where your friendship is. And to some people here that might seem like, oh, you know, no, we don't do that.

AA: [Chuckles]

PD: But adjustments like that, I feel that, you know, we had to make, what else?

AA: When you talk about it being different in school, was it the environment or was it the language?

PD: Both. Maybe not as much as the environment but the language.

AA: Okay.

PD: The language would be the major reason, yes.

AA: Have you maintained contact with your relatives in Mexico?

PD: Yes. My mom contacts, you know, she calls my grandma every week.

AA: Yes.

PD: Most of the time every Sunday. Well, even during the week, you know, she'll just pick up the phone and call back home. With my aunts, too, I usually text home with my aunts from down there. Also with cousins and stuff through Facebook, and with friends, too, through Facebook, from here to there, there is contact, quite frequently.

AA: Do you go see?

PD: Even Skype sometimes, too. Things like that.

AA: Do you go visit?

PD: Yes, we go usually, we try to go every other year. During Christmas break. Over Christmas and New Year's Eve and New Year's [Day]. That's when we try to make it down there, to be with family.

AA: Okay.

PD: But it's not always possible though. The plant has a lot of restrictions on when they only allow a certain number of people to take vacations from a certain department at a time. And usually who has the most seniority gets to choose when they want vacation.

AA: I see.

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PD: So a lot of the times might not go during December, but we'll still make it down there in the summer or whenever it is available.

AA: Have you maintained contact with Mexico, the cultural Mexico, and the history and all the traditions and everything that Mexico is? In addition to the family. You know, in other words, you maintain contact with the family because it's family. How about like when you started, when we started the conversation you said, "*Puro Mexicano*," [Pure Mexican] you know. [Chuckles]

PD: Yes.

AA: Or a hundred percent Mexicano.

PD: My generation, I feel we have, you know, we keep that tradition. I think the generation lower, like my brothers, it's a little different. But can you repeat the question again?

AA: Yes. If you're still connected?

PD: Oh, yes. There's many things that I still see. I mean, a small thing, and when I was raised when your parents call you, or an adult, you say . . .

AA: Sure.

PD: They call you *mande*? [Direct translation is "Tell me again." It is a respectful way of asking for repetition or clarification. *Mande* is used with elders, parents, and other persons of authority.]

AA: Okay.

PD: A lot of the kids my brother's age, my brothers, "*Que*? [What?]" [*Que* means the same thing as *mande* but is used with peers, not with persons in authority or elders. To use *que* with an elder shows disrespect. Many would say the person using *que* with an elder lacks education or is uncouth, ill-mannered.]

AA: Yes.

PD: You know, to your parents, "*Que*?"

AA: What.

PD: What, instead of *mande*.

AA: [Chuckles] Yes.

PD: Little things like that, I think they've gone more Americanized and that's changing a little bit. But, we still keep it though. And I try to tell them to, you know, have manners and things like that.

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AA: Okay.

PD: Another big thing is, you know, *quinceañeras* are still celebrated every summer. We usually have like five or six a year during the summer. [*Quineceañera is* the celebration of a girl's fifteenth birthday. It marks the transition from childhood to young womanhood. The celebration varies significantly across Latin American countries; in some countries, for example, a *quinceañera* takes on more religious overtones.]

AA: Sure.

PD: That's a big thing for the Latina girls in Pelican Rapids.

AA: [Chuckles] I see.

PD: I think there's like four or five this summer coming up. And that's another big thing. When we were in high school, me and my friends, you know, the first years it was a little bit tougher for our principal to accept it, but every Cinco de Mayo, you know, we would get out. The fifth of May -- commemorates the Mexican army's 1862 victory over France at the Battle of Puebla during the Franco-Mexican War (1861-1867).] We would tell our parents to make us a note. And even if the principal didn't agree, we'd still get out, he couldn't stop us. And, you know, it was just celebrating, just having that pride, that tradition of being Mexican. And we just, you know, have fun, go out to a friend's, or go to Maplewood State Park and just grill some food, and just have a fun time with friends.

AA: That was on Cinco de Mayo? When you would not attend school?

PD: Yes, we would do that every Cinco de Mayo. We just get out of class.

AA: Okay.

PD: I think we did, the whole day and we would just grill and have fun.

AA: Now that was your group. Was there something for Cinco de Mayo in the community?

PD: No.

AA: Okay.

PD: Not for Cinco de Mayo, no. I've never seen anything like a big parade, or big event, and things like that.

AA: Okay.

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PD: I've never seen like that, not in Pelican, I don't think with that we've ever celebrated anything big as a community. Same goes for September 16th, which is [Mexico's] Independence Day.

AA: Sure.

PD: You know, people don't really celebrate that. A big thing that people do celebrate is *doce de diciembre,* which is *dia de la virgen.* [The Virgin of Guadalupe is considered the Patroness of Mexico and the Continental Americas. She is popularly invoked as *Patroness of the Unborn*. On December 12, Mexicans and other Latinos observe La Virgen de Guadalupe, an advocate of the downtrodden.]

AA: Yes.

PD: The church does celebrate that. It is a big thing for the Catholic community in Pelican. So that's one thing that they do celebrate. And I mean, the soccer team, too. A lot of people are really big fans of the Mexican national soccer team, that's another thing that's always been there.

AA: Okay.

PD: But yes, people in Pelican, they have pride, and in who they are, and I think that'll always keep on going. Even because even my brothers, like I was saying, that a lot of times, you know, they reply with, "We're Mexican."

AA: I see.

PD: And so I think you know, it'll keep on going. Who knows what they'll teach their kids? It more than likely, it will start fading away, but I always tell my brothers, you've got to know where your parents came from and you've got to have pride you have to know how to speak both languages. Never forget that, for sure. Like even your kids, you guys have to keep the tradition going, and never forget where you came from.

AA: So the cultural traditions are being passed down.

PD: Yes. Yes. Because well, my sister, she has two babies now. One is a year old and then one is seven. And she teaches them Spanish and tries to teach them all the cultural things that we do.

AA: Yes.

PD: So I think, yes, they are passed down.

AA: You have talked about some of the cultural traditions. What? Because you said that there is also some *Guatemaltecos* [Guatemalans] there.

PD: Not a lot, but there's a few, yes.

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AA: Some.

PD: A few families.

AA: Do they just kind of celebrate everything together? Or do they do their own thing?

PD: That's interesting, because they do. I feel like a lot of the time they blend in with the Mexican community, with the Mexican culture.

AA: Yes.

PD: Because, I mean, there's not many within our age group, within my age group that I went to school with or anything, so I don't know much about them.

AA: Yes.

PD: They're usually younger or older, which is parents, and then younger kids. So I don't know a lot about them. But, for most of the part, yes, they kind of go with our fellow.

AA: Now it's kind of interesting, because earlier you were telling me that you were here in town in Fargo, because you get together with your friends to play soccer, but you called it football.

PD: Yes.

AA: But you were raised here. So if you told somebody here "football," they're thinking of American football.

PD: They're thinking American football.

AA: You know, Cowboys and the Redskins or something, you know.

PD: Yes.

AA: And so you've absorbed that language and the like although you played college football.

PD: Yes.

AA: You're not out there slinging a football; you're out there kicking the soccer ball.

PD: Yes.

AA: So you're absorbing some of that stuff that's coming from Mexico.

PD: Sure.

AA: The culture, and the traditions, and likes, and interests.

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PD: Yes.

AA: How are your brothers taking to that? Because they were born here.

PD: They were born here. A big difference that I have seen, when it comes to me and my parents, well, them, too, because my parents aren't fluent in English. They'll understand it and speak it a little bit. But my sister who is older it's just interesting how these things happen. When I speak with my sister, most of the time it's in Spanish. I don't know why, it just is. When I speak with my brothers, it's always in English for the most part. I would say ninety-five percent of the time it's English. And same with my brothers and my sister, they will speak mostly Spanish to her. But then when it's with me, we speak English. And then, I mean, with the parents it's always Spanish.

AA: Even your brothers?

PD: Even my brothers, yes.

AA: So they speak it well?

PD: But here and there, you know, they'll speak English to our parents.

AA: Sure.

PD: But I'll always speak Spanish to them and same with my sister.

AA: So they speak Spanish well, they just prefer to?

PD: They prefer to do English.

AA: Yes.

PD: And a lot of times, even with my friends, a lot of times, we speak Spanglish.

AA: [Chuckles]

PD: You know, we'll be speaking in Spanish, and then all of a sudden you don't even notice, and you're speaking in English. Vice versa. So yes, I think that's a great gift and I love it. But yes, I think my brothers, that's one thing that my brothers do. Yes.

AA: How about with your friends? Like you're out here playing soccer, and what are you speaking with your friends?

PD: It's a little bit of both.

AA: Okay.

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PD: But I would say, for the most part, it's English. But probably sixty-forty though, we do speak a lot of Spanish. But it's mainly English.

AA: Okay.

PD: [Chuckles] A lot of people have always asked me, "Do you dream in English or Spanish?" [Laughs]

AA: [Laughs]

PD: I've never thought about that. But I think if I'm speaking, I have dreamt of both, you know, speaking in English or Spanish.

AA: [Chuckles]

PD: Which is always funny, because I think about it, and I'm like, it's true.

AA: Yes.

PD: Yes.

AA: How about out in public? Let's say, I don't know what the grocery store is in Pelican Rapids, but you're at the grocery store or post office regarding the mail. You run into another Latino. What do you speak?

PD: If it's one of my closer friends or someone around my age, that was someone that I went to high school with, I will speak in English.

AA: Okay.

PD: If it's an adult, I'll approach them in Spanish.

AA: Yes.

PD: Even if I know they speak English, I'll approach them in Spanish.

AA: Okay.

PD: For me, I don't know, more respect, kind of thing for me.

AA: Out of respect. Okay.

PD: I don't know why, but that's how it seems.

AA: Sure.

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PD: But, yes, when I see someone out in the town, if it's around my age group, then I'll approach them in English. But for the most part, especially if it's one of my friends, it'll usually be in English.

AA: A little while ago you touched on, you know, how your brothers sometimes will say "q*ue*," which is "what" to an adult.

PD: sure.

AA: As opposed to "*mande*" which is a respectful way of saying I didn't hear you, would you repeat it.

PD: Respectful.

AA: You know, what other things have you noticed that are changing in the traditions and culture?

PD: I think a lot of it has to do with the mothers working.

AA: Okay.

PD: Because, you know, when I was growing up, me and my sister had my mom the whole time. My dad was here working for half of the year and then he would be back home in Mexico. But I think she raised us that way. Whereas now, you know, all the moms work.

AA: Yes.

PD: So in school, half the day, some of them. A lot of them are in sports though. You know, they get to see their parents probably three, four hours out of the day.

AA: Okay.

PD: Which they don't get a lot of that same education that I feel we got when we were younger. I think that has something to do with it. And I think even the parents, you know, they have gotten accustomed to the American ways, too. And that's something that I plan on passing on to my children that I never want to lose, it's just that heritage, that tradition of how to be a Mexican, how I was born and raised. But I think some parents, especially the younger ones; they kind of lose that, and don't teach their kids those ways that we were taught.

AA: Sure.

PD: And I feel that's where it gets lost. [Pauses] And well, like what I see with my mom and dad and my brothers. Yes, they've gotten Americanized. But, you know, they're great kids and everything. But for the most part they were kind of raised they see my parents more as friends as

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than parents. I feel that my parents have opened up more to them, maybe since they're the youngest. And maybe that's why they act the way they do.

AA: Okay

PD: [Compared] to as when me and my sister were younger, I feel that my dad was a little bit harder on us. So I think a lot of the time that has to do with it, too. And we always had that respect for them, you know. Oh, it's our parents and with my brothers, you know, they're always joking around with them. And for the most part, seeing them more as friends as than parents.

AA: Okay.

PD: So I think that's where it gets lost, too. And, you know, you don't have the same respect.

AA: You know, change is difficult to measure if you don't have something to compare it to. When you go visit in Mexico and you see your parents interacting with your relatives down there, through the years have you seen your parents changing also? Or they pretty much remain steadfast with their culture and traditions and the beliefs?

PD: Yes. No, they remain. When we go visit, I have never noticed any changes within my parents.

AA: Okay.

PD: And the way they act and the way they are with their brothers, sisters, parents, and friends, I have always seen them the same.

AA: Yes.

PD: I don't think they lose anything at all. I mean, some might, a little bit here and there, but for the most part, I believe that, in my parents' case, they're the same people.

AA: Sure.

PD: Here and when they go back home.

AA: Good. What type of relationship did your family have with neighbors, both Latinos and non-Latinos through the years? Ah, you know when you arrived, and then when you felt comfortable.

PD: I would say when we moved to Pelican there wasn't a big, you know, there wasn't a big bond between white people and the Hispanics. But that started progressing when I was in, I don't know, I would say 2004, around that area, when I was into middle school that started to change. Ah, families started getting closer and more communication and things there. And also, a lot of the Hispanics, a lot of the Latinos started getting more involved into school activities, school

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sports. And that definitely helped a lot, because, you know, people would see that, you know, we wanted to be part of everything.

AA: Sure, sure.

PD: We weren't just here to cause trouble and be that stereotype where, oh, you know, Latinos are always just here for trouble.

AA: Yes.

PD: I think that caused a lot of families to get more comfortable with the Latinos and started talking more, build that relationship and bond with them. I think that helped a lot, being part of athletics, I mean, getting involved in the community, things like that. I feel that helped out a lot. But there was definitely a barrier when, you know, when I got here, I would say.

AA: Okay.

PD: But now, I think, you know, a third of the population in Pelican is Latino, so I think they've gotten used to it now, and they've accepted it, and I think, for the most part, no one really has a problem anymore as it used to be.

AA: Sure.

PD: Because even when I was in elementary school, you know, we would still hear racial comments here and there. But now I rarely do. I haven't heard one in a long time.

AA: Yes.

PD: But in my own town of Pelican, when we were younger, you know, here and there, if it was from classmates or sometimes even older people, too, we would hear racial . . .

AA: In the community or in school?

PD: In the community.

AA: Okay.

PD: No, not in the school. We never heard it in the school. No, the teachers were always great. But in the community we would hear it.

AA: Okay.

PD: But that has changed. I have never heard anything since I was young.

AA: Good. So everybody's now kind of getting along.

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PD: Yes. Yes, there's a bond there, for sure. And it's really neat because my brothers are wrestlers. And how many? I think, there are twelve weight classes. Eighteen, only three of them are white, and then the rest, three of them are white, one is Bosnian, and the rest are Latinos.

AA: Really. [Chuckling]

PD: So you have a whole team of wrestlers going to other schools, you know. Every other school has their roster is full of white kids. And then we get there, and it's hilarious because the announcer is always trying to pronounce Gutierrez and, you know, all these last names. And it's just funny, and it's really neat though, and interesting.

AA: Yes.

PD: And a lot of schools actually like that. So yes, it's really neat to see things like that.

AA: What's the mascot in Pelican Rapids?

PD: Ah, we are the Vikings.

AA: Oh, okay.

PD: Yes.

AA: So when are they going to change that to *Vikingos* then? [Vikings in Spanish.] [Chuckles]

PD: [Chuckles] Yes. Yes, hey, now that would be pretty cool.

AA: [Laughs] Yes. So how important was it for your family and your parents that you be accepted and you felt comfortable in the community? Or was it basically an economic decision to stay, regardless of how things were?

PD: Yes. I think that's how it was, you know. It was like, we're here, we got here, we're staying no matter what. You know, regardless of racism or anything, you know, we're staying because we're staying.

AA: Okay.

PD: Mainly for economic reason.

AA: What kinds of? I know that you've already talked about some of the issues that Latinos in your family dealt with when you arrived. Anything else that pops into mind, as you settled into the community and needed to go see a doctor, or the relationship with the schools, and, you know, the parents and the schools, or the children and the schools? Who did you play with after school?

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PD: That's changed. My sister's group, she's a little older, it was mainly just with her group, and you know, the Latinos.

AA: Sure.

PD: She would just mainly hang out with the Hispanic girls. That changed more towards my generation, my age group. You know, we started hanging out with our classmates, with white kids, and definitely now you'll see that big change in school now like with my brothers. They're always having white kids over. They're over at their places, and it's just a more friendly place now. It's definitely changed.

AA: Okay.

PD: But as in trouble or problems or struggles when we got there, I can't really think of any that you know, that pop out in my head like that was major. I know it was tough for some of the people to accept Latinos moving in.

AA: Sure.

PD: A lot of times, you know, they would pull out the racist comments and things like that.

AA: Yes.

PD: But as I said, that's changed, definitely. And I think it was maybe it was just xenophobia, maybe that fear of just like I've never seen one of you, like, what's happening or what's going on?

AA: [Chuckles]

PD: But I think that we struggle a little bit with that, but not to a major point where, you know, anything crazy occurred. But yes, nothing that I can think of that was major.

AA: Talk about the state or the condition of Latinos and education in Pelican, the academics part, what role it plays in your life and your future.

PD: Again, I go back to the same age groups, which I think is, you know, the longer we live here, the more the younger kids see, and the more Americanized they get, and they want something better.

AA: Sure.

PD: In my sister's case, that age group that people are now from between twenty-four to twenty-eight, you know, a lot of the times they didn't care about school. Many of them dropped out. Well, why do I need? I mean, I'm here; I can work at the plant. I get good money. That's all I need. I'm satisfied with that.

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AA: Yes.

PD: And a lot of them did do that. From that group, Miguel [Miguel Diaz, a friend who was also interviewed for this project. Miguel is in that age group but did earn a bachelor's degree.] is actually in that group. That I can think of from the top of my head, that was a big class, enough Latinos in that grade that graduated in 2005, I would say about twelve to fifteen Latinos.

AA: Sure.

PD: And only about five or six. So close to half of them went on to get their bachelor's degree in college. And half of them, they did graduate high school. Half of them ended up working in the plant and half of them went on to a college.

AA: Okay.

PD: But throughout the way, they did, you know, have a few dropouts. And then in my age group, definitely over half of people went on to college.

AA: Yes.

PD: And then, as the years, like the kids behind me, a few years younger than me, you know, the majority of the Latinos that graduate high school go on to college right away. I would say eighty percent of them do.

AA: Wow.

PD: Which is big.

AA: That's great.

PD: Yes, it's a big change from ten, fifteen years ago when I got here.

AA: Sure.

PD: I mean, *some* still have that mentality of, they don't really appreciate what their parents have done for them and all they think about is about, you know, I mean, I can get a job here, then I'll be satisfied, I'll be fine.

AA: Okay.

PD: And a lot of them don't take advantage of the importance, all that their parents have done for them to get them here and provide them with everything to give them a better education.

AA: Sure.

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PD: And do something for themselves. And a lot of them still have that mentality of, "I'll just go and work at the plant." But it's changing though. As I told you, I coach a group of kids.

AA: What age?

PD: Fourteen to sixteen years old.

AA: Okay.

PD: Soccer.

AA: So it includes your brothers?

PD: Yes. Yes, that includes my brothers. So I always tell them that, you know, to shoot for the stars, and never get satisfied with working at the plant. You guys want to be better than that. You guys want to be better than your parents. And I'm sure they want you to be better than them, so always shoot for the stars.

AA: Okay.

PD: And I always encourage them to plan on going on to college. Because a lot of them, two of them will be going to college next year. A lot of them in a couple of years. And so, yes, I always encourage them to do that. And for my brothers' age, I think, you know, they all have that mentality of going to college. And I think a lot of them have older siblings, too. Especially if their siblings have gone on to school, you know, they see that. So then they go, well, I have to I'm like, I'm kind of committed to doing it, too, because they did it. So I have to do it.

AA: So are your brothers talking about? Well, what role does education play?

PD: A major role, you know. [Chuckles] I'm like a parent to them. I'm always pushing them. My parents do, too. They push them a lot. You know, they get home after practice, the first thing they've got to do is homework, you know. Do your homework. That's a major role. And then go hang out with friends or do whatever, but first things first, you know.

AA: Sure.

PD: Do your homework. School comes first for everything. So it plays a big role.

AA: Other than Lutheran Social Services, are there any other organizations in that area in Pelican that provide services to the population?

PD: No. Not that I can think of, no. And for the most part, a lot of the families that are in Pelican, you know, they're settled in now.

AA: Yes.

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PD: And they live well. So I think that there is not much of a need for it.

AA: Yes.

PD: And, you know, there are a few families that move up here, here and there, but, you know, they've got their families' support, friends' support, and things like that.

AA: Okay.

PD: But yes, I think the need for it's not there anymore, so there's no other organizations that do that.

AA: So are you saying that even if there was an organization, Latinos probably wouldn't go?

PD: I would say [sighs] a few would. There's still quite a bit of illegal Immigrants in Pelican that I think would use those services, yes.

AA: Okay.

PD: I think it would, it would be used if there was. But for the most part, I mean, I don't know exactly, but I think ninety percent of the population, of the Latino population of Pelican, are either citizens or residents.

AA: Sure.

PD: I would say only about ten percent are illegal. So I think they would use those services. But I don't think many use them now. But I know a lot of them use like the Food Shelf, which, you know, provides food for families with low incomes.

AA: Yes.

PD: Things like that. So some families do use things like that.

AA: Are Latinos involved in political activity, like running for office, or campaigning on behalf of somebody, or speaking up for or against political issues?

PD: Not in Pelican. I haven't seen anyone yet run for sheriff, for council, or any position, or anything like that.

AA: Okay

PD: Not yet.

AA: Describe how things are between newly arrived individuals and those who have been here for many years.

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PD: Describe activities?

AA: Describe how they get along.

PD: Oh.

AA: What kind of reception do they get? Do they embrace them? Is there some rejection or friction?

PD: I think, for the most, part people are very welcoming.

AA: Yes.

PD: Ah, especially if they're from back in the same town, or they know them from back in Mexico that a lot of the time, you know, they'll provide them with whatever they need. They'll embrace them and be like, you know, we're here to help, whatever you need. And even if they're not from Guanajuato and they're just people moving in, people are still very welcoming and, you know, embrace people like that and help them out in many needs.

AA: Now you did mention that there are other people from other countries now. Guatemala . . .

PD: Guatemala, Salvadoreños. [Salvadorans]

AA: But also Salvadoreños. But also Somali.

PD: Somali that was a big population.

AA: How is the relationship among those groups? Or, with those groups?

PD: Ah, we get together, we get along well. But, we're closer to the white folks than we are to the Somali community.

AA: Okay.

PD: They're a little bit more segregated, I feel like. But in high school, I had a few Somali friends that we played soccer with in high school and things like that. And they're great people, but I feel that they're a little bit more segregated; they're just in their crowd most of the time.

AA: Was soccer the bonding thing or was it just something to do?

PD: Yes. Both. There was a gentleman, David Brown, and Michelle Grinstead, they both started soccer back in…

AA: Spell Grinstead for me. [Chuckles]

PD: Grinstead, G-R-I-N-S-T-E-A-D.

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AA: Okay.

PD: And they started the soccer program in Pelican Rapids, which has been a *huge* thing.

AA: Sure.

PD: She did it because she saw all these kids older than me that had talent, and she didn't want that talent to go to waste. And she didn't want to see these kids get involved with drugs and all the crazy things on the street.

AA: Yes.

PD: So she decided to start a club in Pelican Rapids, and that's how the soccer program started up with her. And David Brown did some coaching here and there. So that was definitely, that's been the bonding and yes, I mean, ever since. Not many white kids play, but we usually get from one to five or something like that to play with us, but most of them do other sports. But definitely with the Somalis though, that's been a bond. We were always would always play together. And got along well, we always got along pretty well. We still do.

AA: If a friend of yours or a friend of your family's from Mexico called and said he was thinking of moving up to Minnesota somewhere, or up north, and asked about Pelican Rapids, what would you tell him? How would you describe the area? What would you tell him about? What you tell him about the weather? [Chuckles]

PD: [Chuckles] I would tell him [Chuckles] the weather is crazy and you never know what to expect.

AA: [Chuckles] Yes.

PD: But if it was an aunt or an uncle with the family, you know, I mean that they would have family here, so I would recommend them moving to Pelican, because I think it's a great town. It's a great small town to grow up in. I mean, I'm glad I grew up in Pelican, I really am. I was only seven, so I consider Pelican to be my second home.

I would recommend them to move if they have a family. If it was someone younger, you know, there is not much to do. Ah, especially with an education, if you want something bigger, you've got to move on. But geographical, I would say there are many hills and lots of trees, lots of beautiful lakes. You know, we live right in the lakes area. Very friendly people. Very friendly people. Openhearted, everyone, you know, there's a lot of great people in Pelican that support the Latinos, and will do many things for us.

AA: Yes.

PD: I think we have a good school also. But for the jobs part, you know, that's the risky part. You can work at the plant, but if you happen to get fired, you know, you don't have any other

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options. You have to move on, go to a different town, and commute every day. So I think that's the risk there. You know, there is only that.

AA: Okay.

PD: If you have that language barrier there, you can't speak English, then that's definitely a big issue. That's the only main employer and if you don't work at the plant, you know, chances are you can't really work anywhere else.

AA: Sure.

PD: Because, you know, they require you to speak English.

AA: What are the reasons that people are reaching out to Detroit Lakes and Perham? Is it just for better opportunities? Or because, like you said, they get fired here and they have no other options?

PD: Yes.

AA: So they have to go.

PD: Some of the cases are that. They get fired and they have nowhere to go, so they go there.

AA: Yes.

PD: Some of them believe that the labor is less tough other places than at the plant. Yes, I think those are the main two reasons why people reach out to different places.

AA: I see.

PD: I think out of all of the, you know, the employers around the area, that people from Pelican who work at the plant probably have the better pay out of them all.

AA: Now you said that about this group there are maybe ten percent or so that work elsewhere other than the factory in Pelican. So what other kinds of jobs do they do?

PD: Hmmm, some of them are paraprofessionals at the schools.

AA: Okay.

PD: Some of them work at the local grocery store. There's also a Mexican store there, which is a little small, and then the Mexican restaurant in town. At Wells Fargo Bank. That pretty much about it.

AA: At which bank?

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PD: Wells Fargo.

AA: Oh, Wells Fargo.

PD: Yes, in town, in Pelican.

AA: Yes. Is there anything else you'd like to add to this interview, that you would like people to know about Latinos in Pelican Rapids?

PD: Well, I think that it's made a big impact. Our school has this newsletter than comes out monthly. And they do a section for students, for former students of Pelican Rapids.

AA: Okay

PD: You know where they are now, what they do, and what they took from Pelican Rapids, what helped them out.

AA: Sure

PD: For the majority, the part all of them always comment on the diversity in Pelican Rapids.

AA: I see.

PD: You know that it helped them where they are now. It helped them be ready, be prepared. Because a lot of the people from small towns in Minnesota, they go on to college, and maybe it's a big shocker for them to socialize with someone from a different color, different culture. And a lot of people from Pelican, you know, took that, and a lot of them, I was very thankful for that, and always comment on how important it is to have that diverse community in Pelican. And they really enjoy that. That's a big thing. That's, I think, something really neat. [Pauses] [Whispers] What else?

AA: So the diversity was really part of their education, not just the economics.

PD: Yes. You know, it helped them socialize with us and get the feeling of what it is to socialize with someone different than them. And be prepared for the real world when they graduated high school. So a lot of them yes, a lot of them always comment on that. What else can I think of? [Pauses] I mean, I can't think of.

AA: Well, you've provided a lot of information, so I appreciate it.

PD: [Chuckles]

AA: Thank you very much for the interview.

PD: Yes, no, it's my pleasure. I'm glad I did it.

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Minnesota Historical Society