

**Oral History Interview of  
Juan Francisco Fitz**

**Interviewed by: Daniel U. Sánchez  
May 16, 2014  
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:  
*Hispanic Interview Project***

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## Interview Series Background:

The Hispanic Interview Project documents the diverse perspectives of the Hispanic people of Lubbock and the South Plains. These interviews and accompanying manuscript materials cover a myriad of topics including; early Lubbock, discrimination, politics, education, music, art, cultural celebrations, the May 11<sup>th</sup> 1970 tornado, commerce, and sport.

## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Juan Francisco Fitz, who discusses his experiences as a Texas Tech Health Sciences medical student, his medical career in Lubbock, Texas and his civic involvement.

**Length of Interview:** 00:44:21

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### Keywords

Hispano, Covenant, Texas Tech, UTEP

**Daniel Sanchez (DS):**

My name is Daniel Sánchez; today's date is May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014. I'm in the office of Juan Fitz. Juan has agreed to be interviewed for the Southwest Collections/Special Collections [oral history] project. And we're going to cover a little bit of his history today and follow up on another day. Thank you, Juan.

**Juan Francisco Fitz (JF):**

Good morning guy.

DS:

For the record, can we get your complete legal name?

JF:

Sure, my name is Juan Francisco Fitz. F-I-T-Z.

DS:

When and where were you born?

JF:

I was born in El Paso Texas, October 2, 1953 and at a hospital called Hotel Dieu, which is no longer in existence. And from what I understand from what my mother told me, I was the only boy born that day. So, we have a lot of things going out. We got furniture my parents got furniture. Gerber gave them food—I don't know but I was the only boy born that day. It's kind of a weird situation so my parents got a lot of stuff.

DS:

Some got a bunch of freebies, huh?

JF:

Got a bunch of freebies, yeah. The ex-wife says I was jumping from crib to crib already.

DS:

It wasn't a bad start to life.

JF:

I guess not.

DS:

You mentioned your mom. Can we have her complete legal name?

JF:

My mom? Her name was Mary Fitz F-I-T-Z. She was from Horton, Kansas. My dad was from Mexico City. His name was Job J-O-B, Fitz F-I-T-Z.

DS:

Did they ever talk about why they came to the U.S.?

JF:

For a better life. They met in Mexico at a wedding; this is what they tell me. They met at a wedding—. So, eventually they got married and they moved to the United States. My dad worked for the Hertz Corporation and the Avis Corporation. He retired from Hertz and then retired from Avis. While in El Paso my dad was very active in a lot of stuff. Especially in Juarez, right across from El Paso. He was a soccer player. They were pretty well known in Juarez. He was the president of the soccer association for Juarez and the referee college. And then he was the president for the state of Chihuahua for the referee and the football association. So, he was pretty active in that kind of stuff. So, because of that my father made us learn Spanish by the time we were five. But my brother and I were speaking English and Spanish and writing it pretty fluently. It was blessing to be bilingual.

DS:

Given your dad's background education was very important very early?

JF:

Well, my dad didn't have much of an education. My dad only had a sixth grade education. My dad was a very learned man, by that meaning he loved to read books. He just got into books, he loved history. Any time we traveled he always took us to museums. He always made sure we understood history because we learn by history, and so both my father and my mother were both very much into history. My mom had a high school education and my dad only had a sixth grade education but he was very good at math. He could calculate things in his head real quickly. Like I said he was a very learned man. He taught us at a young age, always dress properly for the occasion. Go to church, you go in a suit and your shoes should be shined and you have a handkerchief. So my dad was always very strict about that. If you go to a meeting, you have to have to be in a suit because you have to show your dignity. You just can't show up. My dad was a mechanic. We never saw my dad in a mechanic outfit. When he quit work at the end of a shift he would go wash up and put on civilians. We never saw him come home full of grease or his outfits from work in grease. He always showed up in a *guayabera* if it's in the summer or in his coat or whatever. He was always cleaned up. We never saw him greased up. His hands were always clean. He always used pumice to keep them clean. My mom was a house maker. She was always at home taking care of the kids. My dad didn't want my mom to work. He wanted her to take care of the kids and that's what it was. So my dad would work two jobs to send us to private

school. My dad was a pretty hard worker and he believed in education. They encouraged us. They didn't push us; they encouraged us which was very different.

DS:

You mentioned your mom and dad and you said she was from Kansas. So what part of Kansas was she from?

JF:

A little town called Horton. I'm not sure if it still exists or not. I've been there before once that I remember. It's near Wichita, and my grandfather (unintelligible Spanish) on both sides, my grandfather on my mom's side worked for the railroad. My father's father, my grandfather worked for the railroad too. He was an engineer. The story that I get, he was from Germany and came to Mexico during the Kaiser situation in Germany. At that time Mexico was recruiting a lot of immigrants. They wanted to build the railroad. They wanted to build the breweries and the infrastructure in Mexico. So, a lot of Germans saw what was happening in Germany so they all packed up and bugged out. That's how my grandfather wound up in Mexico.

DS:

Wow, so that's the interesting story. Because I was going to ask how did the Fitz come from Mexico. First we had to get there, right?

JF:

Yeah, well you got to remember 35 percent of the Hispanic population is not Hispanics or Indian. We just celebrated *Cinco de Mayo*, but most people don't know what *Cinco de Mayo* is. Some people erroneously think it's the revolution, and it's not. It's the day that Zaragoza defeated the French army, which at that time was the strongest army in the world. And a bunch of peasants, ill-trained, basically, defeated the French in Puebla, and that's why the *Cinco de Mayo* is celebrated. So at that time, going back into the history is, there was a lot of Germans, a lot of French, a lot of Austrians. They came to Mexico during Maximilian and Charlotte. It was the House of Habsburg who basically came into Mexico and they brought the armies because Mexico owed France a lot of money. And since they couldn't pay, Napoleon decided to invade Mexico. The United States was busy in the Civil War so they couldn't enforce the Monroe Doctrine. So he did what he wanted. He put Charlotte and Maximilian as the crown of Mexico as it was called. And a lot of French and a lot of Germans came over. And that's why our Mexican cuisine is so mixed. If you look at it, the native Mexican cuisine and you mix it with the European, you get Mexican food. It's very different because you see a lot of the stuff that we eat in Mexico then you go to Europe and Germany; it's the same thing just a different name; a little bit different flavor, but it's the same thing. So that's how my father came over and my grandfather he said, "I'm out of here," and a lot of Germans did too. They came to the United States or went to Mexico or South America, and that's how the Fitz name came about. We see a

lot of Mexicanos with German last names, because of that influx that you had from the Maximillian time and from the first war.

DS:

You mentioned the cuisine as one of the things, but with El Paso being so close to Mexico, is it closer to everything there being more traditional than, for example, here in Lubbock?

JF:

Oh yeah, it's a big difference. You're more on the border there so it has transplanted a little more differently. One of the things I notice being here in Lubbock is that a lot of the Hispanic names are spelled differently than what I'm used to. They got an S instead of a Z, or whatever. As well, they make a big difference there. When they talk about Mexican food here in Lubbock, I'm sorry, there ain't any. And the reason I say that is because we were talking about more traditional Mexican food. You're used to here is more Tex-Mex. What you see more in Mexico, in Juárez you see the *cochinita pibil*, which is a pig that's roasted in the ground. You see *mole*, traditional *mole* from Puebla. There's like five different *moles*. So you see more a mixture there. Here when we see enchiladas it's some kind of a Tabasco sauce and ketchup mixed together and thrown in with cheese and there's no such thing in Mexico, it's very different. So we get more traditional Mexican food. With mom being from Kansas, learned how to cook a lot of the traditional Mexican food though. So we grew up with real Mexican food. We learned how to cook it, so it was great in that area. But we see more traditional Mexican food. Right now with the situation in Mexico is, there's more Mexican Restaurants coming into El Paso because a lot of the Mexican owners are leaving because of the crime in Mexico. So they're setting up their Mexican restaurants in El Paso and it's kind of a fusion of cuisine that's coming down. But it's pretty good. I go every now and then out there. It's a different mixture of cuisine. It's pretty good though.

DS:

So did you visit with you grandparents a lot when you were a kid, your German grandparents?

JF:

Well, not my German grandfather, he died in a railroad accident. They irony of it, we have a cousin, the Fitz's, if you look at the Fitz name in Mexico, it's all one family. The family on the Fitz side worked for the railroad and they're working like sailors. You know every port, a love, and every little crank station they had somebody there. There is a little town in Oaxaca in called Fitz Oaxaca, which was established by one of my uncles. So they all worked in the railroad, which was kind of funny. But I never got a chance to meet my grandfather because he died in a railroad accident. From what I understand, the locomotive that he was operating at exploded and he died in that accident. My grandmother, I never got a chance to meet her, because she died when my father was pretty young, my father was probably about nineteen or twenty when she

died. So I never got a chance to meet my mother on my father's side. On my mother's side I was able to meet my grandfather and my grandmother. My grandma there on my mother said she was from I think Guanajuato. They were *hacendados* in the Mexican Revolution. They left Mexico. And for some odd reason wound up in Kansas and I'm not sure how my grandparents met on that part. So, but I know that she lived in Kansas and he moved the family around. They lived in Kansas, and they lived in Michigan for a while, and then the depression hit here because I guess the connection that my grandmother had in Mexico, they decided to move to Mexico. I'm not really sure how that ended. They never really talked about it. That's all I know to that part. How they wound up in Mexico City, I have no idea, but they did and I'm sorry I never got a chance to ask my mom but they really wouldn't talk about it but they just said that they met at a wedding and that was it.

DS:

One thing I want to do is kind of go into your education. You mention you went to a private school. What did you start off with?

JF:

My father believed a lot in education so he worked hard so we could go to a private school, both elementary and high school, and this was in El Paso. There was one school, it was called Saint Mary's. I went up to the sixth grade in that school. The school closed down. Then he put us, my brother and I, he put us in another school called Saint Patrick's, which was further up in central El Paso. I went there for the seventh and eighth grade. Then from there I went to high school, which was Cathedral High School. Cathedral High School has a big connection with Notre Dame. They're very strict, very, very strict. From what I understand at that time, I didn't know that, but 100% of the graduates going to college under scholarships. So they went up with lots of scholarships and I do remember when we competed at the science fairs against the school district in El Paso. One year they told us they did not want us to compete because we were taking all the prizes. So they said, "We don't want you guys back." So, I guess you work hard and they kind of kick you out. In my graduating class was a hundred. I graduated the top ten. And so I was fortunate enough because I graduated their top ten, you're ten. So I graduated top ten, number ten. And it was only a graduating class of a hundred. They were a very strict school. What one brother told us, Brother Emitty Long I remember very dearly, very strict, but he was teaching things that we were going to be learning in college, in high school so by the time I got to college, college was a breeze. So I was already set in the ways from that school. And my brother he went to cathedral as well. He graduated from there as well.

DS:

And you mentioned the ties to Notre Dame. Did you go there?

JF:

I wish. I wish. I wish I had though. This was big ties. It was a big connection. But, my family was poor so we could not afford it. I had scholarships to Pomona, American University, and several other places but we could just not afford it. We had a certain amount that we could pay for it but of course where is the rest of the money coming from? I was fortunate enough to have a nomination to West Point. My eyesight, unfortunately, kept me out. I was only like a fraction off and they tried to get me through and I'm glad I didn't go to a certain point. I'm glad I did go because it gave me the opportunity to do some other things. I got offered opportunities through the military to sign up, which I did. I did my army tour. I learned from there a lot of stuff, traveled. The G.I. Bill was able to help pay for the rest of my schooling. I'm fortunate.

DS:

Let's talk a little bit about that brief military career. Where did you go, and what did you do?

JF:

I was stationed at Fort Ord. I did my basic training at Fort Ord and I got assigned to Fort Sam and did a lot of training there and got assigned somewhere else before and then wound up in Germany. I wanted to go to Germany because I wanted to go where the family came from. I didn't speak German. None of us spoke German. There's a big German airbase in El Paso. So I'd always hear the Germans speak; so I always wanted to learn the language, it was our language. I got a chance to go to Germany, and I was stationed there. I actually moved in with a German family. They taught me German. That family was very learned because they knew five languages. Their English was perfect English, very great English. They were fair enough that they asked me to move in. and I moved in, I didn't pay any rent; all I had to do was bring groceries. From the moment I moved in they just started speaking German to me. Within a month I was able to communicate and as time went by I got better at it. I got out of the service in Germany; stayed there for a year and worked over there and then came back. So I came back and went to school. I went to El Paso Community College. I got a degree from there and I went to University of Texas at El Paso, graduated from there and then wound up at Texas Tech here for my medical school.

DS:

What year did you start the medical program here?

JF:

I started medical school here in '81.

DS:

'81.

JF:

'81 and graduated in '86 and wound up doing my residency in Michigan from '86 to '89. Then I came back and lived in Dallas for a while, came back to Lubbock and then due to my parent's illness I had to go back to El Paso and take care of them. Then when they passed away, covenant had been recruiting me for a long time to come back here, so I came back. I've been here since then. On and off for over twenty years here in Lubbock.

DS:

Let's talk about Lubbock when you first got here. To go to medical school, what was that like?

JF:

It was different. I looked at other medical schools and Lubbock wasn't even on the radar. Texas Tech was not on the radar. You've got to understand, one of things is Lubbock, among the Hispanic population, outside of Lubbock, Lubbock is seen as a very racist city. So a lot of people say, "Why do you want to go to Lubbock? They are very racist, they don't like Mexicanos there." And to be honest there were not a lot of Mexicanos when I moved here in '81. It was real different. If you looked at the area you did not see a lot of Hispanos, and you looked around the hospital you did not see a lot of Hispanos. And if you did they were not in a position of influence or that kind of situation. From what I understand there were only two or three physicians that were Hispanos at that time. So it was a little different though. Did I feel uncomfortable? Nah.

I've been in worse situations, so I came here and I said, "I'm being me here." If they feel uncomfortable having a Mexicano that's their problem. That's the way my father taught us. If they feel uncomfortable, they're the ones that got to deal with it, not you. You come in, you have as much right to be here as anything else and with that philosophy of my father, I did. Now what brought me to Tech? It's a guy by the name of Jim Bob Jones who used to be the dean of student affairs. We became very good friends. I first met him when we were touring the school. Met him, struck up a conversation, I liked him and just started talking to him and a few days later he called me up and see how I liked it, how I enjoyed the visit and that's when I changed my mind. And I eventually did apply to Texas Tech and got accepted at Tech. It was a no-brainer; I got accepted to other schools and because of Jim Bob Jones I decided to come here.

I'm glad I did because I met a lot of other people who were Hispanos but they were not from. There there was another guy Manny de la Rosa [Dr. Jose Manuel de la Rosa, M.D. Regional Dean of Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center at El Paso] was two classes ahead of me if I remember correctly. He's now the Dean of the medical school in El Paso. There was Joe Gonzalez, he's in San Antonio. He does physical medicine rehab. I know a few other guys as well who had an organization called TAMAMS, Texas Association of Mexican American Medical Students. They got us involved in there so we wouldn't feel out of place. I think there were only four Hispanos in my class. There were only two African Americans in my class. It was a class of a hundred as well. So we were definitely the minority. I didn't feel out of place, just I'm here, I earn my way, so I'm here to stay and I did and eventually became president of

TAMAMS at the state level and the local level. We actually had a grant from the government to track Hispanos from high school on and a lot of these guys that were in high school are now physicians practicing in other cities in the state. We ran out of money so we couldn't keep the thing going but we were successful because we went to high school students to teach. Remember I said that 35 percent of the Hispano population was not Hispano surnames. I'm going to give you three officers of the TAMAMS organization and they're all Hispanos. Hendrix, Flood, and Fitz.

DS:

Sounds like a law firm.

JF:

It does. My brother says when they go "Fitz and Fitz," oh we're a law firm. You had those and the most active people in our organization were non-Hispanos were Anglos, were *gringos*. They were very active in our organization, doing things, going out to talk to kids in high school. We went out recruiting for Texas Tech and we had a budget. We had our own little teaching group that the Hispanos had. And we were successful and the school came to us and said, "Can we use you guys teach our other students?" And me being business-minded, I looked at it and said, "Yeah but they're not doing it for free." Just because we're Mexicanos, I'm not doing it for free. So I told them, and I they kind of said, "No, no we'll get you a budget, we'll pay them." So the students at the same time we're studying were getting paid to study. So they were getting paid like seven dollars and fifty cents an hour to teach, which is great because initially they wanted us to do it for free and I said, "I ain't doing it for free." So we got that and we got a budget for us to go travel, and we got the federal grant and we traveled all over the place, recruiting. Then we had to present in Washington and several places. So, it was a big satisfaction knowing that we had an impact on others Hispanos going on to medical school who are now practicing as well.

DS:

Y'all were probably ahead of the curve trying to do that in '81. That's early to be doing that.

JF:

It was, there were other Hispanos at the schools but sometimes, what kind of makes me mad a little bit to a point, I got the worst and most insulting rejection letter from San Antonio, from that medical school. The dean up there was a Hispano and I got the most ugly rejection letter. That letter inspired me to strive on and work harder. You get a little bump in the road and you work harder to strive to get there. Because of that it made me mad. Eventually when I did graduate I ran into that dean and showed him the letter and I said, "Thank you. You inspired me." And he goes, "Oh why?" And I said, "That was the most ugliest rejection letter I've ever seen." And I showed it to other deans and they said that was inappropriate. Then I said, "You inspired me to prove that I could make it." Because that letter said that I was not good enough to be a physician

and to look for another career. So I still have that letter just to kind of get at their goat. When I went on front of him, I was president of the association TAMAMS and we were having our annual meeting in San Antonio. And he was the hosting person and we had several US Representatives coming down to tell us the impact that our program was having. So I was very proud of that to at least tell him, "Here, this is what your letter did, it made me strive harder."

DS:

How hard was it to balance all that? The education and being involved in that organization?

JF:

It was hard. I've always been used to working hard. In fact my grades were a little bit low when I was working and doing things. I had so much free time I worked while I was in medical school. We weren't supposed to but I worked at what used to be Saint Mary's. I worked in the ER. That kind of made me because it kind of set me a timeframe that I kind of have to work hard and strive and yeah I had my downfalls and my bad times in medical school but you just pick yourself up and go. You can't dwell on the bad. You hit a bump in the road, pick yourself up. Like Mark Twain said, "If you're going to fall, fall forward, at least you're a few inches ahead." And so I did, I had some bad times and there've some good times, I failed at things but I keep going. I keep going, that's all you can do, just pick yourself up, shrug it off, and go. I had some bad times in school, how am I going to say no? It was tough and I was able to make it—and I'm here. It was tough. It was tough.

DS:

What was the most memorable thing about being involved in that organization?

JF:

There were a lot of good memories but I think one of the memories was when I had to go up and tell the guy, "This is what you did." Being president of the state organization and having the big meeting at his house to demonstrate to him, "You lost out." I think having the impact of having influenced a lot of other students to pursue a career. Because here's what happens and I'm seeing it again. I teach at Tech, and I don't see a lot of Hispanos. I'm the boards of several organizations, a wealth of national level organizations. I'm not seeing a lot of Hispanos anymore in school. What happened? Where are they? I'm kind of disappointed in that because, I just came back from a meeting in Galveston for the Texas College and there was only one Hispano out of the whole, there were like over four hundred medical students. Only one Hispano? Really? I just came back from Fort Worth, a medical association, same thing. The medical student section was only like two or three Hispanos. Whether they're Mexican from somewhere, it doesn't matter the Hispanos there were only two or three? What I'm noticing is that the majority who are going on to medicine or career medicine, they're coming from a family that are professionals. I'm not seeing any more of the lower socio-economic Hispano going on the pursue this. And I'm kind of

doing a little bit of research on it as to what's going on and I think it's the breakdown of the family nucleus. Who does a kid look up to? Okay, you've got a mother whose got four or five kids, all different fathers. Who will they look up to, there's no father figure, there's nobody there. Who do they look up to? Nobody. Who do they see around them, criminals, drug dealers? I don't know; I'm confused as to what's going to happen. There's another gentleman here Noe Brito, you probably know him. He's involved in saving people and young kids and getting them away from the gangs and away from that kind of situation though. I don't have a problem with gangs. My father was very different. My father was very strict. It was yes sir, no sir, yes ma'am. When you introduced, you walked in, you introduced yourself. My father was strict about who we could meet and who we could hang around with. He was very particular about that. If he didn't like your friends he'd say, "You're not hanging around them." We hate our parents, when we're growing up a lot of times because we hate the way that we are. I've become my father. I really have. I go, "Damn, my dad was right," You see a perception. My brother is the same way too now. He was hanging around with certain people and he'd say, "I don't like those people, we don't even associate with them." It's one of those things that my father taught us. We were very close knit, we're very separate, we're not into big things out there. It's one thing I notice I don't see a lot of Hispanos now being currently pursuing. I've seen it at the college level, and I talked to one of the advisors there. He says we can tell who's going to make it and not make it, just by their behavior and we saw that too as well. They got in there and they start partying. You start partying and your GPA, you owe points by the time you finish and they drop out. And we saw that when we were talking to those kids in college. Party was their main thing. I was in college, and I didn't have time to party. I was working full time, and I was going to school full time. I didn't have time to party. Everybody said "Spring break." I never went on spring break. I went spring break after I finished everything. I went on spring break with my family. We went skiing. We went here and there. It wasn't Florida go get drunk, or go to Cancun and get drunk. I said, "Hey I can get drunk when I'm older." But then as you get older and you try not to get drunk because you've got too much to lose. I don't know. It's surprising seeing that we had an influence on somebody who pursued a career in medicine who came from a lower socio-economic situation. Those who came from a higher socio-economic situation, it was already there. They already see what the advantages and stuff like that, it's those who were in a low socio-economic "Where are they going in life, or what can they do." I know there is one congressman who is from California. He's a Hispano. How he paid his way through school, family migrant workers, they worked in the fields and what he did was he made a contract with the people of that community. He went around in a suit in the middle of summer walking around "if you give me money here's a contract, I promise to come back to this community" and he did. He went back, put clinics in, put programs in there and now he's a congressman.

DS:

That kind of mirrors programs that the government has now for certain professionals. If you get your degree and you go back to the community and you have your student loans forgiven. That

type of stuff that you have to commit to. Even rural doctors you have to commit to go to a rural community.

JF:

You have to commit. There's one thing that's very different that I've noticed in my past relationships is that a lot of time they don't understand a physician's dedication to their career. One time there was a survey done. If there was an epidemic or something happened, a disaster where would you go do? And most of the responses were "to help others." First and make sure my family is okay, but I'm going to go help others. So you set plans in. Being a physician is still a noble career. You're respected. You help people. There is something that goes with it though. It still is a very noble career. So I encourage people to go into it. I know a lot of the older doctors complain because of the regulations that are in there from the government, but we let that happen. We as physicians let that happen by not being involved politically. I'm involved politically and actually ran into a couple of legislators yesterday. I was picking up a pizza, and we started talking about politics. The girl friend calls me up, "Hey, you are late." I go, "No I'm not, I'm taking care of business." They don't understand that. We can't just drop everything, we have to be involved, and we have to give back to the community. I give back to the community by teaching at Texas Tech. I've got a great income from tech, zero. I get zero money from Tech. But I teach. My income comes from Covenant working at the ER then working here at the medical spa I do here. I enjoy doing that. I enjoy being a physician and giving back to the community. That puts a little bit of pressure on me, because I have to behave. You have to be careful. You've got to ride the straight and narrow because you are an image in the community. There is a certain respect that's expected from you. So you have to play that role. I'm very particular about that I have always taught that to my kids. The other thing I taught my kids was wherever you go I don't want you dressing hood-like. I want you dressing appropriately. If it's preppy, dress preppy. I've always dressed preppy; I've always liked penny-loafers and stuff like that. That was the influence my parents had. You are judged by the way you dress. If you walk in all hood-like, you're not going to get much respect, but if you walk in more or less well dressed, you don't have to be fine-dressed it's very different the way you're treated. That's one thing my parents taught us is you dress for the occasion. If you dress in a nice way, then you're going to be treated nice. And always treat people nicely, that's what my father said. He only had a six grade education but a learned man. He taught us how to tip. He taught us how to take care of our people. When we go to hotels, I leave a tip every morning. I always meet the person taking care of my room by their name and I greet them by their names. Same thing at the hospital. People working housekeeping, they're somebody's mother. So I'm going to respect them too. I'm not going to look down on them. My father had to work hard too and I'm pretty sure he was looks down on by some other people. But I try to learn their name and nothing gives you more respect than that though. They look at you that you're up here. You treat them in a nice way and they like that. Like I said, it is somebody's parents and it is somebody's father who is working hard to earn

an honest living. So I respect that. That is why I try to meet everybody by their name and greet them by their name.

DS:

I want to ask you a question about where are those Hispanos now from the lower economic—going into medical school. And I wonder if this has any impact with something like that. Years ago I had a meeting with the former president of the Health Sciences Center, John Baldwin, and we were discussing Hispanics and recruitment and his take was kind of, “Well we have UTEP [The University of Texas at El Paso], and we are going to be the international recruiting center.”

JF:

Well it's a little different. Yeah that gives a little bit of a different aspect. Like I said, maybe I came here and at a good time because, who was the president of Texas Tech at the time when I came here it was Cavazos. Look at the family of Cavazos they came from the King Ranch basically they were the hand. And it changed. I can't tell you. I think that the attitude is taken from whoever is on top. Who leads basically is the attitude. Yeah, we have UTEP and we have Diana Natalicio, Natalicio is an Italian name, not a Hispano name. And she has led UTEP to a very prominent position. I mean yeah we would make fun of other football team, but who is the only university from Texas that has ever won the national men's championship in basketball? It ain't Rice, it ain't UT. There's only one team, and they changed the color of basketball literally. That's what I tell people. I always tell people that, “You can never tell me what is the only university, in Texas that has ever won the national championship.” They are always wrong. They can never tell me that. I'd tell them, “It changed the color of basketball,” and they still don't know. The first thing they come up with is, “Oh yeah I saw that movie.” UTEP is ranked high now, in one of the reports I just saw it's ranked above Stanford in education and graduation of Hispanos, and the degrees that they're offering. It's ranked above Stanford. It's ranked above Harvard. For a while there it was being called “The Harvard by the River in El Paso”. For a while there, they were the running joke because we had a lot of international people that ran for UTEP. They couldn't say UTEP right so they would always say “JUTEP”. So it became the joke to saying “JUTEP”. We've been the little boys being picked on. But you have those and now you've got another, UT San Antonio coming up too as well.

So, I don't know about that attitude. I know when Cavazos was here, his thing was to recruit as many Hispanos as he could. He was very supportive. That is probably why we were so successful at TAMAMS because Cavazos was head of it. His daughter was in my class and so was his niece. So, it makes a big difference when you have someone who really believes in certain things. They came up from nothing. One became a general, one a football player, president of the school. It's very different though. The struggles are always there. I'm just kind of disappointed that I don't see more Hispanos moving up. Yeah you go to El Paso list they are all engineering. Yeah they have a big medical school there and they have a big pre-med program there but, they go somewhere else. Texas Tech is not even on the map. If it wasn't for Jim-Bob

Jones I changed my mind. Then I brought my brother up here and after I moved here and he stayed here so he is married to Dr. Ginter and they have the Ginter Eyecare Center. They've done very well. Lubbock has been good for him. I am here now, again. Lubbock has been good to me. Lubbock good to me. My kids are here. The grandkids are here.

DS:

And you mentioned coming back to Covenant because they had been recruiting you. Can you talk about starting into that career there and what your early roles were and how you developed?

JF:

Well, I did my residency; the funny thing about it, I've always been the first in something. I was the first from my family to get a college degree. First of my immediate family to go on to medical school. My brother got a degree as well, and he got it from Texas Tech. I got mine from UTEP. I went to Michigan and did my residency there. And I was the first one from Texas, I was the first one from Texas Tech, and I was the first Hispano that they had at that program. So, like I said, the first I did a lot of stuff. Came back, worked in Dallas. Then I came back to Lubbock and I worked at UMC for a while, and left there for about a year and a half to go take care of parents. At that time, there was a transition that was happening at Methodist to Covenant and I had an aviation company that was in El Paso and an air ambulance and kept in touch with Aero Care because if I could field the call I would give it to them to take it. They would do the same for me if they couldn't take the call, they'd give it to me. So we would kind of help each other. I was a director for a big ER group traveling all over the place. People knew me at Covenant already because some of the people I had worked with before, they kept recruiting me to come back. There were opportunities there when my parents passed away. Actually, my father passed away and my mom still stayed and eventually moved here. Opportunity came and they continued to recruit me to come here. I did. I looked at the opportunity. I looked at what was there. And the advantages and my brother says, "Just come back, come back to Lubbock, we've got an Airport, we can always leave anyway." I came back. I don't have any regrets. Opportunity we've got a good medical community here in Lubbock so, I can't complain.

DS:

Do you have administrative rolls out there at Covenant?

JF:

I used to. A new administration come in and changed things. I used to be the assistant director of the emergency department. I was in charge of the stroke center. I was in charge of the chest pain center. I was one of the co-directors of the chest pain center, co-director for the stroke center. I'm still director for the ambulance service that we have there. In 2008 I won the excellence award because I put up a telemedicine program in Covenant because we didn't have anything.

Neurology is a stroke type of thing so they were basically using a robot. 2008 things were barely coming into the technology using so a lot of people made fun of me. But I got the excellence award from Covenant for bringing in that kind of technology. Now you look around, it's everywhere; telemedicine is one of those things. I was one of the pioneers for that here. I gave talks around the world and at international conferences on how to use telemedicine for strokes and stuff like that, so it was a big opportunity to do that. Other than that—women's in mass media, I won their award a couple years ago for having an impact, the most influential impact in Lubbock. I'm proud of that and I thank my family for being supportive in that regard. A lot of times I wasn't home all the time. It leads to problems but that's the way it is. It's been good. I'm glad because I can dedicate time to this here; time goes on. Things happen. Things change. Time will move on. So I have less headaches now.

DS:

You were involved in an organization back in your college years, but then you were also president of the Lubbock-Crosby—

JF:

Yes, I was president of the Lubbock-Crosby-Garza Medical Society. The reason why is because there was not enough doctor's in the other small counties so they became part of this. Again, we go back to the firsts, I was the first Hispano president of the county medical society for Lubbock. And it was fortunate because at that time it was when we were celebrating our one hundred years so as a typical Mexican you got a reason to celebrate. So I said, "Let's do a gala." So we did a gala celebrating our one hundred years. We had it at the Overton. As fate has it, I got involved in the history of Lubbock. To know a little bit more about Lubbock, kind of like what you're doing, I know that is how we met and how we did little things and it's been taking a while to get things done, but I'm getting to the history of how the medicine has progressed in here. I'm surprised that there was only one Hispanic physician here and that was Dr. Duran in the forties and fifties and I don't know what happened to him. I don't know what has transpired and I'm trying to find that out, so I'm doing a lot of research to write a book on the history of Lubbock, the medical history. El Paso did that too, many years ago. I was involved with that project. I'm not going to try to do it here.

DS:

I think his widow may have passed already.

JF:

I think yes because I've tried to find out and I don't know if—

DS:

But they did have a son that worked for some local entity here.

JF:

I'm going to try to find out, if you find out, let me know.

DS:

You probably know a few people that are involved with the local LULAC [League of United Latin American Citizens] chapter.

JF:

No not really.

DS:

Because some of those guys know them. I think they—

JF:

I'll try to get in touch.

DS:

I'll see if I can find it because I need to talk to him too.

JF:

Yeah

DS:

Because his dad, Dr. Duran was also very meticulous. So he kept very good records of everything.

JF:

Oh, that would be great to see.

DS:

He was one of the guys from LULAC that kept all the original records. And they are somewhere, like most organizations. You know the ones that stay with the presidents. So, he's got—supposedly files put away somewhere.

JF:

I'd like to, real sorry, I was just talking to the girl friend, I'm going to be stopping and picking up some burritos on the way, because we're going to—I've got to go pick her up.

DS:

Well if you want to cut it short we can.

JF:

Yeah we can hook up somewhere other. When would you like to?

DS:

Whatever works for you next week. I've got...

JF:

You know what I'm here Wednesday. I'm back Wednesday.

DS:

Wednesday in the morning and going to be out but I can do something Wednesday afternoon.

JF:

That would be great. No, I mean whatever, I have nothing planned here yet though we could meet somewhere—We can meet here again.

DS:

Okay, sounds good. We'll do it then.

JF:

Sorry about that though.

DS:

Oh, don't worry about that. Life doesn't stop for us.

JF:

I know.

**(end interview)**

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