

**Oral History Interview of
Martin Aguirre**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
March 17, 2015
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*The Hispanic Oral History Project***

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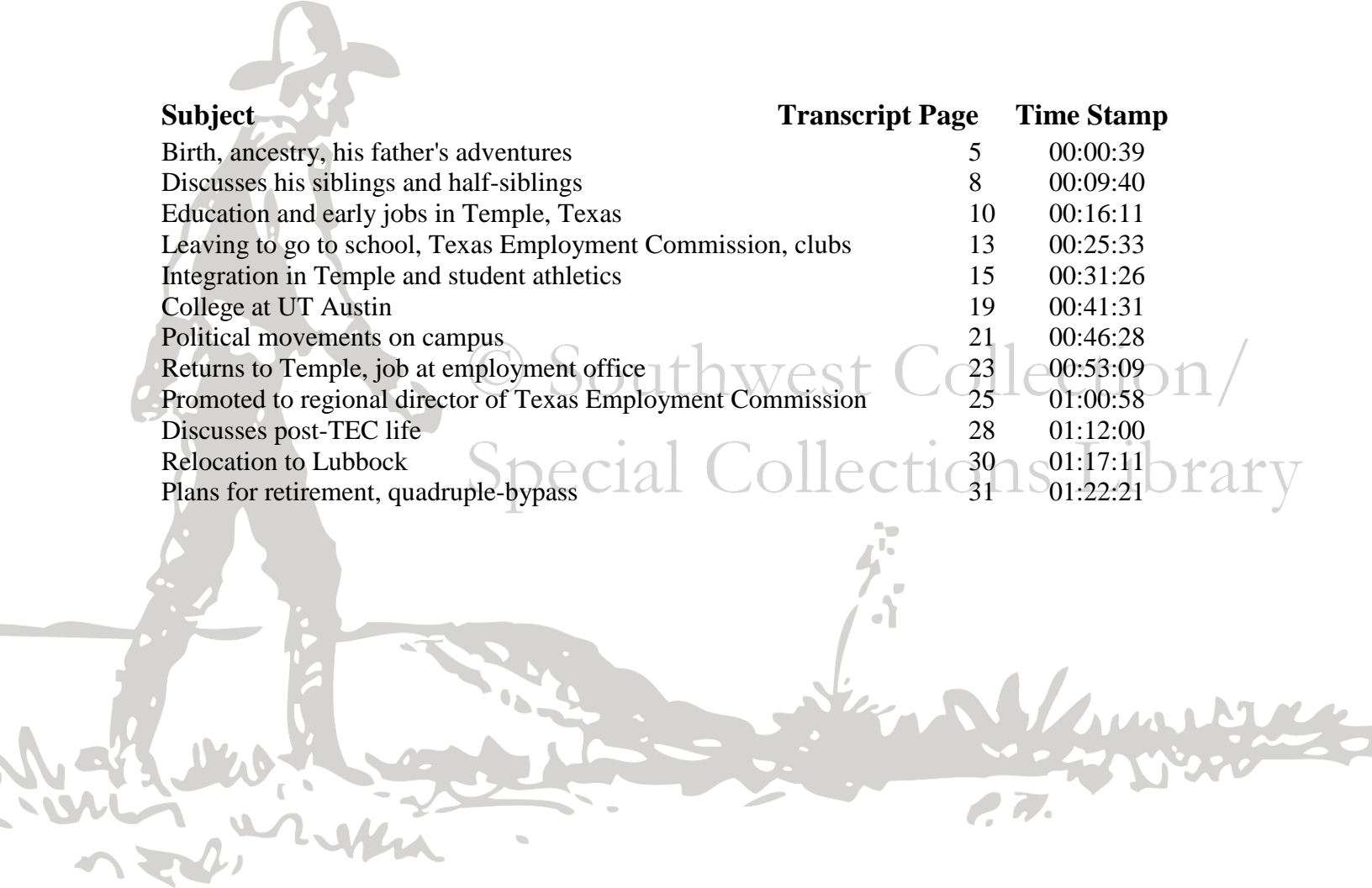
Hispanic Series Background:

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 Martin Aguirre, who discusses his early life, upbringing, and experiences as a public servant and consultant for city governments in the state of Texas

Length of Interview: 01:28:16



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Keywords

Hispanic-American culture, education, municipal politics, government service

Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Sanchez; today's date is March 17, 2015. I'm at Lubbock, Texas with Martin Aguirre. And Martin, please state your complete, legal name.

Martin Aguirre (MA):

My complete, legal name is Martin Aguirre. There's no middle name, it's—in fact, for the longest time, I thought my middle initials was—were N.M. and I. —you know, no middle name or initial, you know. I'd see documents that said Martin (N.M. and I.) Aguirre.

DS:

Now, where were you born?

MA:

I was born in Temple, Texas.

DS:

When?

MA:

November 12, 1948.

DS:

You know, we ask the tough questions first, right?

MA:

Yeah, okay, let's get the hard part out of the—

DS:

Let's answer the same thing on your mom and dad. Where and when are they from?

MA:

Oh, wow. Well, mom and dad were both Mexican nationals, and so mom was born November 10, 1912, and she was born in Rancho Grande, Zacatecas. And Dad was born in, well, it's a little rancho outside of Ocotlán, Jalisco; it's a Rancho Conosle. Dad was born September 2, 1892. And, so, baptized names are the same as given names—Maria Aguirre Ogenio—I mean Maria Contreras Ogenio Aguirre. And my grandparents were from the same villages. I really don't know my father's grandparents that well, because there's no records. It's one of those things where the village church burned down, so we have some things—like I have my father's birth certificate—a copy of the certificate, but I don't have anything past that. Mother's village was probably founded, like, in 1850, or something like that, and, again, we have some records, but

not everything—not very complete. And I never have lived in Mexico, we've—I have visited, both villages once or twice, just to see where my parents came from.

DS:

Did they ever tell you how they met?

MA:

Well, family story it that my father—if you did the math a while ago, my father is twenty years older than my mother, and my father was a contemporary of my grandfather—my mother's father. And so they were friends and drinking buddies back in the day, and this would have been—my dad, actually moved to Temple, Texas in the late '30s. My grandfather had immigrated to central Texas in, like 1926, and had been a tenant farmer in Bell County, and so they met in Bell County. My dad had moved there from—when my dad immigrated to the U.S. in 1920—and about the same time, about 1926, but he came into Bisbee, Arizona, because there was a lot of labor necessary for the open pit copper mines in Bisbee. And so, you know, if you've ever seen those things, that's pretty backbreaking work, I mean it's a hard life. So, he had heard that there were jobs in Central Texas, because the railroad was building. So, he moved to Central Texas, and that's where they both ended up in Temple. They're—you know, we're all Roman Catholic, and pretty much devoutly so, and so they gathered together to worship together, and they—you know, like I said, they ended up getting a marriage license out of Cameron, Texas, because that was the nearest Mexican Catholic church at the time—there wasn't one in Temple. And we assume that, of course, my dad hanging around with my grandfather, that he got to know my mother at the time, because she was the—she was the daughter—the surviving daughter that took care of my grandparents until they passed away. And that's as close as we get to it; they're not around to tell us any different, nowadays.

DS:

Well, you know, you mentioned some stories about your dad, when he was growing up and still in Mexico, and—

MA:

Yeah, that's—well, it was a tough era to grow up in, when you think about the history of Mexico, and the fact that, you know, the Mexican Revolution happened about the time he was in his twenties, and if an army came through your village, you usually joined the army that came through first, because if you didn't join, they would execute you on the spot, rather than have to face you on the battlefield at some later date. And, so, my dad was—inducted? What would we call drafted by the Federales—by the government army, to defend the country against Zapata, and Villa, and all the other revolutionary armies that were in the field at the time. So dad, actually, was one of those guys that, you know—war was not pretty; war is not pretty now, but in the—back in the day, you know, more people died from injuries than they did from actual fatal

bullet shots kind of thing, so he had survived a lot of that, because, you know—he showed us the bullet tracks; he had .50 caliber tracks on his legs, and things of that nature from those days. And, as I understand it, he was made a lieutenant in the Mexican army, or something, because that just meant you got to go first—can't shoot at somebody's head, if you need a target, I guess, hit the guy in the front. And, so he fought with that, and then, uh—dad was from Rancho Coroscojaca, Jalisco, and if you know that era in Jalisco, right after the Mexican Revolution, we had the Cristero Revolutions in the early '20s. In fact, there was a really interesting movie made of them, I can't remember the name of it right now, but—actually I saw it here in Lubbock. And, again, he, being devoutly Catholic, was fighting on the church side. And, again, they lost that conflict, and at that point, he had to leave the country—it was one of those, “Okay, now you really got to leave, or somebody's going to find you and kill you, or execute you for being part of the enemy camp.” So that's when he went to Bisbee, and spent the time there in the open pit mines. I've been to Bisbee; it's a long way from the top to the bottom of one of those things, because it's just a big old hole, you know. I went there just to see it, because I'd heard of it, I'd heard my dad was there, and I couldn't fathom what an open pit mine looked like—you know, you see the stories of the coal mines in West Virginia, and all that, and you see the miners coming out of the tunnels. Well, there's no tunnels; there's just a big hole in the ground in Bisbee, Arizona. It was the copper mine, you know, and there's still copper mines in that area.

DS:

So, after he moved there, you said, he started working for Santa Fe?

MA:

Well, when he moved to Temple—when he moved to Temple, Texas. The Santa Fe Railroad was—well, they hired quite a few Mexicanos—more than just a few, I think everybody that came in that was able-bodied wanted to work hard, I mean—track laying is hard work, and track servicing, it's not anything glamorous, I mean, it's just labor. But it paid well, and it was steady work. And the men—the crews worked out of Temple—Temple was one of the railroad area headquarters, kind of places—had a round house, had all the other things it needed. And, so it also had the hospital. The Santa Fe Railroad had its own system of hospitals for their employees. You didn't have insurance, you had your own hospital, so that, if you needed healthcare, the—Santa Fe took care of you. You'd either get transported to the nearest Santa Fe hospital—for the Texas lines, it was in Temple, Texas. So my dad got moved to the hospital to work there as a maintenance guy, which I think was probably a good thing for him, it was less punishing than working on the track, where my uncles worked, and where a lot of the other compadres were working. But he was there, with the hospital, and we were raised at the hospital. We were living away from the hospital for the first few years of my memory, which was like, up until about 1953, and then we moved to the hospital in '53, and worked there until dad retired—I mean, he worked there until he retired in '60. And we lived at the hospital, itself, which was—we lived in a house that was furnished by the hospital. We had very nice growing up conditions, I think,

because we had at least a twenty-acre lot that the hospital was on. So, you know, we had fruit trees, and we had pecan trees, we had all the land that you wanted to play baseball, football, you know, name the sport, we had plenty of land to play in, and it was all of our playground, I mean. If Dad was working during the summertime, and we were off at—we had fish pond—if the school needed fish—goldfish today, I mean, we'd go fish for them, and take them to the schoolhouse for fish tanks and stuff. We had huge magnolia trees in the front of the hospital. Not to make it sound too idyllic, because cutting magnolias was terrible, because you really had climb a long way. But, you know, we could furnish the teachers with magnolias, which made us a favorite of all the teachers, because they liked the magnolias and the scents. So, yeah, it was a good childhood, living behind the Santa Fe hospital and working there, and then helping Dad, because he taught us a few things, you know, I learned to ride a tractor there, because they had a riding lawnmower, so, you know—had the big tractor with the belly mowers and stuff to cut grass, and, you know, I learned that—I learned how to fire boilers, because every winter—in the wintertime, you had to go over and fire the boilers to keep the hospital warm, and stuff, and it was all oil-fired boilers. So Dad taught us how to do that, so that incase he already had kicked off his shoes—was relaxing at the house, he could send one of us, and we could—knew how to fire the boilers for the hospital. Of course, that was—I don't think we told the hospital. (Laughing)

DS:

I think it's a good time, right now, since you keep saying "us", "we," just to tell us the names of your siblings.

MA:

Oh, wow. Well, there's, there's actually seven of us. I'm the middle child, if y'all do that kind of comparisons. Now, my oldest brother was born in '43, that's Francisco. And he retired after, oh gosh, thirty-four years in the Air Force, something like that. But he's in Alamogordo, New Mexico. This next son was Mariano, Mariano was born in '45, and he retired from the Marine Corps, and is in Albuquerque, New Mexico—also retired from the City of Albuquerque, because—he retired after twenty—he had joined the Marine Corps at, what, at eighteen? So he was thirty-eight years old, so he had time for—make another career at the City of Albuquerque. My sister, born in '46, Paulina—Paulina has been a Franciscan nun since 1965, and so she is now currently assigned to Saint Francis on the Brazos in Waco, Texas. Then me, I'm the middle child, you know, born in '48, and so I'm here in Lubbock, although some people say—always ask me, "Why are you in Lubbock?" My younger brother, Domingo—Domingo was born in '51, and he retired as a home appraiser for State Farm Insurance at San Antonio, and he passed away last year. He'd been on dialysis for over a decade, and that's not an easy life, so if you've had relatives on dialysis—especially families like ours, where all of us are diabetic, so we all have seen the ravages of diabetes up close. And then I have two younger sisters, my little sister Mary Frances, and Natalia. Both born in '54 and they're not twins, I know everybody asks that question. It's one of those situations in Hispanic families where one of my aunts died in

childbirth, giving birth to Mary, Mary Frances, and my uncle, realizing he couldn't raise an infant without a wife, asked my mother to raise her. And my dad agreed, so we raised Mary Frances from the—she came home from the hospital to us, since her mom had died in childbirth, and we raised her, so she's one of our sisters. But she's about—Mary Frances was born in late August—August 27; Natalie was born December 1. So you can imagine, I mean, my mother was—for the first few years we had those two girls, it was like having twins, because you had two children too close alike to have to take care of. In fact, mother used to treat them like twins, she'd buy the same cloth, make the same dresses, dress the girls, and if you know those girls, they're not even look-alike. You know, they're—Mary Frances is big and husky, and a very strong looking woman and Natalie was always the little bitty frail thing. We have pictures of these two girls, back-to-back, and—same dress, looking like twins—being posed like twins. And we always laughed about that, but, yeah, so I say “us,” that's our family. Mother—well, Dad, Dad died in '69, so, I mean, excuse me, at the age of sixty-nine, so that was 1961. So the younger girls and my younger brother and I—probably, I 'm the, again—being the middle child I get—sort of get to split the difference. We spent almost as much time with my mother as my father had spent with us, you know, Dad having—like I said, I was born in '48, and I was thirteen when my dad passed away. My mother passed away in 1975, and so when Mom passed away, I was already twenty-four? Forgive my math, twenty-three. So, you know, so we have a greater affinity for my mother, of course, which wouldn't be atypical anyway, in a Mexican family, that you would always want your mother to be number one. And my dad was always a hard-working guy, and we always appreciated that, you know, when he did that. And he was always real great with us, and, you know, yes, we wish we would have had him longer, but he had two families—very typical of the Revolutionary War in Mexico. He had to leave a family in Mexico when he left, and, of course, he didn't marry my mother until—if he left Mexico in '26, and he married Mom in '41, so there's a, you know, quite a span there, when he was working here. But he had a family in Mexico, and we did get to meet them. I mean, we've been to the village a couple of times, and met the other part of the family—my half-brothers; well, half-brother, and some half-sisters down there, and, in fact, my half-brother just passed away about three years ago, but he was, like eighty. And, so, this would have been his second family, up here, starting. And so—we're just not, I think unique to the era. You know, like I said, that I know other people that that had happened to, that had that split family situation occur, and the circumstances of the time, you know.

DS:

Yeah, I've met somebody like that before, too.

MA:

Yeah, the circumstances of the time. So, uh, it kind of changes your perspective some, and people have told me that I'll—even when I started working that I, probably, was one of the older-thinking young guys that they had. Because, you've, you know, if you've lived with a

parent that has that age on him, like when I—passed away, like I say, when my dad passed away, I was thirteen—but he was sixty-nine, I mean, he was sixty-nine years old; which was a good age for him in that time, and for the life that he led. You know, because he had led a very hard life, and so, to survive to the age of sixty-nine, for him, was good. And mom passed away at sixty-two, of a—died of a stroke. And that's when we all thought, "Okay, now, we've got to take care of each other." Because, you know, we didn't have any—I haven't been back to Temple in a long time, because I don't have any surviving uncles down there, I don't have any—you know, my parents are both gone. I've got some cousins that are there, that we meet at some of the family gatherings stuff, but no overriding reason to go visit Temple, Texas. Yeah, walk the halls of the old high school, okay if you want to, the old high school was still there, you know, that type of thing; but—and some friends, you know that you have.

DS:

Well, you know, and that brings it back to where we were talking about, you know, is you being a child and taking things into school—talk about education there in Temple.

MA:

Wow, education in Temple, that's a—well, you know, we always start with some of the typical—what I'd call the typical Mexican stories, you know, where the kids would start in school with not knowing English. Because mom and dad didn't know English, and so we all spoke Spanish at home. When Frank and Nano, and then Pauline started school, they really were handicapped, because they didn't know any English, and they didn't have anybody to teach them. When Mingo and myself and Mary and Natalie—we learned from Frank and Nano, you know. They brought English home because they were grades ahead of us, and so they were able to, you know, to pass on some—some elementary vocabulary, at least, to us. But still, when we started school, we didn't know enough to tell the teacher that "Somebody had swiped my lunch money," that type of thing; so that—we did a lot of sign language in the first and second grades. Temple only has like a five percent Hispanic population—or only had, at the time, about a five percent Hispanic population; so it wasn't—there wasn't a great number of us in the schools. Because of the school boundaries and you know, the precincts and so forth, Temple—well, Santa Fe hospital, where we lived when I started elementary school, was in a pretty nice part of town, you know, it didn't—wasn't in the barrio, and so I have even fewer Mexicans in my elementary schools; you know, two-or-three-per-class-maybe-type-things. You know, I still know two or three of them that were in my elementary school classes, and it wasn't until we got to junior high school that we ran in to some more Mexicanos, and then in high school, since it's a one high school town, you know, we all finally got dumped into one—into one school, and we saw a few more. But still, there was only twelve Mexicans in my high school graduating class, and my gosh our graduating class was almost three hundred people. So, education was pretty basic—I mean, I thought it was a good education, I'm kind of one of those guys that looks at all the new curriculum reforms and thinks, "Well, we were taught a lot of more stuff when we were younger,

than I see going on.” And certainly, we were taught differently, I mean, I’m not going to say that there’s not a change in style and curriculum and so forth. I mean, you know, we were, I mean, I was taught phonetically, I was taught math with just, you know, pencils and papers, and how to—how to—you know, I got to use a slide rule in high school, and all that kind of stuff. There wasn’t any calculators you know, in fact, we were all very proud that we can—that we were—at least in advanced math, where you could run a slide rule. (Laughing) We were fortunate in that—I don’t know why, you know God blesses you in strange ways, but my brothers and I were usually pretty smart, you know, we were considered very—pretty smart, and I guess the aptitude tests might have borne that out. Because we all did do advanced placement-type classes, and we all had got scholarships to—at least to go to the community college when we graduated from high school, so we had a means to continue education. You know, we knew from early on that, you know—after Dad died, especially—that Mother couldn’t afford to pay for any colleges, so whatever we did for college was going to be on us, and so the payoff was good grades equals scholarships and grants. And one of the things that was happening—especially when I graduated from high school, was like the Hinson-Hazelwood grants and stuff for low-income kids, because we were definitely low income—after Dad died, all we—my mother survived on was Social Security survivor benefits, which is not a whole lot. And, so, we all worked. I mean it—part-time work was just a part of the game, and we never were—kept any money, all of it went to my mother, because we needed it—it was a family pot, you know, the family treasury kept all the money, we didn’t keep money. If I needed two dollars for—to go to the carnival, she’d give me two dollars to go to the carnival. Yeah, okay, that came out of the family pot; but not because I kept money out of a paycheck—no, you don’t do that. You give a hundred percent in, and you’ll get back what you need, you know? My first job in the fields, what did we do—chop cotton for fifty cents an hour, you know, pick cotton for a penny a pound, we were not—well, not pick, I mean, I mislead all the cotton pickers around here, because we pull cotton, you know, which is a whole different thing than picking cotton. But we were pulling cotton for a penny a pound, and two pounds—two cents for the second picking—second pulling, kind of stuff, and from there I went to yards—yardwork. Because I was playing football, and I—my hours were really weird because, you know, you had to go to practice after school, and all that, so I had—we had a—one of our friends, there was also a railroad worker that my mother and dad knew—had a yard business, and—he had a pretty successful yard business, basically because he would employ all the guys like me, friends of—children of friends, kind of thing. But we had over a hundred yards, and so every afternoon, we’d all show up at, you know, Trinidad’s house, his—Trini Hernandez. We’d show up at Trini’s house, and we’d all go out and start cutting grass until dark, and, you know, Saturdays we went sunup-sundown, and that paid our money, and I think I was making, like, a buck an hour with Trini, you know, for—big time bucks—that’s big time money, you know, for the yard cutting businesses. So, it was—yeah, I didn’t get an office job until I was in the eleventh grade. And one of the school teachers—her husband, who was also—who had also become a family friend—she had actually—don’t ask me how, but Frances Bailey took on the role of being our protector. She was one of the history and economics teachers at the high school.

My older brother, Frank, got a job at their family business, which was a department store there in Temple, called J.M. Dyer, and Mr. Bailey ran the department store. So he got to know all of us, because we became an inherited job when Frank graduated and left town, you know, the next brother took on the job, because we were the delivery boys—this was an old-fashioned department store. We actually drove a delivery van, and took your stuff to your house when you ordered it, okay? And so we had a lot of steady customers, all the credit card accounts were on three-by-five cards, you know, pencil and paper. So, you know, we just sort of, like I said, I don't know whether we became a pet project or a pet what, but we enjoyed it and appreciated it. But Mr. Bailey was a city councilman in Temple, Texas, and so he knew a lot of people; he knew the HR¹ director at the state—at the state—at the federal soil conservation service state headquarters that was in Temple. So he got me a job with them as a federal student aid. So that, you know, I got a regular GS² rating: I was a GS2, which is as low as you can go on the GS rating, but I was summer help. I was student summer help, you know, but it was the first job where I actually got to wear a pair of khakis and a sport shirt to work, you know, and on special occasions, you know, he—we'd get a tie. Well, Mr. Bailey knew that I didn't have any of that stuff, so he—before I went to work, he got me on a weekend and took me to the department store, and gave me shirts and slacks and stuff to wear to work, kind of stuff. So, yeah, that worked out pretty well, because I worked with them through '69, when I graduated from Temple—then Temple Junior College, now just Temple College—and was on my way to—I had applied, and was being transferred to UT to go to school. Mr. Bailey was a UT ex³—I didn't know—didn't know what that meant at the time, but he asked me, he said “Well, what are you going to do,” he said, “Are you out—have you got everything registered, and stuff?” I said “Well, not really,” I said, “I've, you know, submitted the paper, and all that stuff; got my admission notice.” He said, “Okay,” he said, “Well let's just make a date, and let's pick a day we can go to Austin and we'll get it taken care of.” So he took me to Austin, got me to the registrar, got me—papers filled out, bought me my first Arby's sandwich of any kind in Austin that day, and fixed me up to go to school. And then found—well, I had a few days to find the apartment and all that kind of stuff, and try to—but then I had to find a part-time job. I had saved all my summer monies for living expenses. But I knew that I couldn't stay past a couple months, like three months, if I didn't find a job to pay the rent and buy the groceries; pay the car—I did have a car, so I was buying gas. So one day I called him up and I said “Mr. Bailey,” I said, “I'm going to have to leave,” and he said “Why?” —he said “Why?” because—and I said “I don't have a job, and without a job, I can't stay, you know? I'll have to go back to Temple and just go to work somewhere.” He said, “Okay,” he said, “Let me see what I can do.” —I mean, just like that: “Let me see what I can do.” So I said, “Okay, fine.” I didn't expect anything, but he called me a few weeks later, and—yeah, about ten days—he said, “I've got somebody that's going to call you, don't worry, you know, we'll see what comes of it,” and I said “Okay.” So that was the first time

¹ Human Resources.

² General Schedule (GS) government pay scale, used for employees of the federal government.

³ The University of Texas.

in my whole life that I ever interacted with the Texas Employment Commission. I got a call from a supervisor at the local Texas Employment Commission office, and he said—you know, he called me “Martin”—he said “Martin,” he said, “We’ve got an opening at the state headquarters for a half-time employee,” and said, “and if you’re available for the afternoon, you know, we can hire you.” And I thought, “You can hire me?” I—he hadn’t even seen me. But he said, “Here’s what we want you to do: go to the local office, in Temple,” because, you know, TEC offices were everywhere in Texas—he said, “and report to the manager, tell him, you know, talk to J.B. Owens, tell him your name is Martin Aguirre, and that, you know, that we sent you to him to take the merit system exam for clerk three,” or something like that; I said, “Okay.” So that’s what I did—I went to the office and, of course, J.B. Owens was the office manager—he didn’t know who the heck this was, this Mexican that they were having him come to work on a Saturday to meet, because he had to meet me on a Saturday. And he said, “All I know is I’ve got a phone call to give you a test, you know, for the clerk three for a job in Austin,” and I said, “Okay.” So he gave me the test, he stayed there with me—it’s a four hour test. It’s a, you know, multiple choice, fill in the—there was no bubbling back in the day. So, I guess I scored fairly well, they didn’t ever tell me. But they called me, and they said, “Okay, now, we want you to go talk to so-and-so at the state office, and he is the interviewer, and then he’ll tell you where—if you’re hired, and where the position is,” and so I did that. And they assigned me to the mailroom. And they said, “You know, we’ve got jobs in the mailroom for guys like you that just need a half-time job, and you got to go to school. We just need for you to block your classes so that you went to school eight to twelve, and you work here 1:30 to 5:30”—fine with me. You know, so that’s what I did for the two years I was in Austin—my junior and senior years. I worked for the Texas Employment Commission and the one semester I had to do student teaching, I thought—well, I went and talked to them, I said, “I don’t know what I’m going to do now, I’ve got, you know, I can’t work in the afternoon, I’ve got student teach in the afternoon and I’ve got classes in the morning, I don’t have any, you know, I don’t have the four-hour block in the afternoon,” he says, “Nah, that’s okay, we’ll transfer you to the night janitorial crew.” They had a night janitorial crew, little did I know, and so I spent one semester just mopping and sweeping—not sweeping—we were mopping and stripping and waxing, is what we were doing. Which was fine, I don’t care, it paid the same, you know, and it paid the rent and the groceries. And so that was my first introduction to TEC, and then, many years later, when I left the agency in ’96—those two years counted as seniority, you know, because they were permanent, part-time employment. Which is—make’s a—it’s a difference in the state nuance. So they counted it toward the longevity of the—and increased my retirement because of it. You know, so I thought, “Oh, okay, *que tal*.”

DS:

It worked out.

MA:

Yeah, it worked out, so—yeah, that was the whole “raising” part of it, and I—like I said, I never did—we were all really good—we were all fairly good students—Frank set the bar pretty high, because he was one of those guys that, you know, he was in the National Honors Society in high school, and Junior Honors Society and all that in middle school, so our goal was, at least meet Frank’s standard. You know, so I did that, I was in the National Honor Society, the National Junior Honors Society, and having—playing football in a little 5A town like Temple, you’ve got some status, quite frankly, because you’re, you know, playing for—on the big football team, and I was a starter in high school. So I got invited to all the Key clubs and all that kind of stuff, I got invited to be a—what is that—DeMolay? I used to laugh about that one, because the DeMolay is like the student version of the Masons, okay? Well, being Catholic—the pope doesn’t like for us to be a Mason. I didn’t know that, you know. I asked Frank one day, I said “Frank,” I said, “They asked me if I’d join the DeMolay,” you know, I didn’t know what that meant, other than it was a school club. He said, “Martin, you can’t join,” and I said, “What do you mean, all my friends are joining.” —you know, just—exclusive little club. And he said, “No,” he said, “ask father,” you know, “Ask the priest, ask father.” Okay, and the priest said, “No,” he said that, “the church has a prohibition against secret societies that stay closed to anybody but the church,” you know, or God. And so, oh, okay, don’t join DeMolay. You know, join the Key club, fine. Join, you know, all the other—the Junior Engineering Technical Society, I belong to that, like all good Mexicanos, we all belong to the Pan Am club, you know. I did all those kind of things, and before we graduated, and then the same thing with—at UT. I didn’t really do too many extracurricular—first of all, I didn’t have time, you know, because you’re working and you’re studying—did the student teaching, did all that kind of stuff. We did have, you know, I did belong to the Mexican-American student organization, those years at UT, and so I made a lot of friends there. People talk about UT being a big school—it’s only as big as you want it to be. If you find your demographic and your, sort of, your subset of people you want to hang out with, then it becomes much smaller place, because you’re only—I mean, there was only like—we had thirty-five, forty thousand, thirty-five thousand students at the time that we were—that I was at UT—maybe two hundred Mexicans, you know, so if I was hanging around with Mexicanos, mostly—yeah, it’s a small group. We all went to dances together, we partied together, we went to the football games together, you know, and so we all knew each other—all of us within a couple of years.

DS:

You know, we’ll come back to your UT years, but I want to talk a little bit about, you know that—high school years. Because you did mention that you’d been a student athlete. But while you were there, wasn’t that when the shift happened between segregated and integrated school systems, also?

MA:

Uh-huh, yeah.

DS:

Can you talk how that impacted the football field, and stuff like that?

MA:

Oh, well that's easy. I mean, that—they say it's a black and white issue, and it's all shades of gray. But because of the segregation in the early '60s—but Temple didn't become segregated until after they built the new high school. So, the new high school was opened in nineteen-sixty—the fall of '65. First graduating class for the new high school was '66, and the integration occurred that year. And so, by the time we got to my class year, '66-'67, you know, we had a fairly—well, it was integrated, period. We closed the black high school, which turned into a middle school, it was also a Dunbar. I mean, there's a Dunbar here in Lubbock, I mean, he was a great gentleman, so they named a lot of schools in Texas after Mr. Dunbar. It made it a better ball club, I mean, what can I say? There's a broader set of athletes, broader set of athletic skills brought together, and it just became a much better ball club than it used to be, because there are certain attributes that we talk about that are—you know, go with all the different groups, because even as kids, you know, when—none of us play ball as a kid on a gravel road, wanting to be the blocking lineman, you know, you always want to be the receiver, you want to be the quarterback, you want to be the glory hounds, right, the glory guys, and yet, you know that it takes eleven guys on the field, and all of you are doing something different. I was never really that athletic—I was fairly quick in the forty yard dash, I was small, you know, for the time I wasn't that small, but I was small—five-nine, 183 pounds, I think, in high school—and so the line in Temple at the time, you might've averaged it at 195 pounds, maybe; very few two hundred-plus guys on the line at the time playing. And so we were running a power set, basically, I mean, like I said, we—we all grew up with Vince Lombardi and the Green Bay Packers, and the pulling guards and the—the big sweeps—big power sweeps and stuff, and that's what we ran at Temple High School. First of all, in those years, we really didn't have anybody that was throwing the ball a long way, you know, so very—not too many quarterbacks were, you know, kicking back into what they call, now, the pro set and going downfield. So yeah, that was a—that was a big change, but we surely picked up faster kids—made the competition—made you better, quite frankly, because of the competition, to be playing with some of the guys that were—Dunbar was a looser game than ours. Well, I mean, we had watched Dunbar play, it was always fun to watch Dunbar play, because they were—they played a fast game, you know, and we were more of the methodical game. So we picked up more running backs and receivers, and you know, the end kind of people. In fact, in my high school—my senior year, I don't think any of the linemen were black, if you were to go with that. There were—all the blacks that we had playing with us were receivers and backs—and they were quick, they were good, you know, they held on to the ball. So we did that, and that was a good thing—I know that—we'd talked earlier about this whole

thing with—we laughed about who's the best ball club—ballplayer to ever come out of Temple, Texas, and I say "Joe Green." You know, I didn't ever play with Joe Green—Joe Green is my age, but he played for the black school right before we became integrated, and so Joe graduated a year before I did. And the one time I ever got to do anything was, we got to play against—play—we got to scrimmage the black clubs, because we would scrimmage each other. That's how we knew how, you know, how good they were, and who they were, and yeah, I'd spend many an afternoon nursing my head, you know, from getting beat on by Joe Green, because he was a big kid, even then. (Laughing)

DS:

How big was he in high school?

MA:

Oh, I don't know, he was six-three, six-four, you know, I mean, he was still a—he was already a big kid, he just—he didn't have the weight—the same weight. Because, by the time you get to college, and they start building you up, it gets to be a pretty good-sized weight. So he was, you know, 230 pounds, maybe, but he was a defensive tackle, which was a big kid in high school, and for our era. I mean, it's not now, I mean, gosh, I went to watch Temple High School play in the state championships this year, and you know, I mean, they had 300-pounders on the field, I mean, high school—

DS:

Oh, man, guys are six-nine.

MA:

And you're going "Wow, that's amazing." But I always say Temple will never build a second high school—it's still a one-high-school town—because they don't want to break up the football team. You know, it's been good for them.

DS:

Yeah, well, let me ask—you know, you mentioned how they were, you know, it was already integrated when you were there, and I talked to somebody years ago about—he was the coach at the black school in—I forget which community it was. And so, when they integrated, the other school had not been doing as well, and the coach of the school they were integrating into was going to remain the head coach, and he was going to be an assistant. And they agreed that, "Well, you know what we'll do to make it fair to all the kids, half of my guys are starters, half of your guys are starters," then they went from there. How about that school, did they do the same, or—

MA:

No.

DS:

—did they just—whoever was the best at it?

MA:

It was whoever was the best athlete on the field at the time and the position. We never did do that. In fact, none of the black coaches were offered a job with us in the integrated school—or if they were, I wasn't aware of it, okay, because the same coaches I had in, you know, tenth, eleventh grade were the same coaches I had when we graduated. But our work ethic was basically: everybody competes for the position, and whoever's the best at it starts. And it's pretty obvious, you know, even to the players, you know, who's better than who—just from watching those practices, and you know, the results of the plays—I mean, it's not—there's no big secrets, you know. We had some good kids on that ball club that ended up playing, you know, college and being All-Americans, and so forth.

DS:

You mentioned that.

MA:

Yeah, it wasn't going to be easy, I mean, for you to start. You had to be competitive and you had to be first at—first to hit. I mean, that's really what—I think the—my senior—you know Dave Campbell's Texas Football? You know they always do a profile on each team in the fall, and they profile all the high school teams, and stuff—and I think that when it came to the Temple Wildcats, and my position, and Martin Aguirre, you know, he said I was the best—I was the fastest off the ball, and I had the best form of all the blocking—pulling guards, you know, kind of thing. Because that's what we were doing, I mean, I always laugh—tell my wife, I said, “That's because I was shorter, and I didn't have as far to go when I—you didn't have to stand up; you just pivoted.” The secret was, don't ever stand up, pivot. Just pivot, pivot in position, and go, you know, don't try to stand up, you're losing time. And if you're standing up, you're in a weaker position to get hit and get knocked over.

DS:

Do you ever run in to any of your contemporaries from back then? From that team?

MA:

We talk, we talk. The guy that was the starting guard on the other side of me—I was the left guard, he was the right guard—he's a friend of mine, you know, we communicate on e-mail, kind of thing, because he's still back in Temple. He married one of the local girls, and—well,

one of the local sweethearts, actually—and he's an attorney, so he's still in town. But when the guy that was one of our—our fullback—is in Wimberley—and I just talked to him, he's a retired DPS⁴ regional supervisor, you know. So that's—so we've all done, I guess, fairly well for ourselves as far as—compared to the norm of our group, you know we've done better than some. I attribute it to football—I think, you know, to young, undisciplined kids, to have to play in a system and pay attention—take orders, you know, learn the discipline, work. I mean, if you don't think playing football is work, try to go out there on August—two-a-days. You know, the heat beating on you, especially in Central Texas, it's—that's a lot of humidity. I mean, you can—

DS:

Exactly. We have a dry heat here, right?

MA:

Yeah, you have dry heat. So yeah, we used to take a lot of extra time with our practices. We used to laugh because UIL⁵—and this'll probably get Temple thrown out someday—the UIL system doesn't allow for summer practices because some schools can't afford a summer practice, and it'd be unfair. And Temple—we never had an organized summer practice. But if you showed up at the field house, there happened to be a worksheet with your name on it, and you did the necessary work, and you signed off on it when you showed up, and the coach would know you'd been there, and that you were working out, you know, and so you had a set assignment of exercises and so many laps to run, and so much weight to handle, and so, you know, that type of thing. It wasn't—but it was strictly voluntary.

DS:

Yeah, and I think that's still really a practice nowadays, so I think that's the way it's handled, it's like, you know, you come in and work out on your own—just what you need to work on while you're here.

MA:

Yeah: “As long as you're here, let me give you some advice, this is the things you need to work on.” Yeah, that's the way we did it, and so it was—but we always laughed about it because, you know, we all knew it was a—it was—really wasn't voluntary. (Laughing) If you wanted to start in the fall, you better have—good attendance in the summer.

DS:

I think that's with a lot of voluntary things.

MA:

⁴ Texas Department of Public Safety.

⁵ The University Interscholastic League.

True.

DS:

And from there you went on to college, so, you know, you said you went to a junior college first, then you transferred to UT. What was it like your first day at—in Austin to go to school?

MA:

Wow, I hadn't thought about that in forever. Blur, it was a blur. There was—because there were so many kids, and just learning, you know, getting the orientation you needed from where classes were to where buildings were to the schedules, you know, finding your place. It was just like the first day of any first day, first year of any school. You know, the first day is just a blur about what you were doing, and it just such a bigger school. And you know, the high school: one building. Temple College: maybe five buildings. You know, UT: forty acres and lots of buildings. And so you learned by the time that you'd been there a year that you didn't—not to schedule one class on the west side of the campus, and another class on the east side of the campus, because you don't have time to get to the other class in between the bells, you know, it's just not going to happen. You can run, and you won't get from that Guadalupe entrance to the San Jacinto entrance in the time span allowed. So—things like that, that were just sort of logistics kind of things. And, of course, I didn't have anybody that I knew in any of my classes, I mean, that would have been a statistical improbability to have those people—to have anybody you actually knew. And I knew that there were kids from Temple that had graduated with me—either high school or junior college—they had gone to UT. I mean, I'll be quite honest, I went to UT—well, I wasn't worried about my grades, because I'd always been a good student, you know, my—I mean, I was on the dean's list at the junior college, and all that stuff. So when I applied, I mean, that's the only school I applied to, I didn't think they'd turn me down. And, of course, they didn't. If you've got a B+ average, even today, and you're going to South Plains College, and you apply to UT, odds of getting in are pretty good, I mean, they're like ninety-nine percent kind of odds, because upper division is not as crowded as the lower division when you're trying to get in to the big schools. And, so the other thing was that—being the poor kid from Temple, and, you know, not having anybody else to support me but me—back in 1971 it was the cheapest school I could go to. I mean, it was fifty dollars for fifteen hours, and with the fees and my books, I might've racked up maybe a hundred and fifty a semester, you know, for the school costs. And that included all my admissions to all the ball games and everything, I mean, that was sports fee and all, I mean, that's pretty cheap, comparatively speaking. Books were still high at the time, but not like they are now, it was all relative, you know, so—so, just getting acquainted, just getting to know where you were, getting your bearings on campus, sort of being—of observing who was going where kind of things, because. You know, it took me a semester just to find enough kids that I knew that we would, you know, hang out together at the student union and, you know, have lunch or something—do whatever if I wasn't working, or headed downtown.

DS:

Yeah. In fact, you just anticipated my next question I was going to ask, how long did it take before you found your niche, and you know, your—

MA:

Yeah, it takes about a semester. It took me a semester, at least, to find that niche, and get to find other kids in my major, and my groups. Like I said, I joined the Mexican-American Student Organization because I figured that would be a place where I could meet some others, and I was right, you know, because there were kids from all over Texas there, but they were all on the same boat that I was. If there was a kid there from West Texas, or from East Texas, or South Texas, you know, we were all just feeling our way around as far as where did we—what was our place at the campus, you know, because, like I said, two hundred Mexicans or so, out of—

DS:

That's still a really small number.

MA:

—I mean, I know we use “Hispanics” nowadays, but back in the day, they were “Mexicans.” There really wasn't anybody else besides us out of thirty—

DS:

Yeah. In fact, that's why we're so comfortable with that term, because that's—

MA:

Yeah, thirty-five thousand people. And, you know, my mom and dad were Mexican, so I'm Mexican. And that was what was there, and—now, I will say that the South Texas Hispanics, Mexicans that came up, they were probably wealthier than we were—from Central Texas, North Texas, or West Texas, because they came more from the historic Mexican areas of Texas, so they had—I mean, some of them were even landed gentry, kind of things, you know. Because for those people, going to UT or going to Texas A&M was an honor. I mean, it was an accomplishment for their families to send their kids to the elite schools, you know. And I never even thought about it as an elite school, I mean, like I said, I went to the school that was closest to me, that I could afford, that could offer me a good education. I never looked at the rankings.

DS:

Yeah. It's just—it was in your neighborhood, basically?

MA:

It was in my wheelhouse.

DS:

In your wheelhouse? Okay, I haven't heard that term in a long time, but—you know, you talked about this group, and some of the things y'all did together, earlier. How was that impacted by what was going on at the national scale while you were—

MA:

Well, basically, because we were, you know, the—at the time there was a movement of, you know, we're just a bit pre-Cesar Chavez in that era, just by a year or two, because he did come—he ended up in Austin within a year or two, but we were basically started out with, okay, it was the anti-war movements, and that time on campus. If you were on campus, you weren't in the—you were either—you had a student deferment, or you were 4-F, you weren't going to get drafted anyway—a lot of our contemporaries had already been drafted, I had a lot of friends in Vietnam—fighting in Vietnam. Had my brothers in Vietnam at the time, because they'd both joined the military out of high school, and that was in the mid-sixties, early sixties. So we were paying pretty close attention to it, and as you know, it was one of the first wars that was fought on TV, basically, for the American public, even though it was fairly brutal and grisly on the ground with the guys that—over there. So did we appreciate it, did we think it was a just war? That's the—that was the debate, did we think we were supposed to be in Vietnam at all.? Well, are we supposed to be in Iraq or Afghanistan, you could almost play the same tape as far as what's the reason we're here, although I think the goals in Vietnam were even more ambiguous, because we really—we didn't have any other interests over there, other than defending allies, probably. So yeah, we had to look at that, and when we did, most of us were saying, “Well, this is probably not good for our generation,” you know, and so we did have a pretty good-sized anti-war movement that was not just Hispanic, it was also, of course, you know, Anglo predominantly. And so we had campus marches and things, you know, like—wasn't the “Hell no, we won't go” kind of things, but it was more of, you know, that we needed to get out of Vietnam now kind of discussions. And this was '71, '72, it was just the years that Richard Nixon was coming into power. And of course, Nixon was the one that actually tried to negotiate, and the Paris Treaty that got us out of Vietnam. So yeah, we marched one or two times in opposition to the war, you know. I never got arrested, never got, you know, anything like that. Like I said, we had got—the gassing of the protesters was kind of common, I mean, you saw it on TV. So when the marches in Austin got gassed, well, okay, you know, that was sort of a—it was sort of a non—actually a nonviolent reaction to keep the march from getting out of hand, because some of the radicals in the march would really get idiotic. If you've ever seen the era movies of—whether you're—you know, we had a Black Panther party, we had some of the more radical groups, you know. We had the Brown Berets, which were a lot more radical than we were, just in the Mexican-American student organization at the time, you know—

DS:

And that was also the commencing of the Chicano movement, right?

MA:

It was the commencing of the Chicano movement, which culminated like, you know, the Ramsey Muñiz runs for Governor, and so forth, and the Raza Unida movement later on in the early '70s. So, you know, there were a few times when we did things that, because we felt like there were racial iniquities involved, and had the Economy Furniture Strike, which is sort of etched in the histories of Austin as far as what we did with that. It was the first time that there was an organized Hispanic movement against the company—a company that we felt like was—not discriminating, but at least treating the workers unfairly, because they were being paid substandard wages, no benefits, and it gave birth to a lot of the Hispanic politicians in Austin, that went on to become figures in Texas politics, and members of the legislature, and senators, and county commissioners, and so forth. And so that's—yeah, it gave you an awareness, you know, it was actually the first time that you got out beyond just your little shell of, what was it, you know, being raised in Temple, Texas, and going to a bigger metropolitan area, and then being exposed to movements that were offshoots of world movements—national movements, there were movements. So you always had that in your background, and you think, “Okay, well, we needed to do the best thing we could for our people”—the best thing we could do for our civilization, almost. I mean, when I went to work with the Texas Employment Commission—I had always thought I'd be a school teacher. I mean, I have a teaching degree from UT; I've got a secondary education certificate—never went to school teaching—went home, and was offered a school teaching job. I worked for the Texas Employment Commission in the summer, at the local office, and I was helping people find jobs and so forth, and it was very rewarding. I enjoyed it, you know, you had a nice sense of satisfaction, somebody got a job and would feed their family because you helped them. And I kept comparing that to teaching eighth-grade English, and thinking, I won't even know whether this knucklehead graduates from high school until four years later, you know. So when they offered me a permanent job, it was in Bryan, Texas. But it paid fifty dollars a month more than school teaching, which was a huge amount of money in the day—because I think the school teaching jobs were not quite five hundred a month, you know.

DS:

So did you transition to that right after graduating?

MA:

Yeah, I went back home—this is the funny thing about social services—I went home, after graduating in May of '71, and—Mom was still there, of course, and my little sisters. And I always thought, “Well, I can always help mom here, but I need to find a job.” And I went to the employment office and got the job. They knew me, obviously, from a couple of year earlier, having—they had to open up the place to give me a test. And, again, back because of the change that was happening at the time, they had no Hispanics in that office. I was the first Hispanic working there, you know. And here's this local product, now a UT graduate, working at the employment office, you know. So I was one of their shining success stories. And mom—by that

time, we had—we actually—because she was surviving on Social Security survivor's benefits—we had moved her and the girls into a housing project there in Temple. It was a nice housing project, I don't think of housing projects as being rundown housing, this was a nice brick duplex with three bedrooms and, you know, a bath, and Mom had a nice place, and she had a good roof over her head and everything. We never owned a house, you know, we just—my dad could never afford to buy us a house and, you know, we just never owned one. But the minute I came home, and I got the job at the employment office, and then Mom had to report that to the housing project because, you know, here I'm an adult, coming home, and I was capable of working, which is a big deal in the business—they doubled the rent, they doubled rent for the project. And I thought "That's silly," you know, because first of all, when you went to work for the state back in the day, you weren't going to get paid for six weeks. I mean, the first six weeks are on the house. So there wasn't any more money to pay the double rent, but—I started thinking about this business—well, so where do you go to have more opportunity and get more pay, and—the Employment Commission certainly was paying more than school teaching, and I liked it, and when they offered me the job at Bryan, which is eighty-three miles from Temple—and I was single, and I didn't really care, you know, I'd been in Austin, which is seventy miles from Temple, and survived quite, I thought, successfully, so I told my mom. She was visiting in Laredo at the time, my older brother was at Laredo Air Force Base—had just birthed the first grandson, and mom went down there to see him. And I called her, I said "Mom, they offered me this job at Bryan," and I said, "I think I'm going to take it," I said, "It's a good job, it pays okay—it pays better than school teaching. It's a government job, you know", which to Hispanics back in the day, that was a good thing to get a nice government job. And she's—my mother always believed that you were born to work, and you were born to take care of, you know, your family and so forth. So she said "Está bien, mijo, vayas a con dios. And don't forget to call your padrino when you get there." And I thought oh, that's right, I've got a *padrino* in Bryan/College Station. (Laughing) So, yeah, I mean I put everything I owned in the back of my car, and—which wasn't much—and moved to Bryan, College Station. And stayed at a hotel the first night, went to work the next day, called my padrino, said, "I'm in town, I'm going to—", he said "Where're you living at?" and I said "I'm going to find me a place, you know, I'll let you know where—rent me an apartment somewhere here," he said "No, you're not going to do that," he said, "You're going to live with me." So I said "Okay." Rent free. Going to live with my padrino, because he had—all his kids were—he was an empty nester, that's today's term—his kids were raised and married and gone. So he had an extra room at the house, and stuff, and so I stayed with him and my *madrina* for a couple years. You know, so it's family—family thing. But I always wanted to transfer back to Temple because Mom was there when she was alive, and so I wrote the director of the area, and in the hierarchy of the employment commission there was a local manager, but there was a regional director that had the whole area, he had, like, thirty-nine counties in Central Texas—and he sent me a nice letter back, saying, "No, we're not going to do that. We're not going to send you back to Temple," he said, "And we suggest that, for the good of your career, you make yourself available for transfer on the—at the request of the

commission.” Which is a nice way of saying, you know, “We’ll tell you where to go, and you just go there, okay?” Which, I came to find out, was a pretty standard practice, because you never manage an office in the same town that you trained in, just because it was a peer thing. It’s hard to supervise peers that you grew up with, you know. So they wouldn’t do that. But my first transfer out of Bryan, College Station was an offer to go to Austin, because Austin was expanding, and they were opening offices in Austin, and so there was more promotional potential. And I didn’t give it much thought, beyond that. Later on, I—in retrospect, I thought, well, that was a good move because Austin had local offices that I could actually be promoted to an office manager. But it also had the regional office, so I could actually be promoted to regional director without moving from Austin, and it had the state office, and so you could be promoted to the state office hierarchy without having to move from Austin. So I lived the rest of my career, you know, in Austin, working for the Texas Employment Commission and—just made all the steps, as you advance through the ranks of promotion. And I was fortunate in that I never turned down a job, and I never looked at a job that—as a challenge, but more just another opportunity to learn something different. And so, when it became time to automate offices, they picked me to automate offices, because I had a natural curiosity for the way the automation works. And so, whether I had to string cable, or teach software usage, or whatever, that’s what I did, and so I got a job in the regional office doing that. Then Ronald Reagan came along in ’83, and I think I told you, I think, Ron Reagan almost decimated the state service, just because he shut down the government, and cost us a lot of money—actually cost us more money to shut down and restart. But we lost employees, and we lost offices over it because we had to break leases and we had to do a lot of the things that we didn’t like. And I actually took a demotion at the time to go run a local office again, from the job that I had in the district office. But I had been counseling with my boss, and he told me, he said, “If you do this,” he said, “one of the things it does for you,” he said, “If you go back to office management,” he said. “In the skillsets of career paths,” he said, “As a staff position, you’re pretty specialized in automation, and doing user specialist kind of stuff.” He said, “But you go back to administration,” which is running the office, “you’ve got to deal with all the problems, whether it’s cleaning up the baby diapers, or whether it’s, you know, personnel or fiscal or any, you know, any of the facilities problems that goes with that office, you’re in charge of everything under that roof.” He said, “And that’s a better thing, because if you want to be in the management end of the business, that’s the—that’s where we’re going to go to look for the directors.” So I took that advice, I went back to being an office manager. They didn’t demote me—they demoted me in rank, but they didn’t reduce my pay, or anything, because with the step⁶ stuff they do, you know, they could raise your steps and still keep your same pay. But he was right. I went back, and as somebody once mentioned to me, in fact, even recently, he said, “Well, evidently you’re pretty good at what you do, because you’ve been doing it a long time and you enjoy it.” And I said, “Well, yeah, I guess so.” And so I took that job, and then a few years later, I was promoted to assistant district director, which was, you know, the one down from the boss. And at that point, then, I was running the personnel for the region, basically.

⁶ Each General Schedule (GS) grade of government job has 10 steps of pay increase.

And one year I'd run operations, the other year, I'd run personnel. It just depended on what we needed to have as the emphasis. And I thought "Okay, I'm going to be regional director someday, when my boss retired." You know, I'm on top of—I mean, this is a good job and, you know, you've been with the commission a long time. Well, I was fortunate, I did—my boss did retire, and I did get his job, and I was promoted to regional director. And, so there you are, you're top of your—you're the—in charge of this—I think at one time, I had, like fifteen offices and three hundred and eighty employees in our region, and there's thirty-nine counties in Central Texas, so I can find you every barbeque pit within a couple of hundred miles of Austin.
(Laughing)

DS:

It's a good skill to have.

MA:

Say, Brenham, Chappell Hill, you name it, I got—I know where the barbeque is, because we used to travel to all those towns, and visit around all those offices. And then this stranger thing happened, I think, that—in this kind of business, because—I thought that for me, in my background, that going to be regional director was like sort of the epitome of my, you know, of my career. That was what I had always wanted to be. In the commission, we had quite a bit of autonomy. As a director, if I'd got something from the state office that I disagreed with, I just would call them up and say, "I'm not going to implement this," as long as I had a good reason, and I had an alternative. And so I liked that, you know, so we'd call them up and we would do basically a lot of what we wanted to do, and directing our offices in our—under our jurisdiction. But I had—for my personal advancement standpoint—I had recognized a couple of years earlier that I had a degree in English and Spanish school teaching, dated 1971, right. And I thought, "Well, you don't even know what you're doing some days, probably. You're winging it, you know, instinctively you know what you're doing, experientially you know what you're doing, but do you really know what you're doing?" And I had to ask myself those questions, because I really wasn't sure the answer for all that was, "Yes," that I knew what I was doing. I went back to graduate school in 1989. Yeah, I went back to Saint Edward's University there in Austin, because it had the night school for the Master's degrees in human services. And I spent two years in night school getting a Master's degree in human services, and a specialty in administration, because everything that I was learning in graduate school was what I was doing, you know. I was practicing what they were teaching me—because I was learning personnel, I was learning statistical analysis, I was learning organizational behavior, I was learning, you know, those kind of operational things—even nonprofit accounting—I had never taken any accounting. Well, you know, it's nice that you can track the money in these jobs, because they give you a lot of reports. So I took nonprofit accounting. The biggest concentration I had was actually statistical analysis and risk management, you know, how to—decision making—how do you decide that's the right way to go or not, you know. So I got a degree in—I got this MA in 1991, and just as I was

getting my director job, and I really attribute the fact that I was better qualified than the other directors, because there were eleven directors in Texas, you know, eleven assistants. Any one of us could have moved to the directorship of the Austin region, you know, and I could have been left going to Houston or somewhere else. But no, I got the job, because none of the other guys had a Master's degree at the time, and none of the other guys—see that little medal, that blue and yellow ribbon over there? That says number one in my class, you know, and so best boy in school kind of thing. It's because I've always been a good student, if nothing else, and so my boss is also an education nut at the time—the administrator of the agency, who was the highest ranking employee. And was the one I was—my direct report. So he, you know, we had a discussion about it, and he said “Sure,” you know, so he—when my director retired, you know, he called me up and said, “Well, we're going to promote you to be the director of the Austin region,” and I said, “Fine, thank you.” And then I turned around and hired a director—an assistant from Houston who had been an acquaintance of mine, that—I knew his work. So I moved Art Torres to Austin to work for me. And then a couple years after that and I was telling you, we were changing legislation; we were working on these different bills and stuff. But in—going to school and learning too much about organizational behavior and the way that management is—structure goes—and I had also been, you know, a student at the LBJ School by then, going to different seminars on executive leadership and senior management, and all those things. The boss and I, because we were both in Austin, and I could just go up to the main building and sit down with him, and we could talk philosophies—we were looking at the—one day we were talking about philosophy and what could be and what couldn't be, and he said “What is your single biggest—” well, he didn't say “weakness,” but he said, “What is single biggest desire when it comes to managing these things?” And I told him, I said, “Well, I believe in the management of the office reporting to having only one boss,” I said, “I can't have multiple masters. I can't have programs in an office reporting to one line of managers, and the supervision of the people, themselves, reporting to another line of managers. That just doesn't work.” Take yourself, if you're in charge of this office, then you want to know and have the say over everything that goes on in this office, that's the way I am. You don't want to think, “Well, I've got a childcare specialist over here. Well, I can tell her a few things to do, but mostly what she's going to do is going to be dictated out of Austin by a bunch of bureaucrats down there,” which is what we had. So I told him, I said, “This bifurcated system that we're running,” at the time, it was mostly employment and unemployment, I said, “It doesn't work well. You should have unified spans of control. You should have everything that's—a little bit clearer—more clearly assigned to the levels of administration.” And so then we had a dry erase board available, and we started, you know, the usual chalk-and-talk. We said, “You can do that just by reorganizing the lines of reporting. You really don't have to change anything else, just the reporting lines. But you have to centralize the fact that the state office people have to report through a—through their division heads, and then they can tell a director that this is the direction, and then the director will spread it from there. But they can't bypass levels of management.” And so as I was drawing that, he said, “Well then doesn't that mean that it requires another unified span here, below me?”

and I said, “Yeah, you need to have a merger here of your ES and your UI divisions to actually make it like an operation division, then you’ve got an administrative division, then you’ve got your legal counsel, then you’ve got your finance.” And then you have his job, you know, the administrator, four assistants, each with a specialty. And so he’s looking at that, and he said—and this was ’93—he was looking at that and he says, “Okay,” he said, “That makes sense,” he says, “You want this job?” and he X’ed that operations job. I said “Well, hell yes, I want that job. I wouldn’t believe it if I didn’t want it, you know, I wouldn’t believe this way.” And he said, “Okay, well we’ll start making plans for you to move up here, and we’ll post your job as vacant. We’ll transfer you up here, you know, first part of the month kind of stuff.” That’s the way I moved to the state office, because somebody had the audacity of sitting with the boss and [to] say, “This is the way we can do it better.” But it’s also a tribute to more education, because I wouldn’t have known to even have the conversation if I hadn’t spent some time in organizational behavior, saying, “Yeah, this is the way it works.”

DS:

Yeah, and him being receptive.

MA:

Well, because he was rather like me, he was an education nut of sorts, and he was also a theoretical person, because he’d been removed from the front door long enough, now, to think abstractly on how the operation is supposed to flow. So—

DS:

Yeah, and I know what you’re talking about, because just like in our small niche, our org file, there’s so many bubbles that are going, like, you know, you report to this person, but yet y’all work together on this—

MA:

The dotted lines and stuff—

DS:

—it’s like, it doesn’t work.

MA:

No, you got to have pretty clearly defined spans of control.

DS:

And it’s that problem with, you know, if they have two masters, they don’t know which one is more important.

MA:

Yeah, uh-huh. As opposed to saying “Well, here’s the deal, you believe the one I tell you to believe, ok?” But, so that’s the way I got promoted to my, you know, to my deputy administratorship at the Texas Employment Commission. And I was telling you that I’ve lived all my life with these highest ranking things about—you’re the highest-ranking Hispanic in the agency. When the agency got changed in the ’96 legislative changes, they created the Texas Workforce Commission and also created workforce boards like we have now, I had legislators, because of me being the highest-ranking Hispanic—from the valley, especially—wanting to know if I wanted them to take up my cause with the legislature to keep me from being laid off. And I told them that I couldn’t do that, I just—it would sort of be a violation of my principles, because you’ve got to be the best person for the job at the time, and I really would never usurp a senior manager from doing what they think is right. And if it’s not, then they’ll find out it’s not right. But I remember Carlos Truan more than once, called me up, he said, “Well, you know, Martin, this is not right. We finally get a Hispanic in the upper tier of the agency, and you’re being laid off.” And I said, “Well, right or wrong, that’s what is happen—it’s what’s occurring. And according to the letter that I’m getting, I’m not getting laid off. When TEC” —and this is a fine line—“when TEC’s role ends on May 31, 1996, your job ends, because there will not be a TEC for you to work for.” And so I wasn’t transitioned to the Texas Workforce Commission. Some people were, but none of us in the higher echelons. And if you’ve done this study of behavior and org charts and that stuff, you know that if, when you’re making a major managerial change—managerial structure change like that, you really don’t want to keep the old guys, because they’re going to be more trouble than they’re worth. Because we know too much about what’s—we’re going to second-guess you, we’ve got too many loyalties in the agency that we could cause you problems if we we’re not receptive. And so I didn’t—from that perspective, I didn’t have a problem with going on—and the other part, going back to Momma, you know, Momma said, “You go work.”

DS:

You know what, and I think an analogy to what you just said is, like, you know, for example, when we get a new head coach in, the old staff has to go—they can’t stay there, it doesn’t make sense.

MA:

No, they’re going to have to move on. They need to move on, it happens. And so you think of it in those terms, say, “Okay,” so I just started looking for another job. And I was fortunate, like I said; I spent a year with the Hogg Foundation as a consultant, actually, as a contract consultant, evaluating programs, which is something I can do. And that was the year of transition that said, “Okay, now, we need to create all these workforce boards,” and all the civilian boards that came together hadn’t been an Austin community person for thirty years—I know a lot of people in Austin from the community that I had worked with on community boards and other things, and I had served on the Advisory Council in Austin for ten years. I represented the Texas Employment

Commission, but I had served on the board, so I knew every board member, and so they approached me and said, "Would you take this job to organize the board here in Austin and set it up for us and hire the contractors and all that?" And I said "Sure." That's what we wrote the law for. I know that, so I'm okay. So we did that, and spent—I didn't plan, really, to move from Austin, but two years later, in '99, I was approached by the people from El Paso and asked if I would go to El Paso. And I kind of hesitated because I thought, "Jeez, never even—you know, I'd been to El Paso twice in my life before I moved there." But it was one of those, "Okay, but we're going to need to—well, we have problems." I thought that was an understatement. But I told them to send me all the documents, I wanted to read the—you don't move without reading all the background and stuff because, you know, you're uprooting and going, and you want to know what you're getting in to, if you can. And it turned out that they had done a—okay, in El Paso at the time, there was a major disruption in the labor market because all of the denim sewing plants—not just denim, but anyway—all the sewing plants, period, in El Paso were being moved overseas, and so all the workers in El Paso were being laid off. And so we had over ten thousand Hispanic women laid off at one time, in this big cohort. And the Clinton administration recognized that issue, and awarded El Paso sixty-five million dollars to retrain the workers. They didn't know what to do with sixty-five million dollars—that was a lot of money, that's all they knew. But they didn't have a clue as to how to operationalize a system. Well, that's what I do, right, so they said, "Okay, they said, well, you know, would you do that?" And I said, "Well, it's—" you know, I'm not from El Paso, I'm not going to say I'm going to stay there and all that kind of stuff. And not being a charity—I'm not a charity case, anyway—they also offered to double my pay to go to El Paso and help me with quite a few perks. I said, in fact, I laughed at them when I got there, because one of the things that their lawyer asked me—or told me—in the negotiation to go to El Paso—because board directors are now freelance, you know, I negotiate my deal with the board. And the lawyer in El Paso offered me profit sharing. And I was laughing about that, I said, "Okay, está bien," you know, like that. It wasn't until a couple of months later that I was talking to him, and again, just in passing—I'd already moved to El Paso—and I said "Frank, you realize you offered me profit sharing?" He said, "I did?" I said, "Yeah, you said all the usual perks, like profit sharing, blah, blah, blah," and he said, "Oh," I said, "Because you do realize we're a nonprofit board." There is no profit sharing, I said. "Unless you're willing to pitch it in." And he just, "No, I guess I wasn't thinking." So I stayed in El Paso about five or six years. I told them three to five years, quite frankly, because I wasn't from there, I didn't plan to stay there. I just wanted to go—I did want to go set up the system, I thought it would be a great challenge. I earned a lot of national respect for doing that—respect from the administration and so forth. And it sort of bolstered my credentials, you know, for having been the guy that saved El Paso. And we did successfully complete the grant that the Department of Labor had awarded, so that was good, because that was the whole point of that. Plus I set up a system, and in 2005 it was time to move. Because, if you recognize you're at a point where it's time to move, you better move. You should move, and I knew that was sort of—in '05 I thought, "Yeah, I'm not good at not changing jobs, I'm better at changing jobs when I feel like it's a renewal." And I had

already set up that system, it was—that system was going into maintenance, you know, for me it was in cruise control. So fine, let somebody else take over, and they can do cruise control, I don't like cruise control. I'd rather do creation. I was going to go to Austin—I mean to Dallas—and put up a sign, shingle. My wife is from Dallas, and we were going to put up this little shingle at the house, you know, that says "Old Guy for Hire Consulting" you know, work-force consulting, or whatever. I already had an LLC, and I had my computers and all that set up. But friends here—darn those friends—called me up and they said, "Martin, you know, Mariandro had just gone to Corpus at the time. We need a director in Lubbock, would you consider it?" And I said, "Jeez, I never even thought about Lubbock," I hadn't been here since I was a little kid. I remember prairie dog town, and the hammer—Joyland kind of thing. So I told him, I said "Well, I'll consider it," I said, "but I'm not really sure that—" well, I told him "—I'm not sure you can afford me," because our jobs are predicated, basically, by the budgets. So I came down and toured the town, talked to the board—interviewed with the board, actually, over at the city council. I read all the documents, because we have legal documents that go with all these boards, and they're structured differently everywhere you go, so you want to make sure you're not getting into any real political traps. And the ex—the past chair was a farmer named James Bellcup of Plainview. The chair was a guy named Jay Messenger, who's the vice president of the bank in Muleshoe. So I talked to the guys, and we scratched out a—the first set of deal, you know, on the paper, as far as "What's it going to take to get Martin to move to Lubbock?" Because, again, you're uprooting and you like be able to at least say you broke even. And also knowing that there's honestly less stress here—it is a small—it's the smallest town I've lived in in—since 1969. The budget is smaller, which also means less activity to worry about, things of that nature. So I knew it wasn't going to pay as much as I had been making, but at the same time—I hate to say this—I'm a state retiree, I didn't need as much as I was making before to be comfortable. I'm comfortable because I have subsidies to my salary that don't go with this job. So yeah, my wife and I looked at each other and said, "Sure, we can do this." Our kids are grown, they're in their thirties—late thirties, now. So we can go wherever we want to. And so we chose to move to Lubbock, we thought it'd be a nice, *pacifico* location to work in, and it is. And the board gives me a lot of autonomy, and I don't have any problem with the politicians most of the time—I'd say most of the time. I've never had a problem with one of the county judges; there's fifteen county judges that have to sign off on the charters for these boards, so actually, there's strength in numbers, and there's a safety in numbers, because no one judge can—take everybody else over—what am I trying to say? You know, there's—you're not going to get one-power seeker to control it, because we had—you know, and fifteen, that's an odd number to begin with, and it's going to take eight to change—which is good.

DS:

Sometimes there's good in numbers.

MA:

Yeah, there's good in numbers, if you only had one, you'd be in trouble, because if that one didn't like you, you'd be up the creek without a paddle. See, in El Paso, I only had five, and the majority of them—of course the population was in El Paso itself. And so you always had to worry about what the county judge in El Paso county was going to say—or the mayor, for that matter, because the mayors also play a role if the town is big enough. In this area, the only mayor that even is a signatory in our work is the mayor of Lubbock. It has to be over one hundred and fifty thousand people in the city. So yeah, we're going to work until we can't, basically. I don't enjoy three-day weekends, I get antsy.

DS:

(Laughing) We're about to head into one.

MA:

Yeah, yeah, exactly, I don't do much—I don't—I don't do three-day—woo, it's already—it's 5:40—but I do three-day weekends well, my wife will tell you. I just don't do it, I've got to be doing something, and I may as well be doing what I enjoy, which is working with these guys, and then sitting at the house trying to figure out if the dog wants to come in or out, that type of stuff. I won't do that. Now, once I decide not to work, which may be another five or six years—yeah, that's probably safe to say—I might move back to trees and grass, my wife likes trees and grass, she's a master gardener—learned it here in Lubbock. But she's not a xeriscape fan, so we've talked about, "Where do we want to live?" We actually want to live in a smaller city than Lubbock, even. Yeah, we thought about that, but we want to be close enough to a larger city because of medical care and other things that happen as you age. So yeah, we're not going to be stupid about it, but where—it'll be in Texas, somewhere, because I can't ever see me leaving Texas. Born and raised Texan, I mean, before I'm anything, I'm a Texan, so I have to—but I've been everywhere in Texas, and there're a lot of pretty parts of Texas, you just have to decide, this is where you want to hang your hat. And, you know, I was showing you pictures of Fort Davis earlier—if they had a doctor I'd hang my hat in Fort Davis, I really would. And, you know, there's nobody out there but me and a couple of cows, and some horses, and maybe my friend Buster, that type of thing. But we might—you know, you never can tell. No, I don't feel like I'm—like I said, I don't have a hometown to speak of right now, because a hometown is where your folks are, and my folks are dead. So I know where their graves are, their graves are in the hometown, but do I need to go see that? No, not really. I mean I don't need to live there to see them, that type of thing. When they—people tell you that, you know, the dead just live in your memories, they don't really have to worry about cemeteries too much. I know that's—some Mexicanos won't believe that, but that's where I go. But anyway, that brings us sort of current on what the working life is, and what we're doing. I had a quadruple-bypass almost ten years ago, now, and so that was when I decided some things were worth doing for a reason besides money—that you have to enjoy it.

DS:

How did that change your life?

MA:

Well, I'd always known that I was susceptible to being hyper, to, like I said, I don't like to—long weekends bother me. I need at least a week to just decompress and then enjoy the second week; I'm not going to take a short vacation, if I ever take one. Last time I took a vacation of any length was in 2005, I took off thirty days before coming here, and two weeks of those I spent down in Mexico. But that's the mortality of it that says, "Okay, you know what, you're at a point where you could—this could be something that changes fairly quickly." I was fortunate in that I didn't have a heart attack, they caught it on a checkup—oxygen and breathing problems and all that kind of stuff, and so when they did the angiograms and scans and stuff, they said, "Oh, look, you've got blockages. We need to fix this, or you're going to be dead. You may have a heart attack, or you just won't wake up." So they did that—I did that in El Paso. So yeah, I hadn't ever thought about, you know, you always have that cloak of invincibility until you aren't, and you find out—you think you're not invincible. And you are susceptible to this, and of course, like I said, we have a history of diabetes in my family, so I—my brothers and I can—don't have to look very far to see the effects of it, whether it's my younger brother dying of that massive heart attack, or my uncles all being buried in short boxes with amputations and things, with the diabetes. Yeah, none of us want to be there. And so you learn to take care of yourself, and some of that says "I've got to do—put some things more to the forefront than they were in the past." In the old days, you just—your work was what you were, and it is what I am. If I have an identity, it has to be as a workforce professional. There's things that I've done growing up, you know, there's the—whether it's the high school sports, or whether it's the clubs that you belong to, or the chairmanships that you've held. I mean, right now, I'm the chair of the what? The advisor committee to Byron Martin, the advisory committee to the career and technology programs for the ISD. You know, you sit on the different boards for different causes or—we have a community workforce partnership that I chair, which is us and the chamber and LEDA. But those are part of work, and if you believe like I do, that workforces doesn't exist in a vacuum, it has to be part of economic development. I just—I keep telling the guys now, in my peer group—I'm also the president of the state directors' association for Texas, so I tell them, I say, "Guys, we're not in—we're just not in workforce anymore, we're in community development, and we've got to be playing in a bigger pond than just our little workforce area." I'm a trustee in the Workforce Development Council for the U.S. Conference of Mayors, so I'm going to D.C. to talk about what do we do on the national level, because we've got some new legislation coming on. Those are what I call my hobbies, because you don't have to take on those kind of things, those are hobbies. What the board pays me for is to run this board. That other stuff is just for the good of the cause. That was part of my deal when I came here, I told them they had to not only support me to work their board, but they also had to support my bad habits. My bad habits is I like to live outside my world here, and give to the greater good—I hope, I think it is. There's not that many of us that are doing that anymore. I think that's part of that generational thing we were

talking about earlier. What is it—if it makes you a social activist? Well, in a way. In a way it's social activism, if it's of my own choosing. That's it.

DS:

That's it. I was going to say, do you have anything else to sum it up with?

MA:

No, that's—if I can change it to the good, that's what I want to do.

DS:

All right, thank you Martin.

MA:

You're welcome. Thanks for coming.

DS:

Thank you, sir.

End of Interview

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