

**Ruben Garcia**  
**Narrator**

**Abner Arauza**  
**Interviewer**

**February 22, 2013**  
**Minnesota State University Moorhead [MSUM] Campus**  
**Livingston Lord Library**  
**Moorhead, Minnesota**

Ruben Garcia           **-RG**  
Abner Arauza           **-AA**

**AA:** This is Abner Arauza in Moorhead, Minnesota interviewing Ruben Martinez Garcia. I am interviewing Ruben in the MSUM Livingston Lord Library on the campus of MSUM. This is an interview for the Minnesota Historical Society Oral History Project. Today is February 22, 2013. Ruben, let's start with the first question, if you'd give me your name and your ethnicity, please, to start.

**RG:** Ruben Martinez Garcia and I am Mexicano-Americano.

**AA:** Okay. And give me your parents' names.

**RG:** My father's name is Ruben Garcia. I'm junior. And my mother is or was Teresa Dominguez Garcia.

**AA:** Okay. Okay, so she's no longer?

**RG:** Yes, well, she passed on in 1972.

**AA:** Alright. And where were they born?

**RG:** My dad was born in Uvalde, Texas. And my mom was born in Sabinal, Texas.

**AA:** Okay, close to each other.

**RG:** Yes. [Chuckles]

**AA:** Yes. How many brothers and sisters do you have? And if you'll give me name and age.

**RG:** I'll start with the oldest. Victor is the oldest.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** He's sixty-two. And then my sister Maria, she's fifty-three. And then it's me, I'm fifty-two. My brother Ben follows, he's fifty-one. Then my brother Frank, he's forty-eight. My brother Randy, he's forty-six. And then my brother Jeff, he's forty. And then finally my sister Jennifer, she's thirty-seven.

**AA:** Okay. Now, okay, you gave me your age. When was your birthdate?

**RG:** June 15, 1960.

**AA:** Okay. Now and where were you born?

**RG:** I was born in Hart, Texas.

**AA:** Okay, west.

**RG:** In the Panhandle. Yes.

**AA:** Okay. And tell me about your education level.

**RG:** I received an associate's degree in law enforcement out of the University of Miami. It was an extension school. And then I completed high school.

**AA:** Okay, how did you end up in Florida?

**RG:** Our commander, he moved to Florida and they had started a unit in Florida and he recruited some of his ex-soldiers to go down to Florida.

**AA:** [Chuckles] Yes.

**RG:** That's how I ended up there. [Chuckles]

**AA:** Yes. Now give me the name of your spouse and ethnicity.

**RG:** My spouse is Jennifer Rose Garcia and she is Finnish, Finlander.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** From Saint Cloud.

**AA:** Okay. I was guessing in Northern Minnesota.

**RG:** [Chuckles] Yes.

**AA:** Okay. Saint Cloud. Do you have any children?

**RG:** We do. We have two children. I have a twelve year old son.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** And I have an eight year old girl. His name is Logan and her name is Karissa.

**AA:** Okay. So what grades are they in?

**RG:** Ah, Logan is a sixth grader and Karissa is a third grader.

**AA:** Here in Moorhead?

**RG:** Here in Moorhead. And she attends Robert Asp Elementary and then he goes to the Middle School at Horizon.

**AA:** Oh. Okay.

**RG:** Here in Moorhead.

**AA:** Okay. And here I'm talking about mom and dad, brothers and sisters, obviously. What year did your family settle in Moorhead?

**RG:** Well, my folks, we moved around quite a bit.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** Well, because they were seasonal workers. And they would travel throughout the Southern part of the United States and then up here. And we settled in Moorhead in 1968, and then started the school system here permanently in 1968.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** Until 1972 when my mom passed away in Moorhead. And then in 1976 my dad remarried and we moved to Saint Cloud, Minnesota where we continued our schools. And we graduated out of Saint Cloud Technical High School. All of us did, actually.

**AA:** Okay. Now how did your family hear of Moorhead and decide to come here?

**RG:** They were seasonal workers, so they had worked in the beets in the Moorhead before, you know, in the Red River Valley.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** Since they were young. So this was, you know, just another stopping ground for seasonal work.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** And the *betabel* [sugar beets] and you know, obviously, that was in . . .

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** Something that they did, my father and my mother with their families. So, they had known Moorhead and, in 1968, when they decided to stay here because we had, by that time, had been at approximately thirteen elementary schools. So my mom said it's time for, you know, to get some stabilization in this family!

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** And so she convinced my father that if we were to go back to Texas there wouldn't be any assurance to her that we would graduate school, you know.

**AA:** Yes. Sure.

**RG:** And or that we would continue the farm workers schedule.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** And continue to kind of live in that style of . . .

**AA:** You know, thirteen schools, that means, like you said, you moved all around quite a bit. So from Uvalde, would you come to Moorhead? Or did you go somewhere else before coming to Moorhead?

**RG:** The circuit was, at that time, it was from Texas to a couple of potato plants that they worked in, picking potatoes in Texas, so that would have been in Hart. And then we'd move to Hereford [Texas]. And then we'd go from Hereford, we'd go to Colorado. And then from Colorado we'd go to Wisconsin, and then you know, so then back to Minnesota.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** And within that time it would be probably two seasons, you know, or two different crops, I'd say, within the same state. So even though we were registered at school, say at Rocky Ford [Colorado], you know, then we would probably move down maybe fifty miles in order to pick another crop, and then we'd have re-register school.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And so that was kind of the sense of where the education was.

**AA:** Wow. So you left Uvalde about what time of the year?

**RG:** Ah, we would leave right after the potato. And I'm thinking that was late July, early August. But between those times, you know, there were some trips before, you know, that they would get some other work in Colorado, so I mean, it was in between times. So at the time, you know, when Dad said, you know, the crop is good or it's going in and we have to get up there before the harvesting in Minnesota, it was a timing thing. And I guess, you know, being so young, I just know sometimes we would, you know, be there until, you know, when school started. But then that cycle in the wintertime, especially up north, would go down back to the south, so not sure what the timelines looked like. But I know that it was, you know, during the school season is where we moved around the most, because then the harvest was done. And then we'd have to go back down south and then start the cycle over again. And I remember very clearly that I didn't start speaking the English language until I was actually in third grade, you know.

**AA:** Wow.

**RG:** Because in Texas, I don't know that we were, because we were seasonal workers, ever pushed in the structure of education as much as the permanent students, you know. So we were kind of bypassed and, you know, and oh, sent out to recess or whatever that might be, you know. But I just remember very clearly not being able to speak the English language, you know.

**AA:** Yes. Knowing the high number of Latinos that live in Uvalde, my question would be, if you didn't learn English until like around the third grade, is it because you were just moving around a lot? Or because you didn't need to learn it since you spoke Spanish with most of your classmates, and maybe even your teachers? [Chuckles] I don't know.

**RG:** Yes, you know, I think the structure of education, in trying, early on; learn your vowels and your nouns and your adjectives.

**AA:** Yes. Yes.

**RG:** And, you know, there just wasn't, because, like you mentioned, most of our friends were Latinos, and so, you know, it was a lot easier for us to slip back into speaking Spanish.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And trying to get the answers from them, at times, it was just a lot easier. So even our instructors and I remember, very clearly, our instructors being American teachers. And so they I really believe that until we actually got here, we were just bypassed, you know.

**AA:** Oh, okay.

**RG:** Because well let's look at the percentage of students that are actually going to be here for this full year instead of looking at the students that are only going to be here for three months and gone.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** So I think it's easier to have him color, you know, color a picture than it is for me to go into an instructional part of, you know, mathematics or English or whatever that might have been.

**AA:** Sure. Sure. Now what influenced your family's decision to settle in the area? And by area, since you've told me that you lived in Saint Cloud and then Moorhead?

**RG:** Well, we started in 1968 when my father decided to stay here.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** He went to work for the Crystal Sugar Company. And I think his decision was, again, you know, with my mother's influence, that she wanted a structured education for us. She wanted us to not really necessarily be back in that cycle of being farm workers where then we would be recycling our children through the same phase.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** And I think, you know, her foresight was to really get us grounded in a community. And Moorhead was something that was very foreign to them because there was four seasons here [chuckling] where in Texas there's only one season!

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** You know, and I think she just liked the beauty.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** And the people were very respectful, I mean, with us here. I remember my father, who has no formal education, going to Crystal Sugar and letting them know that, you know, that he would work for them for free for a week and have them judge whether he was a good worker or not, because he really wanted to. And so they were impressed by that. And even though he said he got, you know, some of the crappiest jobs, he was just happy to have a job. And so when that panned out for him, then he said, you know, this is something this is where we need to stay. And then in 1972 when my mother passed on, he made a promise to my mother that education would be the number one thing that he would strive for, for us. Because he didn't, again, want that repeat. And like parents always want you to be a lot more successful than they were. I mean, and I credit both of them for being successful in the sense of, you know, keeping us fed, keeping us clothed, and keeping us, you know, under a roof that kept us warm.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** And, you know, warm and dry. So I guess it's how you gauge success. I mean, I think they were very successful, and I think that their decision to stay in Minnesota was one that really benefited our family to a lot of extent.

**AA:** Did your family have to make adjustments when you settled in your lifestyle?

**RG:** We did. First the adjustment, I think, of having a one-parent household. That adjustment was huge. Ah, my sister had to grow up a lot sooner than she was in charge of the finances, since my father, you know, cannot read and write, even as of today. But so it was taking on different roles and in what we needed to do as a family in order to unite in order to be successful in the community. But I don't think the community ever set up any barriers. I remember coming to Moorhead and going to school. And I just remember, you know, going to other schools, and my best friend was my sister or my sibling, you know, that was either underneath me or above me, because we didn't have the luxury of making friends because we knew we were going to move on.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** But when we finally settled here, I think we were the only Latino kids that were going through what now is Robert Asp, which was North Junior High School. And even Saint Francis de Sales School, which no longer exists.

**AA:** I see.

**RG:** But kids really wanting to help us, wanting to mesh us into what they were doing, and so sports became part of that. You know, getting to a more structured education got to be part of our routine. And so I think it was, then, Dad's realization that this was, you know, a good community that was extending whatever they needed to do in order to make us successful. And made him feel like, you know, he wasn't alone. Even though he was a single parent, there was some other support that was there for him and us as well.

**AA:** And by other support you're referring to?

**RG:** Well, at the time, my dad was working; he went from Crystal Sugar to working at the courthouse. And I think that, you know, at that time there was Manny Lopez was a police officer there.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** And that support was Ruben Lopez. And Manny, Ruben, and I think there was another older brother there at the Fargo side of the police department, I know Ruben was there. But the support of having a Latino here at that time, there was an organization with Roberto Treviño at that time that helped out migrant workers. And that support was tremendous for my dad because not only then did he have some people that he could, you know, associate with, but then found out that there were some other services within the community that would kind of lend that hand to help us, you know, be successful. And that may be in clothing, that could have been, and again, Ruben Lopez, I just remember him coming from the Fargo side one time and my father just didn't have the money to buy us all bikes, but the police department donated some bicycles. And he came over in uniform.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** And I just remember being at the age of twelve, and seeing this tall guy in a blue uniform.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** And I said, "This is what I want to be." And so later on in life I became a police officer. And then I went, you know, up maybe five years ago, and saw Ruben Lopez before he passed on, at the VA Hospital, as I went there, you know, and now after a veteran, and I thanked him and I said, "The whole reason that I was successful was because I remember you bringing over those bikes and I remember seeing you in uniform. And I remember that that's the way I structured my life is in order to be just like you." So there was a lot of influence and there was a lot of support. But there was also, you know, some good, positive modeling, I think, that was very, very well needed. You know, and I'm saying that for myself. I don't know, you know, my modeling was different than what my sister might have had, you know. But she had other positive role models, Latina women that lived in the Fargo side. Ah, Sandy Garcia who was with the post office at that time, and his wife, Minnie, who worked for Dayton's at that time.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** She also was very influential, I think, in supporting my sister and, you know, helping her with some bills, you know. And how to write a check and how to balance a checkbook and all of those things, so there was, in that sense, there was some support within a small Latino community that we had here.

**AA:** So there were some informal networks among the Latino community that was already here, and then some formal ones, like you said, the agencies that were providing services.

**RG:** Yes. They were providing services. But I think, you know, even at that time was when Dad was with Saint Francis de Sales, some of the nuns, and especially Father Ketter.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** Who then showed me, or led me to be an altar boy, and Father Ketter was just a tremendous, tremendous. I think another part of what I saw as a role model and in him saying to me that, you know, "You're going to start something, you're going to finish it, you know, so I want you to be an altar boy, but I want you to be the best altar boy."

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** You know, so there were some things that I think that he instilled in us and in starting something that you can't just do it halfway. I mean, your parents tell you that all the time, but I mean, to hear it from another person who cared about your success was very influential to us.

**AA:** Okay. Now Sandy Garcia, are you related?

**RG:** Ah, no relation at all.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** And I remember the Treviños were very influential, too.

**AA:** Yes. Now and was that Migrants, Incorporated that he was working for?

**RG:** Hmmm, you know it could have been.

**AA:** Or Migrants in Action.

**RG:** I'm trying to think of the organization.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** That was here, because I just remember the gentleman's name, Treviño, who at that time was chairing a lot of that board. And it'll probably come to me at sometime here, but it was a migrant organization. Ah, Migrants ... it'll come to me in a few minutes.

**AA:** Okay. Now you've lived in Moorhead since 1968.

**RG:** Yes.

**AA:** And at your present address, where you live now, how long have you been here?

**RG:** I've been there for seven years. And actually, a real funny story was when my father was working for Juan Lopez, who worked for Peterson Farms. Where actually my house sits was a mustard seed field where I used to go and pick mustard seed for him. [Chuckles] For the farmer's market. Dill weed, it was dill weed. And we actually get dill weed out there that still kind of grows wild every now and then. But I remember going out there with Jesse Jimenez, whose daughter worked at the VA at that time. But I remember driving out there to the fields from where Saint Francis now sits in Moorhead. And because that's where the Peterson Farm was, and we would drive out there, and I used to think it was such a long drive but because it was neat because we could take a little nap before we got out there.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** And then we'd get out there and where actually I live now was where we were actually picking that dill weed.

**AA:** [Chuckles] Wow.

**RG:** I've been out there for seven years, but in the Fargo-Moorhead community, the last nineteen years.

**AA:** Do you perceive your stay in Moorhead as a temporary one or a permanent one? And I say this in the context of; for example, when somebody asks me, "Where are you from?" My immediate reaction is Crystal City, you know. Although, you know, I haven't been there now for twenty-some years. Whereas when I have a second thought, I said, "Oh, this is my home, you know, this is where I live."

**RG:** Sure.

**AA:** Do you see Fargo-Moorhead as, you know, I'm going to go somewhere else from here, I'm going to go back "home"?

**RG:** I guess my experience has been, Abner, is that I, personally, have always considered Minnesota to be my home.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** When I even left here, when I went into the service and then came back, when I say, "I'm going to go home," Minnesota was the place I would be, you know, going to. And this is where I felt that. My mother was buried here, and so this is where we call home.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** Especially here in Moorhead. And at the time, I was living in Saint Cloud but, even in Saint Cloud, Minnesota was considered my home. I was born in Texas but, I think, I remember most of my childhood in Minnesota. And so I still consider this permanent. As a young adult when I went and left here, I always considered no matter where I was living [chuckles] and at home is Minnesota.

**AA:** Okay. So you were young enough when you left Uvalde that you hadn't yet thought of that as home.

**RG:** No, I know because we were there in such short spurts that, it was just a kind of a place, it was so temporary that, you know, where is the next? You know, we're going to Colorado, we're going to Wisconsin, we're going to Minnesota, you know, or, we were going to Kansas, or whatever it might have been, you know.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** It was just kind of another stopping area. Wasn't until they actually settled here and my mom said, "This is where we're going to buy a home," that this is where then base camp was.

**AA:** What is your relationship like with family members, your brothers and your mother, I mean, your dad's and mom's brothers and sisters, let's say in Uvalde, for example?

**RG:** We're still very, very close. As a family, as my immediate family, brothers and sisters, very, very close. I think one of us ... all say the same thing is that, you know; our best friends are

my brothers. My best friends are my brothers and my sisters because we had to depend on them for companionship for such a long time. As we were growing up, that's who was your best friend was, that's who you looked for in the chaos of a new school. That was something that I always looked for. But even when we went back to Texas and, even now, when I go back to Texas, I am very close with my father's siblings' kids. I mean, my cousins, we text back and forth, we write each other or, you know, and we talk to each other at least twice a month. Somebody, whether they're in Plainview or somebody who is actually in Uvalde, we're always talking and communicating. Well, on both my mother and father's side, those connections never went away for us because that's where our true heritage began, I think. And that's where grandma and grandpa were from, and that's where they passed on, so when you talk about home, what I remember, it's still my father and his tradition where it began.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And that's in Uvalde or Hart or wherever.

**AA:** Right. What language do you speak with your family in your home?

**RG:** [Chuckling] This is a combination of English and in Spanish.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** But with my father, if my father is in the room, we speak Spanish. All of us. And I make it a point to speak Spanish to my siblings because we don't want it to be a forgotten language. The generation of my children coming up, it is all English. And we're trying to immerse them in some way to Spanish, but it's really different, Abner. I mean, it's like when you and I grew up, I mean, you had to learn it because that's what the language was. I think now it's either, and I hear it in Texas, Spanish-English, you know. And the older generation is kind of getting used to that as well, but Dad says, "Pick one. And I prefer you to speak Spanish to me, you know."  
[Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** Because that's what he knows. And then it keeps me, too, sharp in what I need to know. [Pauses] Excuse me. And so when I go back to Texas, I know if an elder is talking to me, I know exactly what he's saying, and not have to look over and say, "What do you say?" You know, or, "What did she say?" You know, I know exactly what the conversation is. But I think that's dying, too, because I know that my younger brothers are losing that, the language, because, you know, I talk it a lot with especially my older brothers and sisters and my dad.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** We make it a point to always speak it.

**AA:** And out on the community, let's say you're out at the grocery store shopping and you run into somebody that you know that's Latino. What do you speak?

**RG:** I lead with Spanish, immediately.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** Because I think that's a comfort level for me.

**AA:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**RG:** I'm not embarrassed; you know, say, hey, *¿que pasó?* [What is happening?]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** Or *como estas*, [How are you.] You know, because it's not something that I am proud to know a second language, and I think there's a lot of people that would say, you know, I wish I could, you know, just whip it out like you can, you know.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And but I think I lead with it for the most part, because there's a lot of Latinos in this community that may not feel totally as comfortable as I do but, in just that extension of who I am, and leading with that, gives them that comfort. And then you kind of just forget who is around you. And, you know, if they're looking, they're looking, you know.

**AA:** Sure. What do you consider Latino cultural traditions or Mexicano or Hispanic traditions?

**RG:** Ah, traditions, is for me, like Dad says, making sure that church, family, strong, strong family ties. In our tradition is that we get together as often as we can, when we can, for two to three hours, because you're then passing that togetherness or that assembly like my children, they know that there's times when we just get together. Whether that's a holiday, or whether that's a Sunday dinner, or whether that's a birthday, or whatever that may be, tradition, I think, becomes then how you lead your family to embrace the cultures.

I mean, and Mexican food has a lot to do with that. Oh, the recognition of, and the bringing up of all cultures and what they did, you know. Like what my *tios* [uncles] used to do, you know, for work. And never forgetting that, what grandparents did for us. So, you know, how they led the way to getting us up here. And, you know, and Dad still talks to us. I mean, and the music. And you know, and the old Tejano music, you still hear it, you know, that they would come up here and work, and it wasn't an easy life. And I think all cultures have that. My wife who is Finnish, as you know, "You're so rich in your culture." "Well," I say, "You know, anybody can be rich in any culture; it's just how you cultivate that with your family."

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And that has to do with a variety of things, you know. Like I said food. But primarily, not forgetting where your roots of your family came from and how they started and how their

struggles were. And then how we've advanced, not tremendously, but just educationally. You know, and the ethic. The ethics that our uncles had in working and from dusk to dawn, you know. Like, you know, I hear a lot of friends of mine who say, "You know, my father is a farmer and he was dusk to dawn." Well, I look at that as, you know, my grandfather working with that person from dusk to dawn, because they needed that support. I mean, so maybe they didn't own the farm, but they were just there. [Chuckles] It's just as long, you know, in doing the labor.

**AA:** Yes. Yes. Are any of those cultural traditions being passed down to your children?

**RG:** Yes, they are. Like in some of the things they [chuckles] that I find amusing, like *cascarones* during the Easter. [Easter eggs. Egg shells are emptied of the white and yolk by creating a small hole. After cleaning them and dyeing them in bright colors, the eggshells are filled with confetti. Then, the small hole is covered with a piece of paper, usually crepe paper. Having a *cascarón* broken over one's head was said to bring good luck. At other times, it was considered part of a courting ritual. Although this tradition might have had significance at one time, now it is just a game, for the most part.]

**AA:** Oh, sure.

**RG:** You know.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** Ah, that's something that's even extended out to the Finnish families and let me expand a little bit more to that, because I always said that I was going to marry a Latina woman.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** But, it wasn't in the cards for me! [Chuckles] But, you know, but it is part of my responsibility, and to show my kids what *cascarones* are. Or, you know, even to go beyond that, to talk about, you know, what rooted traditions that we have in the ancestry. You know, and going back further, you know, having some lineage in the Native American communities, you know. And it's just a mixture of things that you can include in what we try to pass on to our children. I had a thought before the *cascarones*, because there are some things that we do for Christmas. You know, and obviously, there's, you know, *buñuelos* for New Year's. [In Mexico and parts of the United States, *buñuelos* are made from a white flour dough spread like a *tortilla* and deep fried until crisp. Then, they are sprinkled with a mixture of cinnamon and sugar.]

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** I mean my wife who is Finnish, makes *buñuelos* and it's like . . .

**AA:** Oh! [Chuckles]

**RG:** You know, and *menudo*. [*Menudo* is a soup made from beef tripe and hominy. It is seasoned with red pepper, oregano, and other spices. After cooking, *menudo* is garnished with lemon or lime juice, chopped onion, and chopped hot green peppers.]

**AA:** Wow.

**RG:** And some of the food that, you know, is really, I mean, deep-rooted in Texas.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** You know, and I've always, you know, *pan dulce*, you know, sweet bread, you know.

**AA:** Wow.

**RG:** Those are the things that I can remember. They may not be traditional, but those are the things that I say, "I remember that taste." Or I remember, you know, just my grandfather sitting down with all his grandkids, you know, around the fire. You know, because that's what my grandfather did, and that's what Dad does sometimes, you know, and get the kids around and tell them stories, you know, in his broken English or whatever. But it is about putting attention to the elder because, you know, and then they walk away with some knowledge that, you know, that there was other things that we did other than where we're at today.

**AA:** Do you see some of those cultural things changing within your family?

**RG:** I think so. I think with any extension of any large family—we have a large family that some traditions are left by the wayside. And some things even *quinceañeras*. I mean, I have to say that I have a daughter, and I don't know that I know enough of it in order to celebrate it.

**AA:** Oh, okay.

**RG:** And those are some of the things that I think are being left behind. And not good, not bad. I don't know that, I can just say that that's an example, but even like, especially, our language, you know, that's not being passed down. Is it fault of my own for not speaking it? And because I do have, Dad says, "You know, are they ever going to know Spanish?" And I go, "Yes, well . . ." And they can say "door" and they can say, you know, the obvious words that are out there. But I do see some of the traditions falling by the waysides.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And it isn't, it's because of the changing times, and do we really have to go through that, you know. I think the younger generation says that. Where even going back way back and kissing your relative's hand. I mean, as they greeted them going into their home, you know.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** That was grandma that was uncles, I mean, anybody you're an elder, you would, bless or kiss their hand before you came in. And that went by the wayside, you know, even back in the 1970s. And I'm thinking, you know, I do that now when I go because that's just something and I still get the ones who are my age will go, "Why did you do that?" You know, because it was just lost. You know, and some of those traditions are just not going to come back. You know, not good or bad, but, just that they are.

**AA:** Let's talk about your military service. When did you enter the service and how old were you at the time?

**RG:** I entered in 1979, and I was seventeen years of age. And that I went in because, you know, at that time, and because of, you know, obviously the size of our family, we didn't have the luxury to pursue or at least I should say the boys didn't have the luxury to pursue education beyond high school.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** So it was either go into the service or go into the workforce. And I figured going into the service, I might get a trade out of it, you know, like a technical thing.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And then at the same time, meet other people that were, you know, from other parts of the United States, you know. As if I didn't already when I was young! [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles] But so you were seventeen?

**RG:** Right. I graduated high school and then in June I turned eighteen.

**AA:** Oh, okay.

**RG:** Yes. So I went in June Third, the day after high school. And the *very* next day after high school! [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** And I remember going to the AFFES station and they said, "When did you graduate?" And I said yesterday. You know. And I just remembered that was it.

**AA:** Yes. To what station did you say?

**RG:** AFFES station. It was kind of our first step before you go into the military, you know.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** A process at the station before you left.

**AA:** Sure. And what branch did you go into?

**RG:** I went into the US Army. And the reason I selected the US Army is because one of the recruiters was there and I've always been influenced by, you know, the presence and how someone carries themself.

But he was an 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Trooper. And so as he was talking, you know, it was like, *wow*, I'd like to do that! You know. [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** And so I went up and talked to him and he said, "Well, there's a thing called the delayed entry program, and if you go in there now, you know, by the time you get back into active service, before you go into active service, you might get a stripe, and that way you'll be ahead of the game." And I was like, well, that sounds like me, you know, and then you might get picked as a squad leader in your basic training. And certainly that's what ended up happening. And so that's how I ended up picking up the Army. I know there's a lot of stories out there, "Well, you know, the Marines wanted me" And this and that. No, I was pretty specific in what I wanted to do.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** So picking the Army was kind of thing I wanted to be.

**AA:** How did your family feel about it?

**RG:** At that time, they were proud. They were proud that I had made a decision, because I think sometimes, you know, when it comes crunch time, there was a lot of things, a lot of my friends said, "Well, I'm going to go to college, maybe I'm not. I'm going to take a year off." And I think they were just proud then that I had made a decision and that I wasn't going to try to back out of it. And that, you know, it was kind of a here you go. [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** You know, we bought you a suitcase and. . . [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** [Laughing] And, you know, you're not allowed to come back!

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** You know. Oh, but they were very proud and supportive.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** Absolutely. Especially my father, because, you know, he wanted something and he knew I think in his eyes he knew that he couldn't afford education for me. So he was already feeling like, you know, I don't have anything to give you while you're leaving. But I said, "You know, Dad, it's something that I want to do. And that, you know, I want you to just be there for me when I come back." You know. And certainly the support was there, so I felt that I was getting, you know, his sense of pride and my sense of pride going in.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And that no matter what they threw at me that I could take on the challenge.

**AA:** Were there other relatives in the family that had gone into the military?

**RG:** There was. I had a cousin of mine who lived in Uvalde, Texas, who was a Green Beret in the Vietnam War. And my father always used to talk about him being a Green Beret, a Green Beret. And I said, you know, that's kind of what I wanted to do. And the one thing that impressed me as I talked to him and I told him that I was going to go into the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, he said, "Oh, man," he goes, "That's great," you know. And he goes, "And you'll get to do some more exciting things!" And I thought, you know, this is a good thing. You know, I think he kind of mentored me into that. But at the same time, you know, in talking to that recruiter, it was always, I had a mindset of what I wanted to do. And just support, that I had a cousin who lived through it, so obviously, I could live through it, you know. [Chuckles]

**AA:** You went into the military immediately after high school. But had you had some work experience before that?

**RG:** Absolutely. In high school I had three jobs. I worked at McDonald's, I worked at a Sunwood Inn, and I worked at a grocery store. So people often asked me, you know, "How did you do three jobs? And then what were your grades like?!" [Chuckles] And I was holding a straight D the whole time, you know! But I was not a very good student, because I think a lot of that had to do with my early on in education. But I think what got me through high school, and I really believe this, Abner, I could relate to both, you know, someone my age and someone older than me.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And they could see, and I wasn't afraid to share my struggles in education, so, I had some teachers that were very sympathetic. And whether that helped me or not, and I don't really think that I blame them, but gave me a sliding grade, because, you know, they knew that I had the ability to succeed in the armed services. They also knew that I didn't have the ability to succeed in higher education beyond high school. So, you know, I just think that in picking this, the armed services were a better route for me.

**AA:** So you entered here in the Fargo-Moorhead area?

**RG:** No, I actually entered in Saint Cloud.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** In Saint Cloud. And then we were taken by bus to Minneapolis.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** And so I actually entered in Minneapolis.

**AA:** And where did you do your basic training?

**RG:** In Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

**AA:** Wow.

**RG:** I remember getting on a plane; it was that night when we were at the AFFES station in Minneapolis. It's like nine o'clock at night because we left at six o'clock. And then we were there by nine o'clock. And at eleven o'clock in the morning we're on a plane to go to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. And Columbia, South Carolina. And having *no* idea. And I was just like, I remember at three o'clock in the morning looking out the window of the bus and going, [Laughing] "Did I actually make a wise choice here?!"

**AA:** [Laughs]

**RG:** But, you know, what actually broke the whole thing, there was a guy in front of me, a little heavysset guy. I was a wrestler in high school and ran track, so I was in very good shape at that time. And so I remember this guy getting off the bus and he might have been like two people in front of me. But he fell down.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** And I remember the drill sergeant tell him to get back on the bus and fall down. [Chuckles] Like three, four different times more, you know. And I thought, that's kind of funny, you know! [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** And it was funny that it happened to him and not me, but after that I just felt like, you know, this is going to be alright. You know, I'm okay with this, you know. And then, you know, and then getting us into formation and it really helped me see that there was a funny side to being in the military. But, you know, my father married someone who was very strict after that, after my mom passed on.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And I felt like, well, if I can get through her boot camp, I can definitely get through these guys' boot camp, you know! [Laughs]

**AA:** [Laughs]

**RG:** Ah, so there were some things, that I found humorous and I was, you know, very reserved in the sense that I wasn't going to stand out or laugh very loud, but I really just thought, you know, this is okay.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** I'm going to fine.

**AA:** Okay. So, if you survived your dad's new wife, then basic training was a breeze!

**RG:** [Chuckles] It was.

**AA:** So how was basic training?

**RG:** Basic training for me, and I think a lot that helped me was having a mosquito wing, a stripe.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** Ah, going into delayed entry program, because we were immediately sectioned out for squad leader positions. And I still remember Bob Parker, me, Tillman, and Holloway was the squad leaders. And we remained, except for Tillman, because I think he messed up on one of the inspections one time and they took his stripes off. And then they gave it to him later, but I just remember being selected out. And it was two American dudes, an African American guy, and me. Our Drill Sergeant Spaton picked us out and he used to call us [chuckles] the Oreo cookies.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** Because of the way it was, but anyway, Drill Sergeant Spaton was somebody who was a Vietnam veteran and very structured, very mean, mean man. And Drill Sergeant Ricker, who was his other sergeant who helped out, was kind of a dry-humored guy. And so I knew that it could be really, really bad, but I knew that at some time, you know, Drill Sergeant Ricker would come in there and break that up for us. And even though Drill Sergeant Spaton was going to teach us about how to survive if we ever had to get survived, and a lot of the things that he taught us were very, you know, in your face. I think there was a reason for that. I mean, he really didn't want any of us to get into a situation we couldn't get out of.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** But at the same time it was like having, you know, a mom and dad. And then they do tell you, you know, "I am your mom and dad."

AA: [Chuckles]

RG: But somebody who was able to kind of give you the lighter side and somebody who would just not budge at all. You know. But I remember putting me into a leadership position right away gave me the same sense of responsibility I had as the oldest brother in the household. And I remember when my dad remarried, we had five bunks downstairs. And so by seven o'clock we had to have our bunks made. And our shoes put away, and the bathroom cleaned, and, you know, everything that went on with that. So it fit really nicely for me, because I just went from the transition at home, you know, to a small boot camp, to now having, you know, twenty-seven guys in your squad. So it was a good transition for me. And then obviously, you know, picking out the guys who could help out, the other two, you know, in the sense of looking at it, to me, I'd looked at it as they were all my siblings. And there's some that can help out and there are some that are just going to need that extra help. So I kind of liked that part of it. And it kind of gave me a sense of purpose to being there. But it also taught me *more* responsibility. And I liked that leadership part of it.

AA: Sure.

RG: And so I felt like there wasn't anything I couldn't do. Even though there was some times where I felt like, man, these guys are killing me here, you know. We'd spend, you know, four or five hours in the gig pit because one guy couldn't get his, you know, foot locker straightened out. Or he couldn't fold his shirts right, you know, or he couldn't get his socks right, you know.

AA: [Chuckles]

RG: It would always come back to, you know, let's make sure we get this guy squared away and then making sure we check in on him. So I really felt the transition had already started at home, but it just kind of led to this other extended [chuckles] huge family that we had.

AA: So it sounds like good experiences you were in, basic training.

RG: Yes. Yes, it was.

AA: Yes. Go ahead.

RG: It was a time, you know, it was the time, I'd never, first of all, met anybody from New York. And back in 1979 and the 1980s, they didn't have a selective service. So you were getting guys there who couldn't read and write, who were court-mandated to be there. [Chuckles] You know so for the first time and, by no means was it the very first time seeing an African-American person, but there were some guys like some, the Puerto Ricans, you know, they were dark-skinned, and I was surprised that they were speaking Spanish, you know.

AA: [Chuckles]

RG: But it was really *fast*, you know! And then some Dominicans, you know, and then seeing some, you know, some guys from down South who absolutely *hated* the blacks, you know. They

were within my own squad, you know. Ah, and I think, you know, somehow or another, because, one of the things that I immediately picked up on in the service was, you know, “You don’t sound like you’re Mexican.” You know. Because, you know, having moved up here in 1968, you know, and mimicking a lot of the language, because that’s what you were around, you know.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** It was almost like having a Mexican American with a Norwegian [laughs] accent, you know! With the “eh’s” and the “oh’s,” you know, and “you betchas,” you know. So it was easier to me to relate to somebody from, you know, a hardcore Alabaman, you know.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** Like Bob Parker, or somebody, a real hick from Texas. You know, and then combining those guys from New York, or even somebody from Kentucky, you know, from the hills of Kentucky. And it was just a melting pot. And you had to balance that, you had to make sure but it’s what helped *me*, and I think what *always* has helped me, and I don’t know if you’ve ever gotten this, that you know, “You don’t sound Mexican,” you know. And it was, to me, puzzling, at the same time, I used it as a tool for me to get some things done.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** You know, because it was very important for me to adapt, the way I could. And maybe it wasn’t to my advantage at that time, or, I wouldn’t say advantage it was just kind of a tool that I used, to either benefit me or help me or help somebody else. Or get somebody from somebody else that would, you know, help us pass inspection.

**AA:** Okay, you’ve told me what basic training was like as a Minnesotan.

**RG:** Yes.

**AA:** How was it as a Latino?

**RG:** It was difficult, because I know that, let’s say the other squad leaders had a Latino and who was from, you know, California or, you know, even Texas, where I am from Arizona where there’s a large majority of Mexicanos, you know. And we over bypassed them, you know, for whatever reasons, you know.

**AA:** I see.

**RG:** And it was again, you know, I would always wonder why, you know, okay, they’re not motivating yourselves. Or well, what can I do for you? I almost got the sense like they were looking at me like, “Well, how come you got picked?” You know, but then I’d always lead off with Spanish because I didn’t want them to think that I was above them or, you know, acting that I would know more than them, you know. I would go outside my ranks in order to help them if they needed help in whatever area they needed help in.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** You know, and I found myself, you know, sometimes, you know, in Tillman's squad or Holloway's squad, because Holloway was from Kentucky, I think. But very prejudiced. And I mean, I maybe got three words out of him, you know. But I think, even at the time when we had to get things done, we got things done. But he would help his kind before he would help Latinos. And I used to go, "Come on, guys. You know that's not the way it's supposed to be. You know we're a squad here, we don't have a color." You know, we're green according to the Army. But I did see some other people not putting so much effort into helping the Latinos, you know.

**AA:** I see.

**RG:** So, I mean, I knew, I saw it. Whether I witnessed it or not, I don't know, maybe I was in a different position. I don't know. I could see it. I could definitely see it.

**AA:** Okay. Alright. Now and what was your job once you went through basic?

**RG:** I was a radio operator.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** Radio operator. And I think I picked that for a lot of reasons, you know. Ah, one was it was in the communications field, and you could expand that. I felt like there was a trade there that might be after, you know, I got out of the service. So I felt like, you know, I was looking at it as, you know, life beyond the service, you know.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** So I knew that if I got some electronics that I might be able to use that back in the civilian world. And I certainly did, you know, after I left the military.

**AA:** Now were you deployed overseas? Did you go overseas?

**RG:** We did. We went to Grenada. We were support for Grenada October 25, 1983. In Grenada. Operation Urgent Fury. And we were there with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, and obviously to rescue the students who were, you know, being held against their will. It was really not considered a combat or a war; it was just considered a rescue operation.

**AA:** So that wasn't like for a very extended period of time?

**RG:** No. Because I think the military war and combat is extended over ninety days, and we were not there for ninety days.

**AA:** Okay. So did you see front line combat?

**RG:** [Speaks very quietly] Yes.

**AA:** What was that?

**RG:** Scary as all hell. Not going to lie to you. It did prepare me for later on in life as I became a police officer. In seeing things that weren't, you know, somebody that you had been in service with, no longer alive. Knowing that you went in there with this person and then knowing that you weren't going to come back with this person. It was so surreal. I mean, but yet, you know, keeping your wits about you, and you know, always listening in the back of your head that there was somebody who cared about you back home, and that sense of survival. Whether it was physical, mental, just keeping your wits about you because there are still things that you need to keep in mind, you know, when things are going bad. And I just found it, again, an experience that I needed to learn from. And not let it get too far into my head that it would, you know, keep me from doing what I was actually there to do.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** Whether the experience, you know, has damaged me, I don't know. I think that, you know, losing my mother very early on in age prepared me for a lot of that, because, you know, losing her was like losing your friend. My mom, my everything. So, somebody who I had known for a short time period, I mean, it was a lot easier for me to take. And to snap myself back into what Drill Sergeant Spaton said. You've got to survive, you've got to think, and you've got to always be thinking. You can't stop, you can't freeze, and you can't. So there was a lot of that. I mean, occupying your mind to do what you were there to do.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** So the experience was not easy. And it's very frightening, and it's gut-wrenching, and it's every emotion that you don't want, but you have to work with.

**AA:** And that's why you were saying, it helps or needs to be that there's no differences, looking at geographical or ethnic differences.

**RG:** Yes. I think that that's what really made me, blood is blood. I mean, when you see it, it's not the color of your skin, it's still red blood. And so when I used to feel, and I still feel like it sometimes, when people aren't treated, you know, fairly, I just go, "You know, you've got to look beyond that. You've got to know that, you know, tomorrow morning that person may not be there." And so I think that's one thing my father has always instilled in us, is that, you know, give other people the same chance that you would want to be given, you know. And if they excel because of that chance, don't look at them with envy or, you know, or with jealousy.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** You know. Be envious that they were successful, you know. Applaud them for being successful, not because they did it within the same boundaries that you were given, or the same

tools that you were given. So just because, they happen to be a lighter skin or darker skin than you, you know, you were given the same opportunities, so don't use it as a crutch. You know.

**AA:** In combat did you receive any injuries or awards?

**RG:** I don't know that I deserved any, you know. [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** No, I don't know that, like I said, we were there to do a job. And injuries and awards were like the hundredth thing behind my mind, you know. Yes, I don't think that you go into it thinking, "I'm going to get a purple heart; I'm going to race up the hill."

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** Because if you're thinking that way [chuckles], you're probably not going to make it to the top of the hill! [Laughs]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** You know, after, going through some training, your bones hurt and everything else. But I think that's part of what training does.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** I didn't expect any awards or anything because, you know, again, that's not why I did it. You know, that's not why you go into it, because it's all very, very secondary.

**AA:** Tell me about a memorable experience while you were in the military, as an American or a Minnesotan, and as a Latino.

**RG:** I think the most memorable time and this stands out because Drew Eackel. Ah, Drew. His mom was from Blue Earth, Minnesota. And he was in Marietta, Georgia, that's where he was from. And I remember we took a scuba diving class together. He said to me, "Let's go home. Let's go. Go with me." And he *absolutely despised* blacks.

**AA:** Wow.

**RG:** I mean Drew, good friend of mine. I don't know *what* he saw in me. But *absolutely*, you know, was just not a friend of African-Americans. I went to his home in Marietta, Georgia and found out his dad was in the Klan.

**AA:** Wow.

**RG:** And every vehicle at the house [chuckles] *everything* was in white. They had white German Shepherds. I just remember I was in *awe* of what I had put myself into. I think that the only

common thing that Drew and I had was during scuba diving, a training program, we had a mishap. And it was really up to us to survive it, and we did. And I think that's what really bonded him to me and me to him. And so he didn't see the color of my skin after that. And then he knew that I was obviously learned that I was from Minnesota, and his mom was from Minnesota. And he brought me to this home and he said about five miles before got to his house [laughs], "By the way my dad's in the Klan!" And I was like, oh *great*. [Laughs]

**AA:** [Laughs]

**RG:** You know, "By the way, could you leave me here!?"

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** This led me to, later on in law enforcement, another experience in protecting the Klan. But it was just an experience I think I had to go through early on. And I'm glad I did, because his father was away for that weekend. Ah, it wasn't until Sunday that he ushered me out of the back door and then we left that I thought, oh, man, this is real. You know. And other than his trophy room that he had, that we got to sneak in through for a little while. And he was showing me this, and he was telling me that his dad did not want him to go into the service because he would then be, you know, eating or drinking out of the same cups as blacks and Latinos. And I just thought, man, this is, whoof!

**AA:** Wow.

**RG:** Way beyond what I ever I have imagined. But his mom was the nicest lady in the world! I mean, she worked at an elementary school. She was a cook. And we talked about Minnesota, and I told her how I just considered Minnesota my home. So I think that was one thing that I was just like, oh, my gosh. This *exists*. My first taste of it.

**AA:** So it opened your eyes.

**RG:** Yes, absolutely. Bigger than heck, it opened my eyes! [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles] How was the food in the military?

**RG:** We ate so fast, I don't know that we had time to even taste the food! [Chuckles] The food I remember, one time the squad leaders got put on KP duty because we messed up or I can't remember what the occasion was. But I remember one of my jobs was to clean the big mixer where they mixed the hamburger and stuff. So, I took this blade out and as I undid the blade, I pushed it down, and a bunch of maggots fell down.

**AA:** [Hisses]

**RG:** Inside this mixer. And I was just like, *oh, my gosh!!*

**AA:** [Laughs]

**RG:** I went and I told the mess sergeant about that. And he said, “Keep your mouth *shut*. Clean that up. And I never want to see you on KP duty again.” [Laughs]

**AA:** [Laughs]

**RG:** So that explains why we ate the food so fast! [Chuckles] And after that, I never ate hamburger in the Army again! [Laughs] You know.

**AA:** [Laughs]

**RG:** And even though we had to clean it up, but yes, I’d say the quality of the food, I don’t know that it was there to taste. It was just there to eat.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** You know. So it was what it was. I’d much rather liked, yes, eating our K rations.

**AA:** During your service, how often and how did you stay in touch with your family?

**RG:** By telephone and by letters. I definitely, they’d give us time for us to write home on military stationery. And give us fifteen minutes to whip out a few lines. It was always my younger brothers that I would send letters to, or have them read it to Dad, you know, type of deal. Or send a Polaroid picture of me, you know, standing by the PX, you know.

**AA:** What did you do in your time off?

**RG:** Really, *nada*. [Nothing] I bought a motorcycle. And so that’s when I started getting into motorcycles. And so we’d ride in the times that we did have off.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** There was a group of about twenty of us that bought motorcycles with our education money! [Laughs]

**AA:** Oh, wow! [Laughs]

**RG:** [Laughing] Because they were paying us for our education and we said, “Ah, we’ll never go to school!”

**AA:** [Laughs]

**RG:** So we ended up trading in that money and going and buying motorcycles with it.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** Ah, I think that took us away for a little bit from training and the monotony of, you know, going out to, you know, doing training and doing training, doing training. So short trips, not too far away from base. But, you know, it was.

**AA:** As a group?

**RG:** As a group, yes. And going out in the middle of the backwoods in wherever we were. And especially in North Carolina, I can remember and going into some abandoned farmsteads and just picnicking, turning up the music and drinking our beer and hanging out.

**AA:** When and where did you come out of the service? And tell me what it was like.

**RG:** I actually [sighs] got out in 1985. It was in Saint Cloud. And I was supposed to report to my inactive duty station, and I remember going there, and they had a platoon muster. So I remember wearing my fatigues, and I remember wearing my beret, and the sergeant telling me, "You can't wear a beret here." And I said, "Well, I guess I'm not going to be in this unit."

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And they said, "Well, that's fine." So I left that, and I didn't look back anymore. And I was just really proud of what I had accomplished in the military, and for somebody to tell me that I couldn't wear my beret was something that I wasn't ready to hear. I was ready to get out anyway, [chuckles] I got out and I actually left the following week, went to Texas to work for Max Weatherford at a two-way radio shop. And then that's when I started law enforcement as a reserve deputy in Hale County in Plainview, Texas.

**AA:** H-A-L-E, Hale?

**RG:** H-A-L-E.

**AA:** Oh. Okay.

**RG:** Yes. For Sheriff [unclear], yes.

**AA:** Wow.

**RG:** And that's when I started my law enforcement, and I never looked back. And a lot of the things that I learned in the military applied to my law enforcement career. A lot.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** The camaraderie of having training with people with similar backgrounds, you know, who had been when I went into law enforcement, my brother introduced me to it as a reserve deputy. And then I left Hale County after about a year and went to work, or my wife, this is my first wife, who was from North Carolina, had some relatives in Inverness, Florida. And she said, "I want to move to Florida." We were in Texas, in Plainview. And she said, "I want to move to

Florida.” And I said, “I agree with you because I don’t like Texas.” [Chuckles] And I said, “Let’s go see Walt Disney World.” And we went to Florida. And I was hired by the Citrus County Sheriff’s Department. And I was hired on as a jailer. And was moved through the ranks, through there, and became a deputy street patrol officer. And then there, while I was going through the Academy and getting my associate’s degree in law enforcement, I was recruited by the Drug Enforcement Administration to attend their academy, because of my bilingual skills. And they said, “We’re looking for agents to join us overseas. And so we are looking for you.” And they said, “If you want to join us, we’ll pay for your school, give you a car, and clothing allowance.”

**AA:** Wow.

**RG:** And I was like, sign me up! [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles] So and this was like right immediately after you got out of the service or worked a period of years?

**RG:** Ah, it was a period of one year after that I worked in both the radio industry and law enforcement. So I kind of did eight to five in the radio shop, and then became what I was doing at the radio shop was I was installing antennas and towers. So I’d have to climb these towers.

**AA:** Oh, my God. [Chuckles]

**RG:** Like a hundred and fifty feet up in the air. And I realized that I didn’t have a parachute on one time [laughs] when my hat fell off!

**AA:** [Laughs]

**RG:** And I reached out to get it and I was like, *whoa!* And then I grew a tail real quick and I [laughing] grabbed onto the tower and I was like, oh, my gosh! I don’t have my parachute with me!

**AA:** [Laughs]

**RG:** But and then after that I started getting more and more into law enforcement. [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Laughs] Oh, that’s scary.

**RG:** I cut my radio career real quick! [Chuckles]

**AA:** Yes. Now what happened at, you said Citrus County?

**RG:** Right, Citrus County’s department.

**AA:** That you were offered the job because of your being bilingual.

**RG:** Yes.

**AA:** So that in a way was shaped by your being Latino. Were there other things that happened when you got out of the military that were determined or shaped by?

**RG:** Yes, you know getting out of the military and having the trade that I did, I remember going to Saint Cloud Airport, and because I had done some avionics work, radio work before. And I was running into a lot of dead ends in that job, because they really wanted not hands-on experience, but they wanted educational experience. And that was when in 1985 was when I started seeing the trend that education was going to be something that you needed. In other words, you needed a piece of paper, I should say not just having hands-on experience was good anymore, you needed to have a piece of paper with you from an accredited college saying that you have the smarts in order to get through college, but then you also have the hands-on experience. And they were hiring people with degrees and no hands-on experience. And I just felt like, you know, I'm just running into a dead-end wall here.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** So when my brother talked to me about law enforcement, and he said, "There's a radio shop down here," I then combined both. I can do this, but then this is the career I want to go into. So it kind of ran its course, you know. And because I was running into dead-end walls. Because I was seeing that eventually I had to get a degree, but I was going to get it in what I wanted. And no longer was it in radio communications.

**AA:** Now you told me that you have been in law enforcement all of this time, in different parts of the country, Texas, Florida, Minnesota also?

**RG:** Actually, when I left Florida in 1989, I left Florida. I left law enforcement there and I went to work for the Attorney General's Office in Saint Paul. What had happened was I was going through a divorce. And I wanted to come back home. And she wanted *nothing* to do with the state of Minnesota. And I said, you know, "We have opportunities there, you know. And I think, you know, I want to get into a merit system, a state or federal merit system." And I was in the federal system in Florida, but I thought, I wasn't happy there. There were a lot of things that I had witnessed in undercover work that I just thought, you know, it was just not where I wanted to be anymore. And I was getting burnt out. I had seen a partner been killed. And you know, it was just starting that repeat of things again, and I just thought, you know, there's got to be something better. So I went to apply for a job, it was an investigator for a Surveillance and Utilization Unit out of Saint Paul. And at that time, Alan Page was the AG [Attorney General]. And I have recognized him from the Vikings, you know.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** So I thought it would be kind of cool to work for that guy.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** And so I went in and interviewed for the job when I came home. And they said it was Tom McKeever was an ex-police officer. So he liked me right away. And we just hit it off and he said, “Yes,” he goes, “If you want to leave your job in Florida, you can come up here and work for us.” So there again, when I was offered the job it wasn’t, you know, “Okay, we can use you in the field because of your language,” you know. Ah, it was, “We can use you here because you have a lot of experience in undercover work; you have a lot of experience in...” And there was a lot of my skills that they could actually use, so it was getting it because of my merits, you know, it wasn’t because of, you know, “Well, we can use the heck out of you because, you know, you’ll be advantageous to us.” You know. And in working with them, it was a desk job. I mean, auditing reviews, you know, and it was not what I was used to. But I was close to family. And I, you know, had all my brothers and sisters up here, easy for me to go from Saint Paul to Saint Cloud.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** You know, and see my brothers and, you know, what they were doing and hang out with Dad, you know, and reconnect where I had been away for a long time. And then it just became easier for me to come back to, again, this home base of Minnesota. My actual home.

**AA:** As you worked yourself back into the community, obviously, it worked smoothly and well with your family. But the rest of the community, I know that through the years there have been lots of veterans coming back after the wars. Some of them have been received with a lot of respect and they have been treated with respect and honor and sometimes not. What was your experience both as just a veteran in the community and in the Latino community?

**RG:** First as a veteran, I never witnessed any ill feeling because I was a veteran.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** Ah, I think that was always a strong point. I think a lot of people are surprised that I was a veteran. I mean, I think get that. “Oh, you’re a veteran?”

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** And maybe because I don’t boast about it, you know.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** I think that it was an experience like any experience in my life, and I think within the Latino community, as I see, you know, in the Fargo-Moorhead area, I want to be able to see like my dad saw, you know. Like what he says, “You know, I had friends that were in the military,” you know. But he grew up in Texas, Latino friends, you know.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And I grew up here. I mean, I can count on one hand and they're all my brothers of the Latinos that I know within this community that have been in the service.

**AA:** I see.

**RG:** But I don't boast that I am or I was, because that doesn't sound right, but you know, I'm putting people in a position where they say, "Well, now, he thinks he's better than us." Because I am very cautious about that. You know, because I don't want to be seen as a person that, "Well, you know, he wasn't raised like us. You know, he doesn't have the same values as us." You know, because I do have the same values. Any Latino, I mean, family, you know, whether it's you know, traditional or whether it's just, you know, speaking the language.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** But, you know, I was given different opportunities. You know, I look at my own cousins and I go, you know, of all the cousins I have; only one of them went into the military that I know of. [Chuckles] You know. And so I don't know that I haven't been looked at negatively because of it.

**AA:** So how did your military service affect your life in the years afterwards? Or did it?

**RG:** I don't think the life, you know, affected me. I think maybe some of the training, I have, obviously, jumping from airplanes, we went from a thousand feet to eight hundred feet because the Russians were doing it at eight hundred feet.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** So I had a lot of times, you know, I have sustained back injury because of it. Deteriorating back injury, you know, as it gets worse and worse. So, in that sense, I think, you know, physically it took some toll. But I mean that I think, you know, the experiences, the memories that I have from the military were all, all very, very good. And because I've been able to use that in every facet of my life. I mean, there are some things that, you know, Drill Sergeant Spaton and Ricker still, to this day, I can hear them say some words. Or, use those tools they gave me in order to navigate, like you said, through the everyday life, you know.

**AA:** Do you still have friends that you made in the service that you have stayed in contact with, and if so, how often do you see them?

**RG:** We really don't see each other that much. We text each other every now and then, say, you know, once a year to see if we're still alive and kicking.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** Bob Delaney is one. Bobs Hanish is the other. And Drew Eackel I lost contact with maybe seven years ago. And been trying to relocate some of those guys.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** Because they were, I think, very instrumental to how I shaped my life. And I mean there was some real, real brotherhood that was built in the military.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** And as well, you know, in law enforcement. I think the law enforcement guys, you know, because they were in the service, I still keep in touch with those guys because we were in a specialized unit. And I think with being paramilitary, it just kind of, again, reinforces that bond, you know, so I do keep in touch with a lot of people that have some similarities in their backgrounds as much as I do in mine, you know.

**AA:** Were there a lot of Latinos in the units where you were?

**RG:** You know, I would say in the radio operating field, I could count on one hand. How many we had in our battalion. That I actually associated with. One was from Texas.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** Daniel Terán, you know, and he was just, to me, you know, wore the khakis, wore the white shirt, you know.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** Having said that, going back to how my dad used to dress. I mean, this is one of the things that, you know, and because why I connected this, with this guy, because I wanted to know, you know, and the *pachuco* talk and all that because I used to hear my dad talk about it. [*Pachuco* was a Mexican American subculture associated with a specific lingo (or slang) and dress. In some parts of the country, the *pachuco* was a zoot-suited, well-dressed, street-connected, flamboyant Latino playboy. In other parts, such as south Texas, the *pachuco* wore a white shirt or t-shirt, relaxed-fit khaki pants, and highly polished shoes. That was topped off with a full head of hair slicked back in a ducktail, or a closely cropped crew cut. *Pachucos* were often seen as rebels or troublemakers.]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** And I go, you know, it would be, you know, a travesty if I didn't, you know, pick his brain a little bit, you know, and find out exactly what his life was like. But then come to find out, you know, not very different from mine. [Chuckles] You know, because that was the role he had to play when he went back home, you know, and, that was what he grew up with but, then, when you get him in uniform, totally a different person.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** You know. A great sergeant. But, just every now and then we were able to reveal how we dressed at home and what we did at home.

**AA:** I see.

**RG:** And so it was kind of interesting for me. And then I did go back and think of some Latino females that were in the service, you know. And I remember [chuckles] asking a . . . Guzman, she was . . . and I had gone to, I think it was a refresher course in radio operations. But I met her in Fort Gordon, Georgia. And I remember talking to her and I found out she was from Texas, and I said, "Hey, can you make some tortillas for me?" [Laughs]

**AA:** [Laughs]

**RG:** [Laughing] She looked at me and she goes, "I eat bread just like you do!"

**AA:** [Laughs]

**RG:** And I go, "Oh, okay." But, you know, and in my own mind, I was just thinking, gosh, everybody, you know, you're from Texas [laughing] you must know how to make tortillas, you know.

**AA:** [Chuckles] Yes.

**RG:** I guess if I didn't seek them out I was curious, because even when I lived up here, there was just not that much access to, you know, Latinos. And so any time I ran into like my own, you know, I always wanted to pick their brains and find out exactly what, you know, what made them click and, you know, was it much different.

**AA:** Well, you know, and that's really interesting, because of course the easy question is I do want to come back to that. Easy question is, is how you interacted and what experiences you had with other ethnic groups. You know, African Americans, white, Native Americans, Asians, and so on.

**RG:** Sure.

**AA:** But I do know that also very often, we see Latinos from other parts of the country more different than we are.

**RG:** I see.

**AA:** So that sometimes we end up treating each other differently. It's almost as if it was a different group of people. But I know that the environment, and the setting, and the perspectives within the military, because you have to be a team, are different than as a civilian.

**RG:** Sure.

**AA:** Did you see any of that in the military?

**RG:** [Sighs] I did. For example, go back and, you know, being with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, obviously a lot of divisions in there. But there was like a low riders club. You know a car club.

**AA:** Oh, okay.

**RG:** And so and then taking me from a motorcycle, you know, and then pulling up to these low riders and they were all from California, and you know, me, from further north, you know. [Chuckles] I was like, curious, says, “Hey, man, how does this hydraulic system work?” You know.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** Ah, and fitting into them in a very kind of cautious, he’s curious but, he walks like a duck, you know what I mean.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** But he really isn’t one of us. He doesn’t dress like us, you know. And so I think it was just more their curiosities that how come you’ve never seen this? But in my own naïve way, you know, just walking right up to them, “Hey, you know, what’s up? ¿*Que pasó, hombre?* [“What is happening, man?”] You know, in my broken *pachuco* talk and they’d laugh at me and stuff like that. But it was non-threatened, you know.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** Because we were still in the United States Army. We were still expected to do our jobs come, you know, three hours from now, or you know, whatever it was.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And like you said, we were still a team. But outside of that, everybody had their own. And so I would purposely seek out those because the Latinos from California were way different than the Latinos from Texas. Way different from the Latinos that were from Arizona. You know, more closely to the ones that were in California, but you could definitely see, you know, the differences.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And I was just curious enough to put myself in their environment, I guess. But still not accepted because I rode a motorcycle, you know. It was like, and back then it was, “Oh, what’s a Latino doing on a motorcycle!?” You know. [Laughs]

**AA:** [Chuckles] Yes.

**RG:** Because that was a majority of the guys that I hung around with were Anglos. You know, again, because what I was used to here. I mean, ninety percent or even a higher percentage of that of my classmates were, you know, Anglos. So it's kind of where my comfort zone was but not really because I wanted to immerse myself with some Texans, but then I could only get so far. Because there is. I mean, they obviously know that, yes, you weren't born in Texas, dude! [Chuckles] You know!

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** You may eat tortillas and everything else, and know the language and everything else, but there's something that's not there, you know.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** So as they recognized me, I think I recognized that as well.

**AA:** So did that affect how you interacted with them later on?

**RG:** I think, you know, once you put the green suit on, and you outrank them or you were, a specialized, let's say you were 82<sup>nd</sup> and they were not. All of a sudden it becomes, "Oh, okay, we are this," right there. You know, "Now he's trying to tell me what to do."

**AA:** I see.

**RG:** You know, "You wouldn't have done that when I was with my car club or you wouldn't have done that when we were outside or makes you think you can do it now?" You know. But I think that there was ultimately a job to be done and then it would get done. But then the next time you saw them in civilian attire, and then it wasn't the same anymore, you know.

**AA:** Right.

**RG:** Because then they'd see, this was the same guy that you know. So yes, I mean, it's very obvious, you know. Or even the fact that I didn't have an accent, you know. I just remember in doing interviews when I was a police officer and talking to somebody on the phone, and then coming out to their house, they'd go, "Oh. I didn't expect to see a Latino."

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** You know. And even though I was speaking to somebody who was, you know, well, Cuban, Castilian, you know.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** It was just a surprise to them that I could actually speak in, you know, Spanish. I mean, maybe not the same dialect. But I could understand what they were saying. You know, but it was always that, "I didn't know that you're a Mexicano."

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** You know. [Chuckles] ¿*Y donde naciste?* [And, where were you born?] you know, and then the questions would start.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** You know. Ah, because then there was all of a sudden and not really a distrust, but, where are you coming from? You know, what angle is this? You know.

**AA:** Sure

**RG:** So it was just different. I mean, I felt it from both sides, I think. You know, not good or bad, it was just I could sense it.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** You can sense it.

**AA:** Just another maze to navigate.

**RG:** Yes. And it was definitely different, I mean, from when I was inquiring of what their off time was, and then being in uniform, and then the next time you saw them, it was *not* the same.

**AA:** I see.

**RG:** It wasn't the same.

**AA:** The dynamics changed.

**RG:** Yes, the dynamics changed tremendously because, you may have gigged them for something, where, hey, I need a pass here, we're the same. Yes, when my uniform comes on, I'm not going to get gigged in front because of you. Or I'm not going to fail inspection because of you. You know.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** I look at you as I look at anybody else down the line. Get your stuff squared away. [Whispers] ¿*No eres Mexicano?* [Aren't you Mexican?]

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** And it's like, what do you do then? I mean, you still walk away with a sense of, [hisses] maybe I should have. You know. Or why didn't I? You know, having a second thought later.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** You know, but you still, ultimately, I always used to remember, how is this going to save his life later on? And how is that going to, you know, benefit him later on? If he gets passes now, then he's going to get used to it. You know. And then it's going to pile up even higher on my end. So I figured if I was just straight across, I asked everybody. [Chuckles]

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** So that's kind of how I looked at it because, you know, I'm giving you the same tools I'm giving everybody else. Or they gave me the same tools they gave everybody else for that matter.

**AA:** And how were relationships among the ethnic groups? Latinos as a group, with whites as a group, with African Americans as a group. Or geographically, like you mentioned Eackels earlier, you know.

**RG:** Yes. We're down south in rural Georgia, you know. Ah, we're in North Carolina, you know, Rucker, Alabama. You know, and so back in the 1980s, you know, late 1970s, early 1980s, rap music was just coming in, you know, loud music, the thumping and all that. And so that culture was isolating itself. You know, hip hop was so in that off time you had people that just listened to hard rock. You know, and then people would just listen to that rap music. And then the oldies were specifically designated for California, Texas, Latinos, you know, that was the groups.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** You know. And then, you know, everybody was like; I can deal with because it was kind of a bubble thing. You know, I can deal with, like that laid back, 1970s, you know, sounds, and easy listening, or hard rock, you know, because everybody knows AC/DC. But what is this new stuff? And everybody's dancing around so there was a lot of emphasis on, you know, don't listen to that because the blacks are listening to it. And there were fights in our dorms because of that music.

**AA:** Wow.

**RG:** Because they did *not* like rap music. And all of a sudden you had your separations becoming more and more, you know, defined. You know, just in music. And where everything else, you know, food is likeness, some fashions are likeness, cars maybe, maybe not. But the music was one thing that was really separating. I mean and maybe that's been forever. But I just remember that if you walked into the day room and the blacks were in there, nobody else walked in there. Vice versa. If you had the rockers in there, nobody else walked in there. You know. I mean and with Mexicanos, well, we're always out in the parking lot, you know! [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Laughs]

**RG:** [Laughing] So it didn't matter, everybody else had to listen to it, you know!

**AA:** [Chuckles] Yes.

**RG:** But it was really designated. And it became a very sensitive thing, and in with our squad. I mean it got to be really bad. But not playing into it was better for us. You know. Because, I mean, it was easily to be influenced and get on that, you know, that wagon to say, “No, let’s go and mess up your radio or break your tapes,” or whatever.

**AA:** Interesting. So there was some play in there with the ethnicity. It was as much or more to likes and dislikes of certain things like music.

**RG:** I think music. Even as far as off time. Wearing nylons on their head. You know. The blacks, for whatever reason, one thing that I remember clearly, having a profile. A profile means medically designated not to do this.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** Ah, not being able to shave because they can’t shave. You know, because they have sensitive skin. And so why was it okay for them and not another ethnicity? You know. And then all of a sudden they’d say, “You’re giving them a crutch, why can’t we have a crutch?” You know, and then it becomes kind of a struggle in trying to enforce something, you know, if you’re enforcing for all of us to shave, but a selective few not to shave. And then everybody else jumps on it, oh yes, I can get that, too, you know. It was just really difficult to enforce. If you had to enforce it. And then so there was a lot of resentment because of that. And then throw upon the music, throw upon, you know, oh, okay, they’re getting special favors now. And they can’t eat pork now. You know, and it was like beginning to be too much, you know.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And I really saw it because there was a mixing pot of who we had in our platoon. You know and then I always think, you know, I used to watch the Filipinos [chuckles] sitting in their homemade little chairs, just watching this *whole* thing unfold right in front of their eyes!

**AA:** Yes. [Chuckles]

**RG:** And they’re just kind of waiting to see who’s going to win, you know. [Chuckles] It was just interesting to see that. You know, the Panamians doing the same thing. And then because I used to wonder too, why are some of the Latinos from Texas can’t stand Puerto Ricans?

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** They just *cannot* stand them. Well, they listened to everything else. They hate those because they’re from New York, and ya ya ya.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** It's like, well, let's get beyond that, you know. I mean, they can do whatever they want to on their own time. They're not telling you what not to do, you know.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** "Well, yes, but do they have to crank it up?"

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** "Do they have to, you know, invade my space?!" You know, and then all of a sudden I'm going, "Well, you know, there is some likeness. I mean, we are still Latinos. You know. Maybe different regions and different dialects." Yes, it was interesting to witness some of that.

**AA:** How did things change between the time you went into the military and the time you left?

**RG:** I think when I first went in, we're all scared, and there are some unknowns out there. You know, they're still shaping you and molding you so, you know, everybody does hold onto their hands, everybody does. And not until you start getting into a specialized field, do you start losing some of those people that didn't go into specialized training. And when that happens, then you become elite. You know.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** Some that wear the beret, some that don't wear the beret. Some that can tuck in their boots, some that can't tuck in their boots, you know. Some, you know, who get the special ribbons and the badges to wear the unit crest or whatever, you know, it's like, then you start separating. And so then you start noticing in quartermasters, or cooks. Where there was a high percentage of African Americans in that field. And then you look at the infantry, operator or radio operators, there were more Anglos in that. You know, more Native Americans in radio operations, I would see, than I would see anywhere else. You know. So I mean, it's almost like, they were separating by specialized training. And so then you had a higher population here, or you know, then they had women in their unit, and there were some guys that didn't have women in their units, you know. And it was, just they were kind of creating their own. So, when I got out, even though we came in all marching at the same time, the further you go into it, the more separation is made. You know.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And I think that that's when, you know, you do get some hard prejudices in the services.

**AA:** I see.

**RG:** And I know there is.

**AA:** How about in civilian life? How was it different when you went in as when you came out?

**RG:** I think when I went in, I went in with support and pride from the foundation that I had. You know the experiences that from my cousin, the support that I got from my dad, they were all supportive. And I went in with pride. And I came out and I was received with the same pride from my family. So there was no fall off for me. I don't think I ever went out and led with, you know, "I'm a veteran." Because, on all applications, they'll give you a certain amount of points for veteran's preferences.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** That was the only way that they knew that I was in the military. But if I was just talking to Joe Schmoe off the street, you know, unless I had something that reflected that I was in the military, I wasn't looked at any different. You know the transition was smooth. And I remember my brother Victor saying, "When I came out, you know, out of the Vietnam War, because they knew you were a soldier, you might get spit on." I never witnessed any of that. But it was a different war. I mean, I don't know. I didn't live through that. But my brother says that, yes, sometimes you just didn't want to say it, depending on what community you were from.

**AA:** Did you take advantage of the GI Bill? I know what you told me about the motorcycles.

**RG:** [Chuckles] No.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** I took disadvantage! [Laughs]

**AA:** [Laughs]

**RG:** Yes, no. And I didn't, you know.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** I didn't take advantage of it. It was offered to me even through the Upward Bound Program.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** I took advantages where I could, you know.

**AA:** How about other benefits, like business loans or home loans?

**RG:** You know, I tried. I talked to them about business loans. But there's a lot of hurdles, I guess, in the community here that you have to go through. I think they would give you the loans with, the VA is very good about looking at you and, you know, what do you have to offer and is your business plan, like any professional would. It's always up to the community. And I've always said that Moorhead lacks the drive to have Latinos succeed in business. They don't have

an interest in the Latino community first of all, you know, and much less their businesses. You know, they don't want to help out. I mean that's been my impression of Moorhead.

**AA:** I see.

**RG:** And being in the business world in Moorhead, I know that from firsthand experience.

**AA:** Are you a member of any veteran organizations, local, state or national?

**RG:** National, it's the Disabled American Veterans [DAV].

**AA:** Okay. Is there an active group like that here in the area?

**RG:** Yes. There is, we're national, but I mean we have local representation here.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** DAV. And that organization helps veterans transition back into the community if you're disabled, with resources, connections to schooling, connections to employers, connections to education, you know. So there is a lot of benefit in belonging to that organization. I don't belong to VFWs or anything because I just never have. I really, really support DAV because of what I was exposed to by a mentor.

**AA:** As a veteran or just a civilian, because you said that, you know, a lot of people don't see you as a veteran because you don't talk about it. Do you feel that you are a part of the larger community, like this is home, like you belong?

**RG:** Yes. I do because, there's still a lot as a veteran. As a veteran, there are more organizations in this state, in Minnesota, that recognizes veterans and what they did. For example, the Patriot Guard. I ride with the Patriot Guard. And that organization, whether they're service-related or whether civilians, you know, really take pride in supporting families of veterans or veterans themselves, ah, extended families of veterans. You know, you don't have to be a veteran in order to be in the Patriot Guard.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** You know I really believe in the organization because there's a huge sense of community. And I have gone from Minnesota to the Patriot Guard, because it's nationwide in the United States, to Texas and be just in the same arms as if I left in Minnesota. So that organization, to me, no matter where you go, if you wear that patch, you're home. You know, and that's one thing the military has done for me that I could say that if I wear the Patriot Guard and then when I wear my vest, ah, they know what unit I'm from. Ah, when I go to a motorcycle rally, I will hear somebody yell, "Eighty deuce!" You know.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** And to me that gives me a sense of pride, because they're not only recognizing the unit, but they're recognizing me in serving for that unit. And that to me, I mean, always speaks volumes. I mean, there could be somebody I don't even know, and if they see my keychain with the double A on it, I mean, they'll thank me for serving. And I mean it's just something that, it's just nice to have. But I think that's nationwide, like I said. Then when I was in United Kingdom.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** Ah, somebody saw my tattoo with the 82<sup>nd</sup> on it and they recognized it then. And they were like, "Oh, really? You know, tell me a story." [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** And it's kind of nice to be in a well-recognized organization.

**AA:** Yes. And what story did you tell him?

**RG:** Oh, I just was telling him about, you know, my experience with the 82<sup>nd</sup> and what I did and, you know, what my role was. And some of my friends are, true friends, you know.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** So a lot about my, you know, the time in the service and what that was, a good experience. Because I think they asked, "Oh, you know, what was it like to jump out of airplanes? What did you do? What did you hear?" You know.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** And I always tell them, I said, "Oh, I always had night jumps because I closed my eyes, you know!" [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Laughs] You slept!

**RG:** [Laughs] Yes! Exactly.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** So it's just nice to be recognized.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** I mean, even in the United Kingdom, you know.

**AA:** Are there quite a few Latinos involved in veteran's organizations?

**RG:** I guess not in the DAV unless you get to Minneapolis where there's a larger community of veterans. And you're going to see that anywhere. You're going to see, yes, not so many in organizations it's almost like asking a professor, how many Latinos do you have in your class? As opposed to, you know, in this huge university.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** And then going down to Minneapolis where there's a larger concentration of, you know, Latino students. So I kind of, you know, kind of look at it that way sometimes, is that, not everybody wants this, it's not everybody's bag of tea to go in the military.

**AA:** Yes.

**RG:** You know. And I would say that if my kids would say, "Dad, I want to go into the military," I'd say, "You get your degree before you go in the military." [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**RG:** Because then, you can at least go in as an officer. So I think that if I was going to, you know, give anybody advice, I don't see it, but then this community, we are a large group of Latinos here but you know, some of them are still working that seasonal stuff. You know, and going back and forth. And I see it because I know that my daughter has friends that are only there up until October and then they leave. You know, for whatever reason, I don't know.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** You know, but then they'll come back, and right before schools out. [Chuckles] And she says, "And I miss her when she's gone." And I always think back, that could be us. But for whatever reason...

**AA:** So if they are not involved or they are not joining, it's not because they don't want to and they are not joiners, but because there's not the numbers. Is that what you're telling me?

**RG:** There's just not the numbers. It's just not the numbers.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** If you were raised here, and the same exposure that I was, I think you'd call this home. But if you joined the military here. You'd come back here. But if you're in Texas, and you joined the military in Texas, and then you came up here occasionally, you're going to go back to Texas, with a larger community of services, or soldiers are.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** You know, and so they're probably going to have the larger numbers than they do here.

**AA:** You touched on this just a bit a little while ago, but I want to hear more about it. If your son or daughter or any close relative asked for advice on whether to join the military, what would you say?

**RG:** Yes. Depending, knowing now what I know about the military. . .

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** You know, and there's the worker bees. [Chuckles] In the United States Army. And there's the Air Force where you could, you know, get a good desk job and learn a good trade. And then there are the Marines, like the worker bees, and then there's the Navy. Again, a good, long-term skilled job. You know.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** I would suggest and maybe this is being kind of skewed in what I saw. But if it was my son, I would make your selection of the service. But if it was my daughter, pick the Air Force or the Navy. And make sure that you have college before you go into either one of those services. And that goes for my son and my daughter. Because then you're offered a commission in going in as an officer. This, again, puts you in a higher grade.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** That comes with more responsibility. And it comes with more, I don't want to say this, but you get treated better, if you're going in as an officer, than if you're going in as a mosquito wing.

**AA:** I see.

**RG:** You know. So it's just when I went in, I had to do it that way. They have the opportunity now to go to school. And I will work as hard as I can. But I know that my nieces have asked us, "You know, what should I do?"

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** "Which branch should I go into?" And I always direct them to my brother who has been in the Air Force and say, "Find her a career that, you know, she's going to be successful at. Something that can lead from military to civilian without any huge transition." And I would say that a larger majority of specialized office skills are more employable are the Air Force and Navy's, than the Army and Marines.

**AA:** Sure

**RG:** So for a girl or a young lady wanting to do military, I would say yes, and that includes my daughter. I would say, "If that's the route you want to take, make sure you complete four years of college before you go into that." You know.

**AA:** And if they decided to join, what kind of advice or tips would you give them about how to serve in or do their time in their military, especially as a Latino?

**RG:** I know that the numbers are growing in Latinos all over the place.

**AA:** I see.

**RG:** Nationwide, they're growing.

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** But if my son was going in or my daughter was going in, I'd say, "You know, give yourself an edge. Give yourself an edge either by education or by a program that would make you already stand out." You know. That would be the one tip that I would give them. How you navigate after that is really on how you were, I think, raised. You know, to respect others, to treat others the way you'd want to be treated. And if that doesn't work because, I mean, some of those things can go right out the window, you know, in a split minute. Always go back and, you know, think about, you know, what that individual's going through, and put yourself in those shoes and say, you know, "How can I prevent this from happening to me if I'm ever in that situation? What would I want somebody to do for me?" If that means tying their shoe, or helping them out or showing them how to spit shine, or whatever they need to do.

**AA:** Okay.

**RG:** I mean, put yourself in their shoes. What if you were that failure? For that moment. Maybe they're great at everything else, but there's just one thing that they need help with. It's like anything else. You're not always going to be the top of your class. You know, even though you come in there with the intent that you want to be. But that can be taken away from you right away by somebody coming in there with no steady time at all and, you know, be just as successful as you are, you know. [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles] What would you like to add to this interview?

**RG:** Ah, I think one thing more thing I'd like to add.

**AA:** Okay. That's good. [Chuckles]

**RG:** You know, I'm honored, first, you know, that you asked me to do this, because it's something that I have always felt, that there was a purpose in what I did. And in that purpose, you know, I hope that I've been able to live up to. Everybody I met from the time I went in in the AFFES station to the time I left in the military, every individual I came across I took something from, whether it was a mannerism, or that it was the way they looked, the way they laughed, the way they ate, the way they walked. I took that because I was able to apply that in my life. In some way or another, one year from now, even, you know, draw from those experiences or draw from that, that knowledge that that individual might have had. It's just made me the person that I am today. Not wanting to give up on certain things. Knowing where the importance that I may be

able to make a difference or not make a difference. Knowing that, that I was led into it with pride by my father. And knowing that I left with pride in an honorable discharge was one thing that I felt fulfilled, you know. But it was just a chapter in my life. Because there's a lot of chapters in my life that we still have to write. You know. But every one of those experiences, whether it was in the military, whether it was in law enforcement, whether it was in education there is a way that when I see a soldier in the airport, that I know what they're doing. That I know what they're feeling at some point or another. It's kind of nice to just thank them. Because I know that I've been in their shoes. And not everybody appreciates that.

**AA:** Of course.

**RG:** And it's kind of nice to reach out and say, "Hey, thanks." You know, or seeing a WWII vet at the VA who's sitting in a chair and just being able to walk up to him and saying, "How are you doing today?"

**AA:** Sure.

**RG:** You know, and giving him five minutes of your time. That makes my day to hear somebody else's day. How I've been able to help, or just by a smile, or whatever that may take. I hope that when I get that age somebody recognizes me that way. Or thanks me for what I have done as small as it may have been.

**AA:** Well, thank you very much.

**RG:** You're welcome.

**AA:** I appreciate the time for the interview.

**RG:** No, it's been an honor for sure.