

**Oral History Interview of
Abel Billy Martinez**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
August 24, 2012
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Hispanic Interview Series***

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The Hispanic Oral History 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 11th 1970 tornado, commerce, and sport.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Billy Martinez as he discusses his life growing up. Martinez goes on to describe his political views and what got him interesting in fighting for Labor Unions.

Length of Interview: 01:01:35

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Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Sanchez. Today's date August the 24th, 2012. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, and I'm interviewing Billy Martinez as part of the Southwest Collection/Special Collections' Hispanic Initiative. Billy, first of all, thank you for coming in.

Abel Billy Martinez (AM):

You're welcome. Thanks for the invitation.

DS:

Oh, not a problem. Would you please start by stating your complete legal name?

AM:

My name's Abel Billy Martinez.

DS:

And where and when were you born?

AM:

I was born 1951 in Garza County. Just South of here.

DS:

Near what community?

AM:

Post, Texas.

DS:

Post, Texas. And how about your parents? Could you state their names, and tell me where they were born?

AM:

My dad, his name is Emilio Martinez. He was born in Mexico. I'm not exactly know where. And my mother was born in America. She was born in Henrietta, Texas. They were both born in 1922.

DS:

Did they ever talk about what brought them to Post?

AM:

Yes, they did. My dad came to Post in 1932, at the age of twelve or ten, and it was farming, and so was my mother. They migrated to this area because of farming.

DS:

So did you grow up in Post?

AM:

No. I grew up in Slaton, fifteen miles from here. I went to school there until I was sixteen years old, and then I went to school in Hobbs, New Mexico, for a year, and then I came to Lubbock in 1966, I believe, and went to Lubbock High, and then went to Tech after that.

DS:

Can you tell us about your experiences growing up? What that was like?

AM:

Well growing up in a small town like I did, I didn't really enjoy it. In fact, when I left Slaton at the age of sixteen, I told myself I would never go back. It wasn't—in the sixties, it wasn't a very good time for Hispanics in that area. The thing that I remember the most is that there's a graveyard and they had a row of trees and all the Mexicans and Latinos and Blacks were buried on one side, and then all the Anglos on the other side. That left a lasting impression so I never have gone back.

DS:

You said you went up to New Mexico. What was that like?

AM:

It was a lot different going to New Mexico because they seemed to accept people more. There wasn't a very—it wasn't a big thing to be a Latino in New Mexico. In fact, that was the first time that I ever got my haircut by an Anglo person. You know, prior to that, either my dad or we to find a Mexican guy to cut my hair, and that too left an impression. So going to New Mexico was really a lot different for me.

DS:

You mentioned you'd come to Lubbock High, also.

AW:

I came to Lubbock High. My dad was a tradesman. He worked. He had a trade. He was sheet metal worker, so he always had good paying jobs or decent paying jobs and he was offered a job in Lubbock, so we came to Lubbock. I started my junior year here in Lubbock.

DS:

So what did you think about the difference between Lubbock and Slaton?

AM:

It was quite a bit of difference. Seems like Hispanics were accepted a little bit more. At Lubbock High, it wasn't—schools weren't segregated, so it was completely different. I didn't have a problem going to school here.

DS:

Can you name us some of your classmates you went to Lubbock High with?

AM:

I remember some. A guy named Eddy Sanchez, who was very, very talented. I understand he's in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. There was a guy named Esedro Rios [?] [00:04:06] that used to sing. He and I were really good friends, and I think he lives in the valley. I have a pretty good friendship with a guy named Dave Marquez [?] [00:04:25], who became a writer. His family owned the Marquez Office Supplies here in town, and he became a writer and still is in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. That was about it.

DS:

And you talked about how you'd gone to Lubbock High and then you went to college here at Tech. What made you decide, and when did you decide that you wanted to pursue higher education?

AM:

My parents always felt like it was important to get an education. I was the youngest of four, and they provided the opportunity for all of us to go to school. They wanted us to go to school. So it was never an option not to go to school. We just grew up knowing we were going to go, continue on. And that was the same attitude I had with my kids. It was sure, you got out of high school, but you're going to go on.

DS:

And that was kind of unique, now, in that timeframe also.

AM:

It was pretty—it was—yeah, it was. It was kind of a different attitude, but that's the way my dad was. He just felt that education was important, and he wanted everybody to be educated.

DS:

So here you came to Tech in the midst of leaving Lubbock High, but there's all this unrest going

on nationwide. What was it like when you came to Tech?

AM:

That was really bad. The Vietnam War was going on. I remember there was always a lot of protest. People would wear armbands that had either there were doves or hawks. Of course, the ROTC, they were really in favor of the war. But I got to see a lot of different stuff. There was different—we heard different speakers. That was kind of interesting. But it was really not a very good time. Going to school—going to high school at that time, we would have assemblies where they would read names of kids that had been killed in the war and that wasn't a very good time, so I didn't particularly care for any of that.

DS:

Can you talk about what Tech was like?

AM:

Tech was a lot of fun, you know? You know, we talk about my parents. I grew up in a extremely conservative Southern Baptist household. My parents were very, very religious and we were brought up that way, so when I got to Tech and I got to see a lot of different stuff, it was kind of an eye opener. Of course, in the seventies is when the drug movement was really big and I got to see a lot of that stuff, so it was kind of a different world for me. I enjoyed the independency that I got. I never did get into any of that stuff because it just wasn't what I wanted to do, but it was pretty unusual to grow up in that era.

DS:

How about on the academic side? Did Lubbock High have you prepared to come into Tech?

AM:

No, no. That was another thing. Our counselors, they insisted on me going into a trade, and I wasn't prepared for that because my parents had prepared me to go to college, and when I tried to talk to the counselors about wanting to go to school, it was like no, you don't want to go in that direction. And so they almost—it was almost like they were discouraging you to go into a college. I didn't like that. It just wasn't what I expected from a counselor.

DS:

Yeah. I think a lot, back then, the counselor was more about seeing the bad kids more than anything else.

AM:

Yeah. It was not a good time.

DS:

So when you came to Tech, tell us about your first days or whatever, on campus.

AM:

Back then, it wasn't computerized or any of that. They didn't even know anything about computers. So all the registration had to be done at Tech at the colosseum, so you'd work out a schedule, and then you had a time to go, and then you would try to get classes and then once you did, you would go talk to a counselor and then they would work it out. But it made you become pretty responsible in a hurry, which I wasn't used to that. But it was really—fortunately, I had my older brother was in school at that same time, so he helped me a lot.

DS:

What was his name?

AM:

His name is Emilio Jr. He lives in Amarillo now. He's retired.

DS:

What was your degree plan?

AM:

Actually, I was – I started out – because my dad was a tradesman and my brother was an electrical engineer major, I was going to be a mechanical engineer major, but I didn't realize how hard it was, so I changed it to education and then towards the end, I became a sociology major. That's kind of where I was, but I did want to become a mechanical engineer. That's what I wanted to do.

DS:

So what's your most memorable experience from Texas Tech?

AM:

I had several. I got to meet a lot of people when I was—I got to experience my first Tech-Texas game at Austin and I was seventeen years old, and I thought that was something else. Austin was pretty weird back then. You got to remember I grew up a very conservative Southern Baptists so I wasn't—I didn't know what was out there.

DS:

So what year was that?

AM:

That was 1970. So that was pretty early. I graduated in 1969 from high school.

DS:

You mentioned you were still seventeen at the time?

AM:

Yeah, I was pretty young so—going to New Mexico, the age difference—you went to school. You started school when you were five in New Mexico, so when I went there, I was moved up a year, so I graduated a little earlier than my classmates from high school so I was pretty young.

DS:

And what was your favorite subjects out at Tech?

AM:

Oh, I don't know. I had several. I loved English and I had a—in fact, I have eighteen hours of English, but I think that was probably my favorite. I enjoyed reading. I used to read a lot. That was—I enjoyed that.

DS:

Did you have any mentors or favorite professors?

AM:

I had a Spanish class. There was a lady that—and I don't remember her name, but she and I used to go to the same church and she always—she helped me quite a bit. But I don't remember her name.

DS:

So when you were at Tech, were you thinking about what you were going to be doing beyond Tech?

AM:

No. It was—I didn't think much about that. I just wanted to get through it.

DS:

So you know, let's talk about that. When you got through with it, what was next?

AM:

Well, I got married really young and in fact, my junior year in college is when I got married and my wife, she was real young, and soon after we got married, we had our first kid. So I had to

drop out to go to work and so I never did finish my senior year in college, and I went to work. Because my dad was a tradesman, I was able to work with him, and so I eventually got a trade and became working in the trade. I did that for several years, and then I became a representative for local union and that's how I—I did that for several years until I retired.

DS:

Can you talk about how you segued into that?

AM:

Well, I needed a job so I had to go to work to support my family, and I joined a labor union. It's kind of an interesting story about that is that my dad was a tradesman working for a non-union sheet metal shop, and the contractor he was working for got a job at Reese Air Force Base and because it was a government job, they had to pay their employees the current prevailing pay rate, which was somewhat higher than what the non-union workers were making, so the contractor decided he wanted to—if he was going to have to pay union wages, he might as well sign a union contract. So he agreed to sign a contract if they would let his employees become union members. So my dad was grandfathered in, and at that time, which was in the late sixties, he was the first Hispanic union sheet metal worker. Well, his salary—you know, he started drawing good salary. He had benefits and he realized that it was a pretty good deal, so he started calling his friends to try to get them to come in the union and they wouldn't allow them in because they didn't want Hispanics being over the union. So they kept making excuses why they didn't want them, so my dad opened up our home to teach these guys how to be union sheet metal workers. And in fact, about two years ago, the last guy that he taught retired as a union sheet metal worker and received a letter from Randy Neugebauer, which I thought that was pretty cool. And so, they finally let my dad in and then when I started to raise a family, he said, "You might as well become a union member," so that's kind of how I got in. He became a member of the executive board so it was easy for me to become a union member. Plus, because I used to work with my dad, I knew the trade, and then I was elected by our members to be their representative and I did that for several years, which I really enjoyed.

DS:

Can you talk about the role you played, and how that changed from then to now?

AM:

When I retired, the number of Hispanic sheet metal workers—union sheet metal workers nationwide was at nineteen percent. We had—plus the two hundred thousand members, so the numbers were still up there. The only problem I had with that was that we didn't have enough Hispanic representatives in the higher offices. I had a lot of problems with that. So it really did change, and when I became a representative, I would go out and recruit the Hispanic worker, and I would try to get them to—in fact, I tried to get them to set up offices in border towns so that we

could get these workers in, and then do their documentation, and then unionize them, but I couldn't get any support for that idea because if we didn't hire them—if we didn't make them union members we were going to have to deal with them later on as non-union workers. So I was just trying to eliminate that step, which I still think was a pretty good idea. There was a lot of labor that came over from South of the border that was really good labor. It was cheap, but it was good, and we wanted that. Contractors wanted that.

DS:

Let's talk about that difference between a labor—labor that's union and one that's non-union—about some of the pros and cons of that aspect.

AM:

That's kind of a good question. I can tell you that my dad, as a union sheet metal worker, retired when he was sixty-one years old, and this year, he's going to be ninety-one and he's still drawing a union pension, and he still has health care. I retired when I was fifty-nine, and I was what's called upside-down, which means I would make more money being retired than I was working. I have health insurance, and I have a good pension, and none of that would've happened if I hadn't become a union sheet metal worker, so that's kind of the main deal. When I was recruiting workers, I would tell them that I could go out and negotiate the best possible wage for you. I can give you the best training available to do your job well, and I can let you retire with dignity, and I'm living proof of that. So that's kind of the main difference.

DS:

And you know, given that you spent your life doing this, what's it like when you see someone that either didn't take the advantage of it or just didn't have the opportunity at all?

AM:

I think that our big—there's a lot of problems that cause people not to take advantage of that. One of them is that our economy here is based on cotton, and you get a kid that grew up working in a farm, making eight dollars a day. He comes to Lubbock, works for eight dollars an hour. That's the most money he's ever seen in his life. He's thankful he's got a job, so we're not ever going to unionize this guy, so that's kind of the biggest problem, but I just—sometimes I don't understand why they don't take advantage of that. It's—I just don't get it. I worked all over the country, you know, as a union rep. I walked a lot of picket lines all over the country, and I still don't understand why people don't want to be members of the labor union.

DS:

And this is a fight you've been doing for years.

AM:

Yeah. I did it for a long time. When I was young, I was in Las Vegas one time and at the hotel that I was staying in—now, it's the biggest non-union hotel in Las Vegas. Across the street, where they built Caesar's Palace now, it was just a park. I heard Cesar Chavez speak, and he spoke on dignity and respect for the workers and he was right, and so from that point on, I became a union activist.

DS:

That's interesting you bring up Cesar Chavez because I don't know if you were involved with that battle a few years ago to finally have a street named after him.

AM:

Yes. I was part of the committee. I was disappointed in the street that they chose. I really pushed for Avenue Q because it went from one side of town to the other side. I thought that would be a neat deal, but I was told that that's street's maintained by the state, so and I don't know if that's true or not.

DS:

Do you think that in the interest of getting something done, they went for something expedient instead of a drawn out fight?

AM:

Yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah. I think that's exactly what happened because if you look at the street—you look—you go to Albuquerque, New Mexico, you know, right off the freeway, Caesar Chavez. You go to Austin, Texas, there's—El Paso. Everybody's got a big street named after Caesar Chavez and we got a little street at the park. Nobody knows it's there unless you play golf.

DS:

Yeah. It's a street that basically just goes just a little south of *barrio* [Neighborhood], but that's about it.

AM:

That's about it, but I think we kind of gave in because we got something. I was disappointed. There was a lot of people that worked really hard on that. Christy Martinez, David Arturo [?] [00:22:33], and other people that worked hard for that.

DS:

Yeah. I think what I found interesting about it was how they changed the rules for street naming after that fight.

AM:

Yeah, that was not good.

DS:

Because I mean, I don't know if you know some of the background on how streets were typically named and how they are named now?

AM:

I don't remember exactly.

DS:

Okay. All right. And so let's talk a little bit about, you know, the fights that have gone on traditionally between the business owner union workers, and how that's happened in Lubbock.

AM:

Yeah. That's—I'm not saying that—I think a lot of the problems is that in the fifties and the sixties, unions were very powerful and they control a lot of stuff, and they pushed a lot of these owners in this area pretty good. So when the second generation owners took over, they saw what unions had done and they didn't want any part of it, but at the same token, unions realized what they had done and so they started backing off a little bit. But it is a big fight and still is. We still struggle for it.

DS:

In fact, even at the national level. What was it? About a year and a half ago? Was it Wisconsin, where they just tried to undo everything the unions have done there?

AM:

Right. If I had—I was retired by then, but if I hadn't been retired, I probably would've gone to Wisconsin to work there, and I would've enjoyed working there.

DS:

And you're familiar with Miguel Torrez, right?

AM:

He's a good friend of mine. He and I are a member of the same—well—same labor council. I'm not a member anymore.

DS:

Yeah. I think he's still on the board if I'm not mistaken, and so he's been doing that fight recently still. Is that why he's going—heading off to Austin?

AM:

Yeah. He's a good guy. I really enjoy being around him. He loves the labor union, and you got to love it or you wouldn't be in it.

DS:

And how about some of the other experiences as far as being involved within the Hispanic community and the community at large?

AM:

I really—that's—I really enjoy some of that. I really enjoyed being part of the Lubbock County Democrats. I enjoyed doing that part. My older—my brother, he's the only one I got, he's a registered Republican, and he doesn't understand why I do that, you know? It's—the reason that I like being a Democrat is they don't treat me different. My membership is at First Baptist and I like First Baptist, but I like to tell my daughter, I said, "Some of these older people, they think I'm a farm worker." You know? And I don't know if they do or not, but it just seems that way. Whereas, the Lubbock County Democrats, they don't treat me any different. We're on the same page. Is that weird to think that?

DS:

No, no. And well, you talk about the struggles, though, of being a Democrat in a county that's so heavily Republican.

AM:

Yeah. It's hard, but it's fun. I enjoy doing that. I'm not consumed with it. I've seen where friendships have dissolved over that. I'm not consumed with it. I have friends on both sides, and I can deal with it.

DS:

And then your wife has a very important role in local politics, too.

AM:

Yeah. Yeah, she does. And of course, her brother, you know, is the Lubbock County Sheriff and he was a Republican, so I tell everybody that I never voted for him because he's a Republican.

DS:

So that must've been an interesting dinner party, right?

AM:

Yeah, and it still is. He's a big Rick Perry supporter.

DS:

Where's he at now?

AM:

He's in—he works—he lives in Salado, but he works—you know, he got a gubernatorial and works for the parole office and I think his office is in Huntsville.

DS:

For the record, could you say your wife's name and—

AM:

Her name's Rick Martinez and she retired from the phone company and then went to work for the—she couldn't stay retired, so she went to work for the election's office, and she really likes her job and I'm glad she does.

DS:

And her brother is David?

AM:

David Gutierrez. He used to be the Lubbock County Sherriff.

DS:

The first and only Lubbock Hispanic county sheriff so far?

AM:

Yeah.

DS:

Did he ever talk about what it was like? He was a Republican, as you mentioned.

AM:

His first office he ran as a Republican—I mean, as a Democrat.

DS:

I thought it was an independent.

AM:

No. He ran for a judge as a Democrat and he got beat. I can't remember who he got beat by, but then he ran—he was trying to run as a Democrat—as a Republican, and the Republican Party didn't want him, so he ran as independent, and then he came back and ran as a Republican. I was

trying to get the Democratic Party to get him to run as a Democrat because he was going to win anyway.

DS:

Everybody could see that.

AM:

Yeah. But he wouldn't do it. He said he'd rather run as an independent.

DS:

And that's—you know, in local politics, I don't know about national scale, but especially here in Lubbock, we see that a lot where people, they were Democrat then become Republican, but rarely do they go back.

AM:

Right. Well, if you're going to win in Lubbock County, you have to run as a Republican and I think there's a lot of politicians out there that are really Democrats, but the only way they got elected was as Republicans.

DS:

That's interesting.

AM:

And I have a good friend now—I say good friend—he used to be a Democrat and I think he's about to run for an office and now, I heard him on the radio this morning saying he's a Republican.

DS:

Well, you know, we've gone some on the political stuff. Have you been involved with like LULAC [**L**eague of **U**nited **L**atin **A**merican **C**itizens] or GF1?

AM:

Yes. I was a member of LULAC for a long time and that was kind of interesting. I mean, I think the people that are members of LULAC are good, good people, and I enjoyed being around them, and I think that they do some good, but I like—my life is kind of in order. It's kind of funny that way, and for some reason they lack organizational skills, and I think that's kind of a problem. But they get things done when they have to and that's—I had a lot of fun with them. They're good guys.

DS:

In fact, I think you read my mind because I was going to ask you about the difference between your structure of being—organizing workers and then really more of a civic group like the League of United American Citizens.

AM:

They're more like a social group, you know? And there's nothing wrong with that. That's what they like to do.

DS:

Did y'all's paths ever cross as far as they saw something going on with the worker and they asked if you could intercede?

AM:

Yeah. They did. And a lot of times we would—like when they were building a new jail, they were supporting it, so they came to us and asked our council to support it, so we did. Hey, that light's red.

DS:

Oh, really? It's—yeah, it's still recording.

AM:

Oh, sorry. I thought you said it was red—when it turned red.

DS:

Well, it would start blinking.

AM:

Oh okay. I'm sorry.

DS:

We're half an hour into it.

AM:

Yeah, I saw it red and I thought, I can't remember if he said red. I'm sorry.

DS:

That's all right. Well, you mentioned your wife earlier. How about your children? You said you had one when you were fairly young.

AM:

Yeah. His name is Aaron Martinez. He lives in Tyler, Texas. He's got a degree in agronomy. He graduated from Texas A&M. He was a golf course superintendent, but now he works for Torel [?] [00:32:15], the golf course design. The only problem I have with him is he's an Aggie. And then I have another son, my middle son, he's got a degree from the University of Texas at Arlington, and he's got a law degree from Lewis and Clark in Portland, Oregon. And then my daughter, she's got a degree from Tech, and she works for Planned Parenthood here in Lubbock. Always an activist.

DS:

Yeah. I think I've seen her at a few rallies.

AM:

Oh yeah. She's—her major was Women's Studies, which I don't know exactly what that is, but yeah.

DS:

You know, you mentioned your son that does agronomy, you said? What got him interested in that field?

AM:

Well he's a real smart kid and when he graduated from high school, he got a scholarship—a National Merit Scholarship because he scored so well on his SAT test. So he was going to go to A&M as a math major with a minor in accounting, and so that was kind of the deal, and one day he calls me out of the blue and he says, "I don't think I want to do that anymore." He says, "I want to be in the golf business." And I said, "Well, sure." And he was at A&M and he had to go—there was a junior college there. Blinn—Blaine [Blinn] Junior College. He had to take a lot of courses to try to get back, and he had to go an extra couple of years, but he finally got a degree and he was in the golf business. He loved it. But there was a lot of things that he decided to get away from. Mostly, it was the drought. You don't have any rain. So he works for Torel [00:34:25].

DS:

Yeah. In fact, also as far as like with golf courses, isn't there just like just a few major corporations now that run a lot of golf courses?

AM:

Yeah. In fact, Eagle, which is the one that runs Meadowbrook, also runs Lake Ridge and then Troon Golf that runs the Tech course. So yeah, there is. And then the small golf courses, they're just hard. It's a hard business.

DS:

We're talking about golfing earlier because you're an avid golfer yourself, and I was thinking maybe that's kind of what let him know, well there's something else out there if you want to try this.

AM:

Yeah, that was part of the deal. But he loves to play. In fact, he's got a little kid that can hit a golf ball pretty good.

DS:

Were you ever a member of the Pan American Golf Association?

AM:

I never was because—the simple answer would be because they played on Sundays and normally, I got to church on Sunday so that was hard to justify that. But I know a lot of the guys, and I play in a group now a couple of days a week, and most of them are members of the Pan American Golf Association. It's a good organization. It's well run.

DS:

So what was the links like when you started playing around here?

AM:

I started playing in Meadowbrook when I was a kid, and it was only nine holes. I mean, twenty-seven holes, and Jay McClear [?] [00:36:02] was the pro and he would let us play pretty cheap, so that's how I got involved. He gave me a lesson when I was a kid and I appreciate that. In fact, I saw him right before he died and I told him, I said, "I appreciate you giving me a lesson as a kid," because he didn't charge me or anything. He says, "I'm going to give you a lesson and you'll be able to play from now on." Good guy. I liked him.

DS:

So how did that opportunity come up?

AM:

For him to give me lessons?

DS:

Well, for you, one, get into the game of golf.

AM:

Well my brother. My older brother loved the game. In fact, he's like a scratch or two handicap,

and he played and so I just kind of tagged along, and then before you know it, I was playing. Yeah. Back then, there wasn't very many Hispanics that played golf, and so it was a little unusual. But it was a lot of fun. I still enjoyed playing. I'm going to keep playing until I can't anymore.

DS:

You've mentioned your brother a couple of times. How much of an influence was he on your life?

AM:

He was quite a bit. He was a couple of years older than I am, and he was a good athlete. He was a good student. He came to Tech and he got married, but he kept coming and so he got a degree. He used to work for—back then it was Southwestern Public Service and he started off working as an apprentice on the line crew, and when he retired—he retired about four years ago. He was—I want to say his job title was like a vice president and of course, they had a lot of changes and he—now it was, when he retired it was Xcel Energy. His office was in Amarillo at that tall building. So yeah.

DS:

Can you talk about, for example, one particular thing that he helped make your life at Tech easier or anything like that?

AM:

Well he—I didn't know how to enroll, first of all, you know? And he talked me through it. He showed me all the ropes. It was kind of a madhouse. I don't know if you remember any of that, but it was kind of a madhouse.

DS:

Yeah. I still had the same atmosphere because my first semester was fall '76, and it was still the registration out at the bubble.

AM:

Yeah. The bubble. They had projectors on screens, and those classes would fill they'd just mark them out and then at the end, you'd write a check, you know? So you were done.

DS:

How small was your check?

AM:

I don't remember. I don't. My dad gave me a blank check and he says, "When you're done, just

fill this out.” My oldest kid, when he graduated from A&M, he graduated without any loans. He never had a grant. We were able to pay for everything. But when my second and third kid came along, it was impossible to do that. I don’t think you—unless you have a lot of money, I don’t think you can do that anymore.

DS:

Well, you can talk about that perspective as a parent, having seen that rise in tuition across the board of Texas.

AM:

Yeah. He went to A&M and we had to pay for housing, we had to pay for his car, we paid for all his tuition. We were able to do that. Now, it’s—we couldn’t do it. We couldn’t do it. My son that went to law school, there was no way that we could’ve gotten him through there. You know, we helped him as much as you could, but still. That’s a lot of money. He’s been out for a couple of years now, and he’s still paying student—so is my daughter. They’re still paying student loans.

DS:

Yeah. Student loans are hard to pay down it seems like.

AM:

Yeah.

DS:

Yeah. I think even our president has mentioned that he just recently finished paying his off.

AM:

Is that right? I understand that. I don’t see how they do it. I’ve heard people get out of college with owing thirty, forty thousand dollars. Man, that’s ridiculous.

DS:

And it’s even more so if they go to get a master’s or doctorate thesis. You know, you retired a few years back. What’s life been like since then?

AM:

I was ready to retire, Daniel. I had—I travelled. I had to do a lot of travelling and I was ready to retire, and I wanted to retire in April, and then they asked me to stay until June, and then they asked me to stay until the end of the year and I said, “No. I’m going September first.” Labor Day was my last day. Two years ago this Labor Day. So I was ready. I was. When I locked my office, I walked out and I haven’t been back, and it’s been good. I really have enjoyed it. I play a lot of golf, and when I retired, my mom was still alive and my dad’s still alive so I spent a lot of time

with them, and I still spend a lot of time with my dad. I was glad that I retired before they got sick because I was able to watch over them and stuff like that. Traditionally, Hispanics take care of their families. I was glad that I could do that.

DS:

Now, what was it like for your dad? You said he was retired for thirty years?

AM:

Yeah. He retired at sixty-one, which was unheard of, but my dad, he saved us money and he took care of business. He knew how to do it, and he had a go, and he was very—a very influential person in our lives. He was real smart, and he was a tradesman, like I said, but I think back and I think he probably could've been anything. He could've—anything he wanted, he probably could've been. He didn't have a lot of the opportunity, but he did real well for himself.

DS:

Did he ever tell you what education level he had achieved?

AM:

He would always tell me that he had something equivalent to a junior high level. But he was well read. He read a lot. He was bilingual. He read in Spanish and English. He kept up with all current events. He still votes. Now, he does the mail in ballot, but he never not votes, and he encourages everybody, and I think that's why we're involved in politics is because of my dad. I remember as a kid having to pay poll tax just so he could vote, and with all of this voter suppression, it just makes me upset a little bit that we are reverting back to it.

DS:

Yeah. Past couple of years have been a steady march backwards it seems like.

AM:

Yeah, and that's a shame, but he was a Roosevelt Democrat. He grew up during the Depression. I asked him one time if he ever voted for a Republican, and he told me he voted for Eisenhower. I said, "Why?" He says, "Well he promised to end the war and he did," so that's the only Republican he's ever voted for.

DS:

Does your dad still live in Lubbock?

AM:

Um-hm. He still lives in Lubbock. My mom died this past April. They were married sixty-six years. Yeah, he took it pretty hard. He says she still talks to him. That's kind of funny.

DS:

Do you think he might be interested in sitting down to talk about his life experience?

AM:

I don't know if he would or not.

DS:

Because given his age and where he started off from, I think he has a lot of experience.

AM:

Yeah. He's got a good story to tell. He might. You know, he's in a wheelchair.

DS:

That's the one thing about this job, we can go visit your home if that's more comfortable, instead of trying to get out and come up to the university. Sometimes that's a burden on people.

AM:

Yeah, but he does have an interesting life. He grew up during the Depression and during the war. He's seen it all.

DS:

And he had the—with y'all, the thing that a few people have done where the parents themselves haven't had a lot of education, but their kids all went to college. It's just—it's amazing.

AM:

Yeah. Like I said, he thought that was important to get an education. He wasn't near as disciplined as my mom was, but I have a brother and two sisters. We've never been in trouble. We've never been arrested. Nobody's ever had any kinds of problems with drugs or alcohol or anything like that. So they were very unique in how they brought us up. Growing up in Slaton, there was a dividing line there. I told you about that, and all the Blacks and Hispanics lived on one side and there was a lot—you know, it was a rough neighborhood, but my mom made sure that we stayed out of trouble. You look back at some of the kids that I grew up with. Some of them are dead, some of them are in prison. Some of them—so she knew what she was doing.

DS:

Got that dividing line. Plus you mentioned your religious background. You were Baptist.

AM:

That was kind of unusual too.

DS:

Everybody assumes that all Hispanics—that we're Catholic, but not all of us are. Can you talk about that growing up?

AM:

Yeah, it was kind of hard and like you said, everybody thought we were Catholic, and because we were—my parents were ultra conservative, you know, a lot of the kids that I went to school with and hung around with, they didn't understand that. They didn't understand that we went to church on Sunday. We went to church Sunday night, and that part of it was pretty hard. For some reason though, like I have three kids, and we weren't as disciplined with them as bringing them into church as my parents were. So consequently, they—I think my oldest one is the only one that attends church regularly. That was kind of weird.

DS:

Is there anything I haven't covered that you'd really like for us to cover?

AM:

I think, Daniel, that you covered it pretty well. You know, that's kind of my life in a nutshell.

DS:

Exactly. I was trying to find a way to expand on that nutshell and make it—

AM:

No. It's—that's pretty much it. I grew up here, and that's about it.

DS:

What do you think of the current state of affairs in the nation and in the world?

AM:

I have a lot of problems politically. I think that a lot of people don't like our president simply because he's black, and I have problems with that, you know. I think he stepped into a hole that was bad and he tried to dig us out of it, but I don't think people let him. I think Congress worked against him, and that's a shame. That's really a shame that they did that. I think it's—you know, I'm the eternal optimist. I think it's going to get better. I just—I really don't know. I never have experienced anything like we have now. Even growing up in the Nixon era, which was bad, we knew we were going to get out of it, but I don't know what's going to happen now.

DS:

Yeah. It seems like there's two really polarized camps that are driving a lot of things.

AM:

I have a lot of problems with stuff locally too. I just don't know what's going to happen here. You know, politics is local and it just seems like we kind of lost a lot of the—

DS:

Yeah, unfortunately.

AM:

It's not by partisan anymore in Lubbock County and that's bad.

DS:

Well you know, and just recently we had our local county judge—

AM:

Go crazy.

DS:

Make some sedition type speech about the upcoming election. What's your take on Judge Head and what he said?

AM:

You know, remember a few years back where he had those—that stuff posted on his bulletin board? Well, I called him, and I talked to him and he was real nice and he says, “Man, I messed up. I was just trying to get conversations going.” And I—I was in. I was a chairman of the Lubbock Central Labor Council so I invited him to talk to our council, and he apologized and he says, “I shouldn't have done that.” And you know, I believed him and I said—and I told the council, I said, “You know, in fairness of the judge, he took my call. We talked about it. I think we're back on track.” So when he did this, I kind of feel like he let me down a little bit, you know? That was crazy.

DS:

And the news medias, they covered this story, they kind of talked a little bit about the past, but they talked about him as being conservative, but as I remember, it was more racism than conservatism that was the problem.

AM:

Yeah, it was. And that's the problem I had with that. I don't know. I don't know what's going to happen to that deal. I think he needs to resign. I think, if anything, he needs to resign.

DS:

I think I read something online today where the AJ, the *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, the letter to the editor, they called for him to resign today.

AM:

The editorial board. But I don't know if he will or not. He's not—he probably doesn't know what's going on. My wife works for the county and CNN let out his email address, and it flooded their server and it's down, so they're saying that nobody's getting emails today until they fix that.

DS:

You mentioned your wife and she's in a really unique spot because if complaints come from either party candidates about recall elections and stuff, she has to field all those. Has she ever talked about what's going on in her life?

AM:

Yeah. Sometimes we'll talk about it, but it's like okay, you can't tell anybody, you know? And so I just listen to a lot of the stuff she has to say, but there is a lot of stuff that comes through her office that probably a lot of people aren't aware of. Any time that there's a question, they have to research it. In fact, they have a legal person on staff now that takes care of all those questions that are being asked. But she does come in with a lot of questions that people ask.

DS:

And in fact, I want to call Ruth or send her a message also to see if she wants to come in talk about the stuff that she can talk about. Given her situation, there's a lot that you're not allowed to talk about just because of the confidentiality and all that.

AM:

But it's interesting. Her job is really interesting. I do a lot of—since I retired, I do a lot of work for the ballot board, and so like we get to see who the provisional votes and why. Every board member that I've ever served with, they're real good about letting people vote. It's got to be really an extreme reason not to let somebody vote. They're not going to throw votes out without a very good excuse, and I like that. I think that everybody should have a right to vote, so I like being a part of that one. We do the mail in ballots, and sometimes we'll get military ballots and these guys will write stuff on there like, thank you for allowing us to vote. If people would see what goes on in that board, they would take voting a little bit more serious.

DS:

On that issue about the voting, they did pass the Voter ID Bill, but it hasn't been implemented yet.

AM:

Probably won't be until next—not 'til—they—it's not going to happen in this general election. It's too soon.

DS:

And how's that going to affect people, like you said, that are working their hardest to let people vote.

AM:

You know, I've been against that from day one. The other day, the Texas AFL-CIO call me, and I used to be a vice chair at the Texas AFL-CIO, and they said, "Look, since you're retired, can you find us somebody in your area that doesn't have an ID, that if they implemented that today, that this person wouldn't be allowed to vote," and I said, "Well, I'll check." But really, you can't. There's not too many people out there that don't have an ID. My dad doesn't have one now because he doesn't drive, but he's got one because he needs one to fly. So really, I don't think it's going to be very hard to get an ID, so that might not be an issue as bad as we think it is. I don't know. I just didn't want to see it. Especially for somebody that saw their dad pay poll tax.

DS:

Yeah. In fact, and then there's that other issue and I've heard it's coming to a head again. The passing legislation in the name of immigration control.

AM:

Oh yeah.

DS:

Can you talk about that?

AM:

You know, my dad—a lot of people think my dad was an immigrant, but he's not. He came over with a passport, but I see that. Because of my job, I got to see a lot of people that were here illegally. It's—I don't have an answer to that. I wish I did. I wish there was something, but I just don't know what can be done. I just—I don't know. It's—a lot of people, too, that I've met that are here legally, don't like illegals coming in. I don't really know. I mean, I don't. I don't. It's a hard issue. I think Newt Gingrich probably had the best solution. People thought he was crazy, but he said, "Let's let them stay. If they're productive, let's let them stay." So I don't know.

DS:

You know, and then you've heard these partial solutions where some people have suggested that, we'll let them stay and give them, basically what's second tier citizenship, where you can do

everything but vote, and that's such a part of being an American.

AM:

Right, exactly.

DS:

How could you deny that to somebody.

AM:

Yeah, that's—I don't know.

DS:

That's where the power is.

AM:

You talk about voting—we were talking about voting a while ago. You know in Lubbock County there are thirty-thousand registered Hispanic voters? In Gilbert's election in ____ [?] [00:58:00] there was only twelve hundred votes cast. That's ridiculous. I don't know. People don't vote. Our people don't vote. I don't know why.

DS:

You've been working on this a lot longer than I have. What do you see as that problem there? Why can't we? You can get someone to register, but you can't get them out to the ballot.

AM:

We can get people. We register people all the time, and we can't get them to vote. Gilbert lost his election by twenty-one votes. That's—I don't know. And people have come—they've come in at state level. You know, I don't know.

DS:

Well, even at city elections. Victor Hernandez ran a predominantly Hispanic area, won by ten votes to a country club guy who's a good guy. He's now our mayor, but that was a much tighter race than it needed to be.

AM:

I don't understand, man. I wish I had an answer to that.

DS:

A lot of us wish we had the answer because I mean, that's right up there with that pursuing education deal because we all see the value of an educated populace.

AM:
Yeah.

DS:
So as we look towards the future, what are you expecting for yourself and for your family?

AM:
Well, I think it's going to be okay. Like I said, I'm the eternal optimist. I think that I've lived a good life. I don't have any regrets. I think my kids, they're going to be okay. Like my two oldest sons, like my dad's got ten great grandkids, and they're all married. They all have interracial marriages. It's kind of funny. He said, "I would leave my entire will to the first Hispanic great-grandson," which is not going to happen. But I think that they've crossed over and I think they're going to be okay. They're not going to fight that fight that we fought. They're not going to fight the fight that my dad fought. So I think that part of it, they're going to be okay. I think because they're educated that they're going to have—they're going to make a living. It may not be—they may not get rich, but they're going to make a decent living, so I'm glad that that part worked out. As far as I'm concerned, I'm going to kind of blend in. Hit a golf ball every once in a while, which is what I like to do.

DS:
Well, I'm glad you're taking it easy because that allowed you to come on in for this interview.

AM:
Yeah, and I'm really glad you invited me.

DS:
Thank you, Billy. I've really enjoyed it. I think we're hitting right at the hour.

AM:
Yeah.

DS:
In fact, the light's blinking right now. So let's wrap it up with that. Thank you.

AM:
All right, good deal. Thank you.

DS:
Thank you. I really enjoyed that.

AM:

That was fun.

[End of Recording]

