

**Oral History Interview of
Tomas Garza**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
August 18, 1998
Austin, Texas**

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

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Interview 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 Tomas Garza as he discusses his life and background as well as his education at Texas Tech. In this interview, Tomas describes his college career at Texas Tech, his decision to get a law degree, and his thought on the Hispanic community in Lubbock.

Length of Interview: 01:42:31

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Keywords

Family Life and Background, Court Cases, Lawyer. Mexican-American Communities

Daniel Sanchez (DS):

On August 18, 1998, in his office in Austin, Texas.

Tomas Garza (TG):

Okay.

DS:

Why don't you just start off with your name, and date, place of birth?

TG:

Okay. Tomas Garza. My date of birth is May 23, 1944, and I was born in Dimmit County, between Carrizo Springs and Asherton.

DS:

Could you tell us a little bit about your family history? Your parent's names and birth dates and where they were from?

TG:

My father was Antonio Chapa Garza and he was born on May—I mean, on March 28, 1923. And my mother is Josephina DeLeon. She was born on March 23—no, March 25th of 1925. My mother is still alive. My father died in '92.

DS:

And what area were they from?

TG:

They were both born in Asherton, Texas, which is about the same place where I was born, almost. It's in Dimmit County.

DS:

Dimmit County, okay. And what were their occupations?

TG:

Daddy was a farmer. He was a farmer up until 1958—'59, probably '59. And in 1959, he got a job working in a service station. And then in 1960, we bought a little bitty Fina service station. And then, after that, in '61—maybe even in '62. I think it was '62. We bought a larger Fina station and so we started running service station.

DS:

How difficult was it for a minority to purchase and then run, like, a gas station? Was it—

TG:

Oh, it wasn't difficult. The money was the problem. Of course, we didn't have any money and that was the difficult problem was to buy something that you could do. As far as business was concerned, hell, there were enough Hispanics that we could, you know. We always had a main attraction for the Hispanics.

DS:

Okay. So was that different than what you encountered later on in Lubbock? The atmosphere there? Business atmosphere?

TG:

It was probably about the same. You know, if you had the money to do what you needed to do, it always made it a lot easier. The problem was that most of us didn't have the money. [Laughs] It was very economically difficult. Although, you know, there was quite a bit of discrimination, but usually, if you had money, the discrimination kind of withered away a little bit. Not all of it, but some of it.

DS:

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

TG:

Five. There's six in my family. I'm the oldest. And there were five boys and one girl.

DS:

So were you involved with helping your dad around the station?

TG:

Oh yeah. As a matter of fact, my brother and I, David, we ran the service station from 1960 to when I graduated from high school, which was in '62. And then after that, he ran the service station until '63, when he graduated. And then my other brothers, Pedro and Daniel, they ran the service station until they graduated from high school and went to college. So we all stayed there just long enough through until we graduated. Of course, every summer, we'd come back home and we'd run the service station during the summer. But everybody worked at the service station.

DS:

So the family life revolved around—

TG:

Yep.

DS:

Education and working?

TG:

Yeah. Yeah, my dad—see, I wasn't the first one in the family to go to college. Actually, my dad was the only one in—[phone rings]. He was the only one in the family—in his family, in the Garza family, that didn't finish high school. Well, I take that back. I think his sister didn't either. He had one sister out of eight. Everybody else finished high school. Daddy was the oldest, but he was also—my grandfather wanted them to go to college. That was back in the early forties.

DS:

So they were ahead of their time.

TG:

Yeah 1943, when my dad graduated from high school. And—I'm sorry. Yeah, he did graduate from high school. My sis—my aunt was the only one who didn't graduate from high school. But my dad was the only one who didn't pursue a college career in those days, and we lived on a farm. We weren't well-to-do or anything. It's just that my grandfather thought that everybody should go to college, and my grandfather was also born somewhere close to Asherton. I think, maybe, he was born in Asherton. I believe he was, anyway. My grandmother was also born close to Asherton in Encinal, which I don't know if you know where it is. It's a little bitty town on I-35, south of Cotulla. And so daddy decided to get married instead, and so he didn't go to college. But daddy's brothers—Jose graduated from Texas A&M. And then, the one that followed him was Fernando. Fernando graduated from Southwest Texas State. Ilan [?] [0:06:38] graduated from Southwest Texas State. Marine [?] [0:06:41] graduated from Tarleton State and got a masters at A&M. *Mi tia* [my aunt] Maria graduated from somewhere in Corpus. I forget the name of the college, but she's a registered nurse. And then, my other, *tia*, she's the one that didn't finish high school. She's the one that stayed home. She's the one that didn't want any education. And then, after that, my last one, *mi tio* [my uncle]—I don't know that he ever really graduated from college, but he had, like, a hundred and twenty hours. So out of the family—out of my dad's family, most of them went to college and graduated.

DS:

Okay.

TG:

So I wasn't the first one. So by the time I grew up, it was understood that we all would go to college, and so all of us did. I'm a lawyer. My brother, David's a lawyer. My brother, Pete—I don't know if he ever did graduate or not. I think Pete's short of a graduation with an accounting degree. I think he never did graduate, but he's got probably, almost all of his credits. And after

Pete is Daniel. Daniel decided to go into the priesthood, so he's got a theology degree, and so he spent eight years in a seminary, or seven years. And so, he's got the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in theology. And then, after Daniel, is Roy, and Roy, I think, also has about a hundred and something credits in school, but I don't think he ever graduated. Yeah, I don't think he ever did. Then, my sister, the last one, she's got a degree in medical technology. So four of us—or three of us have degrees. I think the other—no, four of have degrees. Two don't in my family. My immediate family.

DS:

So do you think that your grandfather's insistence on education for his kids then gave the rest of y'all a leg up as y'all were coming up?

TG:

Yeah. It was kind of understood that that's what we had to do. There was no question about it and so we just did.

DS:

Did your dad or your aunts and uncles ever talk about what the atmosphere was like on campus when they were going there? Because they would've been going there early on.

TG:

Yeah. Yeah, they were—well, my uncle—the first uncle that graduated from college was Jose and he graduated from A&M in '51, or '52, somewhere around there. And you know, they've never really talked about the atmosphere and how it was and what they had to do. They didn't talk about the racism part. They did talk about how bad off they were because they barely had enough money to pay for books and pay for everything else. I remember my uncle would always comment—the ones at Southwest Texas State because both of the uncles were there at one time. And he said, "Man," he said, "I'll tell you what. We used to get together and pitch in all our pennies so we could go out and buy hotdogs on Sundays," I think. He said, "Because those were the days that we didn't get a meal at the place where we lived." And so, he said, "Man, on Sundays, we had to scrape for pennies so we could go out and get a hotdog." Because they paid for the housing and the housing had meals, except, I think, on Sundays. And on Sundays, they had to go out and scrounge for food, so.

DS:

So was this housing on campus or off campus?

TG:

I think it was off campus. They lived in an apartment, if I remember correctly. Yeah, yeah.

DS:

So they had interesting stories then about what the lack of funds makes you do.

TG:

Oh yeah. No kidding. I mean, it was kind of rough for them, I'm sure.

DS:

So did they have to work their way through college while they were going?

TG:

Yeah, they had to work a little bit, but grandpa made sure that—you know, he paid their tuition and costs and everything because he wanted to make damn sure they went, and so he paid for their—

DS:

What was he working as?

TG:

My grandfather was a farmer.

DS:

A farmer?

TG:

Yeah. We had a farm there in Carrizo Springs, where I was born. I was born on a farm.

DS:

So was it a substantial size, then?

TG:

No, it wasn't that big, but he worked on a percentage. He was one of those farmers that have contract farming. In other words, you raise a crop and you sell it and the owner gets half and you get half and so that's your contract farming. That's what he did. He was a contract farmer. And we moved in 1954 to Dimmit, Texas. We went from Dimmit County to Dimmit City. Actually, we lived on a farm about twelve miles west of Dimmit and again, on a contract farm. But in Carrizo Springs, or close to Carrizo, in Dimmit County. The farm was mostly a vegetable farm. They had carrots, onions, tomatoes. God, I can't remember. I remember they had some other vegetables, but I can't remember what. I know it was a lot of onions and tomatoes and carrots and something else. Can't remember what. But when we moved to Dimmit, it was strictly cotton, wheat, and maze. But he had a contract over there and evidently, the farmer who owned the land

didn't live up to his contract, so we moved out of the farm in 1957. Only stayed there about two years or three years. Then after that, that's when daddy found the service station and we went to the service station business.

DS:

Okay. So how soon after graduation did you pursue your college education?

TG:

That same year. I graduated in '62, and I went to college in '62, and it took me a while to get out, but that's when I first started.

DS:

Okay. And you went to Tech, right?

TG:

Yeah. I went—in undergraduate school, I went to Texas Tech.

DS:

Okay. And what was that like? When you first got on campus, what'd you think of it?

TG:

Well, it was really interesting. Back in those days, there were only fifty, more or less, fifty Hispanics in the entire university. And I think we counted them all. We went through the book and picked every one of them out. Of course, the problem is, unless you didn't have a Hispanic surname, we could've missed a few, you know? But we picked out all the Hispanics and we sent letters to all of them to try and get together and get a group together, but there were around fifty. There may have been a few more, but I think there was around fifty. There were five, ten—about ten of us in our immediate little group and some of them are still in Lubbock. Jaime Garcia is still in Lubbock. Maria—used to be Maria Salas. She's now Maria—I can't think of her last name now. She was with me in class. She was also class of '62. Vilsen Salinas [0:15:10] started in '60—'60, or '61. Bilson. He's there in Lubbock. _____ Maria DeLeon [0:15:25], I think she's a teacher there and she started in '60, or '61, somewhere around there. Right before us. And all of Nepthali's [?] [0:15:38] brothers were in college there. Frank and Hector and Maria. All three of them were in college there. But we all knew each other because there weren't that many of us, so we all knew each other and we all—you know, we formed a group that were called Los Tertuliano's. We formed the group like in '63, or '64, somewhere around there. And it was just merely a social club so we could—all of us get together.

DS:

Did y'all keep like meetings and stuff? Minutes?

TG:

Yeah.

DS:

Do you know where those records? Or who might have them?

TG:

No idea. I was president at one time, but I don't recall who ever kept the minutes or anything. Patsy Ramos—I don't know what ever happened to Patsy. I think Patsy was from Tulia, Texas. The people who might know is people like Bidal Agüero or Jaime. Jamie might remember whatever happened to those minutes, or whatever. Patsy was very big in there at one time, but I don't know whatever happened to her. Maria might know. Since I left the area in '69 and didn't keep up anymore, I went into the army and I spent two years in the army. And then, after that, I moved to Dallas, actually, in Garland. I got my first job in Garland. After I got out of the army. And then, after that, they talked me into going to law school, so I went to law school in '72 and I got out in '75, then I moved back to Lubbock. So there was a six year absence there that I wasn't there.

DS:

Okay. So where did you get your law degree?

TG:

At George Washington University in Washington D.C. There's actually three of us from Lubbock. Four of us from Lubbock who went to George Washington. Este me and Vilsen Salinas, who is there in Lubbock. Abe Lopez, who is in Amarillo. Abe was my roommate. Abe was from Lamesa. Abe is actually a district judge now in Amarillo. He was my roommate back in undergraduate days. And Lenin Juarez. Lenin is—I think he lives in Houston. He works out of either Houston or Dallas in a company. *Pero este* Abe's family, all of them graduated from Texas Tech. Abe, his sister, Esmeralda, who still lives there in Lubbock, and his brother, Hector. Hector lives in, I think, in Oklahoma City. And they all graduated from Texas Tech. So usually, if a family had somebody in college, the whole rest of the family went to college. It was sort of like a family thing, you know?

DS:

Were the majority of those fifty students, would you say, were they from Lubbock? Or from surrounding communities?

TG:

No. The majority of the students were actually from the surrounding communities. The percentage of local students from Lubbock was actually very low. I think only the DeLeon's and

Vilsen Salinas were locals. For example, Maria Salas was from Fort Stockton, I think. Jamie was from Sea Graves—or no, he's from that other city a little bit farther south. I was from Dimmit. Este Gastro was from Rotan. And you could just name all the rest. You know, if you had a—if you had a—I don't have it here, I don't think. My annual from 1960-something. You could go through there and I could tell you where they were all from. Like, Patsy was from Tulia. You know, there was quite a few other people that we knew and they were mostly from the little surrounding towns.

DS:

What do you think that was a product of? Was it easier for someone from a smaller community to gain access to education and then pursue a higher education than those from Lubbock?

TG:

No.

DS:

Or was it just the drive was different?

TG:

No. I think the people who—I guess, in the family. In a family, there's always one family in town who is very educationally oriented, and they're the ones who sent their kids to college. And that's why we'd get one out of each little town because there was always one family. And it's—in a small town, there's rarely more than one family for some reason. I don't know why, but there's rarely more than one family who sent their kids to college. Maybe two, but that was it. I graduated with four people in Dimmit High School in '62, and out of the four of us, I think three of us graduated from college, which was unusual. Yeah, there was only—no, no. There were five. That's right. There were five of us. There were five of us in the graduating class. Out of the five of us, three of us went to college and graduated. I went to Tech. Charlie, finally—I don't know where the hell Charlie went. Charlie went somewhere. And then, Estell Tran [?] [0:22:25]. Rachel—Rachel went to West Texas. And I think Estells Tran never did go [?] [0:22:32]. There were two of them that didn't go. But usually, your little towns had one or two families that sent their kids to college and that's why we got an influx from a lot of the little towns. Whereas, the city of Lubbock itself, for some reason, it just didn't have that many people who applied for entrance into the university. Maybe it was because they didn't have anybody pushing them and for some reason, they just didn't have the percentages because obviously, they had a hell of a lot more Hispanics here than we had in the outlying communities. Because, like I said, we only had four who graduated out of Dimmit High School in '62, or five. Out of the five, three of them went to college, so that's 60 percent. I know damn well you didn't even have 6 percent in the graduating class in Lubbock High.

DS:

Do you think that—I don't know—this is just what I'm thinking about after what you said. Since, you know, most of them lived, at the time, in Guadalupe area or *barrio* [neighborhood], whatever it was called at that moment. Do you think that—because that almost acted like a separate community for a long stretch—that that was also a thing? There would only be one family there that made a push for education as opposed to?

TG:

I think, yeah. If you look at it that way, that's probably the way it was. Then again, I don't really know what was a problem, or what was a cause, or anything. You got to understand, too, that when you live in a small town, okay? There's not a hell of a lot to do. We didn't have too many outside activities. We didn't have anybody to really hang around with—that would, number one, get us in trouble, or, number two, give us any bad ideas or bad habits or anything else. So we were kind of like isolated. So in a sense, maybe we were influenced by the other ideas also of the—of the surrounding people, maybe the white community of people going to college, you know? Whereas, I guess if you live in a community, in a *barrio* or whatever, you have a tendency to hang around with all your people. If they say, "Oh shit. Why do we need to go to college?" "Man, I need to get a job." You know? And so maybe you go along with that stream of thought. I don't really know to tell you the damn truth. I do know that I was isolated in Dimmit. You know, since there were very, very few Hispanics, I didn't have too many friends. I didn't get along—I can't say I didn't get along—I wasn't accepted well, because I was Hispanic, into the white community, even though I was probably the number two person in the high school. The teachers accepted me well. Everybody in the educational field—many of the adults did. But as far as being accepted socially, I wasn't. I wasn't invited to parties. I wasn't invited to this. I wasn't invited to anything. And they were all very good friends, but nobody was socially acceptable. So when I came to college, man, I needed some type of relief. And so, hell, I was glad to get out of there and go to college so I could find other people to talk to.

DS:

Is that what prompted you to try to start this nucleus group and have your social gatherings?

TG:

Yeah, I imagine so because, you know, we—we never had—I never had anybody to talk to that much. Especially, people with similar interests and people who were interested in what was going on in the world and people who were interested in the—in education or stuff like that.

DS:

So do you think that as by being together as a group and supporting each other that helped y'all in y'all's college careers?

TG:

Oh, I imagine it helped us in a certain sense. I think—I think it helped just being able to be more adjusted to the college scene. More adjusted to living away from home. More adjusted to—to being in the environment of college environment. But actually, when I got to Tech, I didn't have that much discrimination at Tech as I probably saw in high school. I don't know why. Maybe there were a lot of people here from the bigger cities. I got along fine with all the people, for example, in my dorm room. And we had a great time with—and they were all *gringos* [whites]. There wasn't a single Hispanic in my dorm.

DS:

Wow. What dorm was that?

TG:

At Sneed Hall.

DS:

Sneed Hall?

TG:

Yeah. In '62. I don't recall a single Hispanic. No, I don't think so. And in '63—no, I don't think there was ever. When I finally moved to Gordon Hall, I think there may have been one. I don't recall, but there were very, very, very damn few of us even then, you know? So—

DS:

Yeah. But what kind of activities did y'all do? Both within this group that you said of fifty, and all? As a whole group of campus, though, what kind of social activities were you involved in? Or civilian activities?

TG:

We just barely got together at somebody's house or—I think, if I remember, we used to rent. Like, for example, at the Christmas parties, there used to be an old place and you can ask all the old guys about the old nights at Columbus Lodge, for example. It used to be just north of the Yellow House Canyon. You know where Yellow House Canyon is in Lubbock?

DS:

Uh-huh.

TG:

Where—I think it's University Avenue—or University Avenue. Or was it Avenue Q? Damn. I don't remember where now. But it's going north just as you cross Buddy Holly Park. No, is it

Buddy Holly Park?

DS:

It would be University if Buddy Holly's Park—

TG:

Buddy Holly Park, where they have the raft races.

DS:

Yeah. That's University.

TG:

Is it University?

DS:

Yeah. University and Canton.

TG:

Okay. Right there, where you cross, is the canyon, the little creek there. You would turn left, I think, it was on Marshall Street. And there was a little, like, a little hill there and the old knight's of Columbus used to have a lodge back there and they would rent it to you, and we would have parties back there. And we would all get together and have a party back there. And you know, we just had somebody to talk to, somebody to have fun with, somebody to dance with, you know? We'd have music and stuff and just get together and enjoy being with our own people. You know, it was fun. I remember I enjoyed it.

DS:

So that would right after you pressed back up on top, over there by, I think, Mustang Mobile Homes and all that's there, you know?

TG:

Yeah, right. Exactly. Yeah. That was a good old place. I remember. I really enjoyed that place.

DS:

Did y'all have anybody else from the community, or from Tech, join y'all functions there? Was it a pretty small gathering?

TG:

Usually pretty small gatherings. They weren't big. I imagine fifteen or twenty of us, usually. We got together fifty, twenty, maybe thirty.

DS:

Did y'all get involved in any type of community service while y'all were there?

TG:

I don't recall that we did up until in later years, I think. I don't recall that we did much of anything. [Audio pauses] I don't recall that we ever did. I think, later on, they did, but by the time I quit hanging around with the group, which was around '66, '67—because I got married in '67. And then after that, you know, I had to work. I had to support the family because I had a kid on the way and I was trying to graduate. So after that, I—and then, also, in, like, '66, I joined a Catholic fraternity, Chi Rho. And then, I started doing a lot of things with the Chi Rho's, which was a Catholic Fraternity, and didn't do as many things as I used to with the Hispanic groups. There were a couple of Hispanics in the Chi Rho's, so.

DS:

You mentioned you were about ready to graduate. What was your degree in?

TG:

Psychology.

DS:

Psychology.

TG:

Um-hm.

DS:

Matches well.

TG:

Yeah, I started out as a mathematics major. Mathematics major and a chemistry minor. And oh, about three years into it, I changed my major and went to psychology. So I got a minor in mathematics, but I should've stuck with math, but I didn't. I would've probably been a computer genius by now. [Laughs]

DS:

You would've been Bill Gates?

TG:

Yeah, probably. But I had this friend of mine, Luis Castro, he was a—he was majoring in nuclear

physics and I think he finally did get a degree in physics and I think he was working on his doctorate the last I heard on nuclear physics.

DS:

Where was he working on his doctorate?

TG:

I don't know. I have no idea, este. He was Rotan. No, Roscoe. He was from Roscoe, Texas. Yeah, Roscoe. Luis and I and Maria, all started the same year and we were all fighting for the same scholarship because there was one scholarship, basically, for Hispanics. It was the Hiram-Parks Scholarship, and it was five hundred dollars a year, I think. Hell, tuition and fees and costs and everything was a hundred and ten bucks a semester. It was less than that. Probably, about eighty-nine, ninety dollars. So you could pay for tuition and costs. And the dorm fees in those days were sixty-six dollars a month. So you could pay almost your whole school year with five hundred dollars.

DS:

Went along ways then.

TG:

Yeah. It was either five hundred dollars or fifteen hundred dollars. Can't remember now. Maybe it was fifteen hundred dollars. Could've been fifteen hundred dollars.

DS:

That's quite good.

TG:

Yeah. Or maybe it was five hundred dollars a semester. May have been. So anyway, Luis won it and he beat me and Maria out. [Laughs] And that's why we never did like him. [Laughs] No, actually, he was a very good friend. But I wound up with another scholarship, but it was only two hundred and fifty dollars a year. But shoot, it still paid my tuition and fees, so it wasn't bad.

DS:

Did you find if the other individuals that were going, they were—had a similar experience, where college was expected? Or were there a lot of them that were first generation college students?

TG:

No, a lot of them were first generation. A lot of them were. Some of them had some—I was probably very unique in that I had a lot of college people in the family. Most of them didn't.

Most of them were first generations. You know, they just had the idea that they should go to college. Somebody did and pushed them and sent them over there. But most of them didn't have the benefit like I did.

DS:

Were they equipped with the kind of study habits that you might've acquired from your—

TG:

No, I think we all had very bad study habits.

DS:

Okay.

TG:

Some of us didn't. I know I did. I had some real bad study habits because, I guess I just never learned them from anyone. Since nobody in my immediate family had gone to college, I was the first one. Even though my uncles had gone to college, but I wasn't around close to them when they went to college. So I had to learn all by myself, study habits. But I guess that was probably the worst thing that'll kill you is study habits. If you don't learn those early—early on in the game.

DS:

Yeah. Because I know that right now, that Learning Incorporated, that's one of their main goals. They try to get in there and, you know, with the first generation, specifically, target them and show them the study skills they need to survive.

TG:

Yeah. Yeah, because that's probably what kicked me out of mathematics, is that I didn't study enough and I should have, but I never did learn to study. I finally did learn to study, but hell, I was in law school by then. So by the time I got to law school, I finally learned how to study. But—

DS:

So you were talking about when you went—or after you came out of the service and then you finally went to law school?

TG:

Um-hm.

DS:

What—besides others telling you to go—pushed you in that direction?

TG:

Oh well, then, that's a whole different story. Actually, I went to law school just to appease this friend of mine who was pushing me into it. It was Abe Lopez. Yeah, and he kept bugging me, saying that I needed to go and I kept telling him that I didn't think I needed to and I told him I didn't want to. And he kept saying, "No, you do." And so, he kind of finally bugged me to the point where I applied. I took the LSAT. I—y *todo* by nothing but _____ because I didn't want to [0:38:44]. I wanted to do something else. I didn't know what, but I wanted to do something else. And so, finally, it got to the point where I was broke and I didn't know exactly what I was going to do, but I knew I was broke and I knew I had to do something and law school was one option. For some reason, I didn't think it was the best option, but it certainly presented itself at the right time and I said, "Oh, what the hell? I'm broke anyway, so I might as well go try law school." And I did. I was flat ass broke.

DS:

How large of family did you have when you went back to law school?

TG:

Two kids.

DS:

Two kids. And about how age—what were their ages?

TG:

Diana was five—four. She was four. And Ricky was two.

DS:

So you needed to be asking for sacrifices?

TG:

Oh yeah. Yeah. They—you know, I could sit here and talk to you for three days and tell you about the sacrifices, you know? But it was a decision that I made at the very last minute and I said, "Well, let's do it.", "Okay, let's do it." And packed up all our crap and put it in the back of a van, or on a trailer, and we put it in storage and my wife and the kids moved to her mother's house. I said, "I'll send for you as soon as I can." I took off with a suitcase in my hand.

DS:

Okay. So did that put more of a desire in you to succeed while you were in law school knowing

how much you had staked, you know?

TG:

Yeah. I don't know that it did that because, number one, it wasn't as if I had thrown away anything to go there. I didn't have a damn thing when I went there, and I figured, hey, if I don't make it, I'll go out and find me a job. It was more a desire to make it just to show everybody that I could make it that kept me going. And I think since we were minority recruits and we all had lesser GPAs and lesser LSAT scores than everybody else, and everybody thought that maybe we were also a lesser caliber and that we wouldn't make the grades, then I was bound to show them that we could and that's what kept me going.

DS:

And so, how well did you do?

TG:

I did pretty good, actually. I was probably in the top 25 percent.

DS:

That's pretty good. What do you think of—

TG:

I was president of the student body, too.

DS:

Oh, you were?

TG:

My last year.

DS:

Last year. And so you went three years and you were out?

TG:

Um-hm.

DS:

And you began your law practice where?

TG:

In Lubbock.

DS:

In Lubbock?

TG:

Came back to Lubbock.

DS:

Did you go to work for Abe, or?

TG:

No. Actually, Abe was working for Lanine and Vilsen [?] [0:41:51].

DS:

Okay.

TG:

And when I came, Abe moved and went to Lubbock. And I came in and worked for Vilsen and Lanine [?] [0:42:02]. And I worked for them for about a year and a half and then I moved out on my own. I've been on my own since March of '77.

DS:

What prompted that move to go out on your own?

TG:

Well, I wanted to get out on my own, for one. And then, that was the year that Lanine was found guilty of possession of controlled substances and he was convicted and given ten years in prison. [Laughs] So, I figured it's time to go.

DS:

Yeah, don't want to be associated with that.

TG:

No. Figured it was time to go.

DS:

All right. Let's move on to something that happened back in Lubbock back—

TG:

Okay. I'm going to have to run to the courthouse. Can you wait a little while?

DS:

Sure.

TG:

You got time?

DS:

Uh-huh.

TG:

Okay. You can go with me if you want.

DS:

Okay.

TG:

All right. Hang on a second because—

[Pause in Recording]

TG:

—um-hm. You want to ask your question again.

DS:

Yes. A while back, you were involved in a court case in Lubbock about the single member district lawsuit. I believe it was called—*Reverend Roy Jones, et al., versus The City of Lubbock, et al.* Could you tell us what you remember about that law case?

TG:

Have you talked to anybody else about it?

DS:

Well, we have the court case and I've been reading through that, but I haven't—you're the first one that I've talked to about it.

TG:

The history about it?

DS:

Um-hm.

TG:

The way that case started, the Reverend Roy Jones and a few other blacks filed a lawsuit through—what was that lawyer's name? He was a black lawyer. God, what was his name? He was a black lawyer. And they filed a civil rights suit under the Voting Rights Act to divide up the city into voting districts because we hadn't been able to elect anybody to the city council at all, especially a black. And so they had filed an action. I think the Voting Rights Act was passed, like, in 1969, or something like that. And so they filed it under that act. They went to court and they didn't have a heck of a lot of evidence. They only had, maybe, couple—two, three witnesses. And so the judge stopped the action and said, "Wait a minute." Said, "This lawsuit is a little bit too important because you're affecting all the rights of the minorities, not just the blacks, in the city of Lubbock." And of course, the black lawyer that had taken it on, he didn't have any help. He didn't have any expertise in it. Didn't have a damn thing. Gene Gaines. That was his name. Gene Gaines. He was a nice guy and I'm sure that the black community got him to file this for them, you know? But I don't think that Gene realized just how important this case was. He didn't realize the magnitude of the effect that it would have on all the minorities in that city, but the judge did and so he stopped it. He said, "Wait a minute. I don't think you're prepared to fight this case, at least not in the way I look at it."

DS:

So was that Judge Woodward?

TG:

Judge Woodward. Yeah. He said, "I think you need to go out and find some help and if you need some help, you let me know if you can't find any." He said, "But I think if you'll go in the community or go out to the law school, you can probably get somebody to volunteer. So he did and he found one guy that decided to help him and he, in turn, made a call and said, "Do any of you want to help me? I need some help." And so there were about five of us that volunteered to help him and I volunteered. Dan Benson, [phone rings] from the law school, volunteered. I think Albert Perez also volunteered. What's his name? Hall. He used to be with—I guess he still is. Mark Hall. Mark Hall was in the lawsuit. And who else? That was about it, I think. I think that was about it. I can't even think of who else was in the lawsuit. There were about five of us lawyers in it. Between the five of us, we managed to start finding out information about what to do, how to prove it, and how to bring forth the information. And so, we all kind of pitched in to help Gene. And then, Gene decided, said, "Hey, look. You guys can do a much better job than I can. I'm just going to beg out of this and let y'all handle it." We said, "Fine. We'll go ahead and take over." This was, like, in—I'd say, in January of 1979, I'd say. Seventy-eight, seventy-nine.

DS:

The court case was in '79.

TG:

Yeah. And we got all of our—and then we added some plaintiffs to add the Hispanic plaintiffs. That's where Bidal Aguero's name came in and I think it changed from Roy Jones et al., to Roy Jones and Bidal Aguero et al. I think. I don't remember correctly, but something to that effect. And we fought the case, like, in 1980—'79, or '80—and we lost it, and then we appealed it to the fifth circuit. The fifth circuit kicked it back in '81, '82, somewhere around there. And so in '82, or '83, we retried it. By that time, Judge Woodward said, "I think I know what the fifth circuit is trying to tell me, and they're trying to tell me that the city loses, so y'all probably need to come to an agreement of some sort." And so, we tried it the second time around because they wouldn't agree, and then, the judge found for us, the second case and gave us basically what we wanted and divided up the city into five districts, I believe, or six districts. Something like that. And that's how it all came about, but it took us about three or four years, maybe five years. No, I think it was a total of seven years because I think the lawsuit was started, like, in '77. We didn't try it until either '79, I think. And then, we retried it again in '81. And then, we won in '82, I think, or '83, when all the appeals were over with. And so there was a total of about seven years between the first time that it was started until we ended it, which was in '84.

DS:

That's a lot of time invested in it. How much do you think all your pro bono time would've cost? Just a guestimate for that duration?

TG:

All the total pro bono between all the lawyers?

DS:

Yeah. Just an estimate.

TG:

Probably a half a million dollars.

DS:

That's a lot.

TG:

Yeah. And we got paid, like, eighty-five thousand, I think. Between all of us, [phone rings] we got paid about eighty-five thousand dollars. I think each of us got paid something, like, sixteen thousand bucks. It wasn't much. But total time wise, we probably spent a half a million dollars' worth of time.

DS:

And your involvement when you decided to pursue it, what was your thinking going into it?

TG:

Oh, we just wanted to—we just wanted to win because it was very clear and very obvious that the prejudice was there. That no Hispanic or black could ever win an overall race with the entire city voting, unless that person had numerous ties and, you know, very close ties to the white community and—which usually meant [phone rings] that he was compromised in his efforts to achieve racial equality. There had only been one person who was ever elected city wide and that was Jose Ramirez to the city council.

DS:

To the school.

TG:

To the schoolboard, I mean. But Jose was Republican and so he had a lot of Republican friends in the white community and they're the ones that helped him a lot. And of course, Jose was a very likeable person and he was about the only one who could possibly ever win. Nobody else would have. And, you know, the fact that one person ever did get elected for whatever reasons usually was not a bar to get your relief and as a matter of fact, during the elections—I mean, during this lawsuit, sometime between 1980 and '84, when the case was finally over with, I ran for city council, I think. Yeah, I think I ran for city council, like, in '82. And you know, I was—I was pretty well-known as a lawyer and I was—you know, I had a good reputation and whatnot. I went to all the city forums and—not debated, but gave my views on what should or should not be done. A lot of people that I met said, "You know, I really like the way you've spoken and I've loved the way you've said things. I've loved your ideas. I love—all this other stuff." And the few people that I did get to talk to, I probably convinced them that I was the best candidate, but I didn't win. I lost like—I think I had twenty-eight percent of the votes, twenty-eight, twenty-nine percent of the vote and that was about it. The total Hispanic and black vote in the whole city was twenty-three percent. I think there were eleven percent blacks. There was more than that because there was about eleven percent blacks in the city and twenty-two percent, or twenty-three percent Hispanics. But voting wise, the voting eligible, there was only like twenty-two percent or twenty-three percent total Hispanic and black.

DS:

So you're getting numbers comparable to what ____ [0:54:54]. He, you know, got about 95 percent of the minority vote and he just had enough of the anglo to push him over the top and he did win, so.

TG:

Right, right. Yeah, because in his precinct, he had probably a 50/50, or 45/55 percentage, but in voting numbers, it was probably 55/45, where the Hispanics were the forty-five. So you had to get all the Hispanics and part of the other vote, in order for you to get over the 50 percent mark. That was the only way to do it. Even now, that's the way it is in that district, which is one of the legislative districts.

DS:

Because I think Ron Givens won after he did.

TG:

Yeah. Ron Givens won and then after that, it's been—what's his name?

DS:

Delwin Jones.

TG:

Delwin Jones, yeah.

DS:

So what do you think how the lawsuit helped Lubbock? What kind of impact did it have overall?

TG:

Oh, it had a lot of impact. Number one, it opened the doors of the city to the minorities. Before, we merely had the door open whenever they felt like opening it and it kind of made it difficult. Even though we had some access, it was all by invitation only. You know, you go in there and you beg for something and you may get it. But once that, the city council opened up, then it caused quite a bit of friction at the very beginning because you got to understand that even in the Hispanic community, we have factions. We have two very big factions in the Hispanic community in Lubbock. One is the conservative faction. And the other is the revolutionary faction, or the very liberal faction. The very liberal faction, of course, has always been the one that was moving everything. And so when the elections came around, they obviously felt that they should get the seat on the board. And actually, they didn't. The conservative faction got the seat on the board. So, you know, there was always a fight between the conservative faction and the liberal faction in the Hispanic community. As you might know, it's still there. The Linda DeLeon versus Maggie Trejo types.

DS:

Yeah, Maggie being a conservative.

TG:
Right.

DS:
Linda being the outspoken individual.

TG:
Right. And in these—in the schoolboard elections, the liberal factions won. In the city council elections, the conservative factions won. So—and it's that tight, you know? Very, very tight race because the liberal faction has a tendency to have less number of votes. Even though they have more people, they don't have the voting capacity. People who are very—loyal about going to the voting booth and—you know, and voting. Not just screaming and yelling about their rights. Whereas, the liberals have a tendency to scream and yell more, but they have a tendency to forget to go to the voting booth, so that's where it all evens out.

DS:
Okay. Yeah. I don't know if you've kept up with Lubbock politics, but this past spring and summer, they had a block ramp issued for this 79415 district [?] [0:59:00], which is Arnett-Benson and north of east Lubbock. Those factions popped up again. They had a meeting at Cavazos junior high and I watched the proceedings on TV on tape delay basis and you could see the faction's still there.

TG:
Oh yeah. And it'll always be there because that's natural. Everybody else has them. The republicans have them. They have their conservative republicans and the liberal and the moderate conserve—republicans. And they have fights all the time. Hell, they're fighting right now. The conservatives are the ones who want, you know, the anti-abortion and everything. All of those on the ballot. The moderates don't. You know, the liberals, why, they're damn near close to democrats. But everybody has them. Hispanic section has it too. The blacks have them. The blacks have their radicals and they have their conservative blacks. So everybody has them. They're always around.

DS:
But were you able to unite all those different factions during the court case? Get them in there?

TG:
Yeah. See, they all wanted the same thing. See? They all wanted a say in government. [phone rings] Mind you, some of them were a little stronger than others, but we all had the same goal, so there was no question that we were all united in getting there. But it's like anything else, we all fought for that pie. But when it came up to dividing up the pie, that's when the fight started. That

was interesting. I mean, at least we had a pie to fight over, you know?

DS:

Yeah. Another comment you made was about the, like, _____ [1:00:50]. Or you have at least the appearance of compromising yourself.

TG:

Yeah.

DS:

You think that goes back to—and I've heard this growing up, whenever someone was just, like, very studious or stuff like that, he'd go like, "You know, he thinks he's white." Stuff like that. Do you think that may have been a portion of it? Or there's a tendency to do that?

TG:

Well, I think there's a tendency to believe that because we all believe, you know, things which are favorable to us. And it's just like anybody who was ever studious, you would always say, "Well, I think he thinks he's too damn good." You know? Or, "He's too good for us." Or, "*se crea mucho*." Or, you know, all this other shit. We always use those things in order to make ourselves feel better. But you got to understand, the only way you could've ever gotten elected to office is to really be very good friends with some very strong political people in the city, which were always the most conservative of the group in the city of Lubbock and that's who—that's where José had a lot of friends, in the very conservative groups. And so, when you are very, very good friends, it goes to say that more than likely, a lot of your thoughts, too, and feelings and ideas have a tendency to be somewhat conservative, okay? Not all of them, mind you, but some of them are, which is what I meant by the compromising portion. Now, Jose had a lot of great qualities and a hell of a lot of great ideas, as far as how to do certain things and how to overcome the racial biases and stuff in school. Yes, he did. He had a lot of good ideas and we probably got a lot of good out of Jose. And at that time, hey, that was the best we could do anyway. We damn sure couldn't afford to elect anybody else, so having Jose there was a hell of a lot better than not having any Hispanic on the schoolboard. But there was no way in hell we were ever going to be able to elect anybody else. You know? Especially, if you started getting a little radical, like, "Hey, we want more." You know? "We don't want just this piece of the pie. We want a bigger piece." [Audio cuts] One of the problems that we had, for example, in the schools were that a lot of the schools in the eastern half of the city, where the Hispanics and blacks lived, the schools had a tendency to be real old. Why? Because all the whites would move into the newer neighborhoods and they'd build brand new schools, so they all had brand new schools. We had the shitty old schools. [Laughs] Okay? But that was because of where you lived. It had nothing to do with the school—putting a dirty old school in your area. That's just where you happened to be. But they could've fixed it up. They could've done—but it cost a hell of a lot of money to fix

old schools. Well, they could've built some new schools, but that's an idea that you have to push across and those are things that minority members can do, which, you know, if you don't push it hard enough, it'll never get done. And those are things that we needed somebody to do. Somebody that was a lot more vocal and a lot more pushy and a lot more demanding. We need more. We need better teachers, for example. All the teachers, the new ones and all the ones that behaved badly, were sent over to the Hispanic schools and the black schools. Why? Because that was punishment for them because those were hard schools. They were hard because the conditions were bad. Some of them didn't have air conditioning. Some of them didn't have—you know, very, very poor facilities for, let's say, gyms. Stuff like that, you know? So the poorest teachers usually wind up going there. The only ones that we had that were good were the ones who were loyal and didn't want to go to the white schools, where they had nicer offices, and they had air conditioning, and they had all this other stuff and the kids, you know, didn't have a tendency to come in maybe unbathed, and smelly, and whatnot, you know? So they'd stay in the Hispanic and black schools because they were loyal. And so, but we didn't have that many of those. We did have quite a few, but not that many. So the rest of the teachers that we got were the first year teachers. The ones that have to put their time in in the salt mines before they could graduate into the better schools, see? So needless to say, we got the low end of the teachers. After they pushed it a while, they started rotating the teachers around and nobody could stay over here. And rotate, they didn't like that one damn bit.

DS:

When did that occur? I've never heard of that rotation.

TG:

Um-hm. They did that about ten years ago. I think they started it—I don't know what they're doing now, okay? I'm sure they've got some formulas for doing whatever the hell they're going to do. Okay? But they started doing a rotation and you might ought to check.

DS:

I think that was around the time of the—what the—their court case with the unitary status and all that.

TG:

Yeah. And see, the problem is that Cavazos got built because they wanted to eliminate a school. No, it wasn't—

DS:

Matthews.

TG:

Matthews. They wanted to eliminate Matthews Elementary because of some problem that we were having. I can't remember what it was. They wanted to eliminate it, but they were going to create a void and so we sued them again. And the last time we beat them, that's where Cavazos Junior High—or elementary—or what is it? A middle school?

DS:

Junior high.

TG:

Junior high? That's where Cavazos Junior High came from. The last time we sued them. Every time we've sued them, we've whooped their butt because they never had a ground to stand on. [Laughs]

DS:

Okay. Would you say that the Lubbock Independent School District, kind of like the city of Lubbock, has never gone willingly. They've had to have been dragged along.

TG:

Oh yeah. We've always had to beat them over the head. And even after they lost, they'd still fight and try to squeeze out of something—tried to weasel out of it, tried to slip out from under it. You know? They have never agreed to anything. They always thought we were wrong.

DS:

Yeah. Because I know, like, one of the things that that Cavazos Junior High is it was supposed to be equivalent to Ed Irons, which is the southwest part of Lubbock and yet, they wanted to—and this, I heard from Linda when I interviewed her. They wanted to—they asked her, “Is it okay to build it on the other side of the tracks? Over in the light commercial area and make it out of not the same grade of material?” And she said, “Well, we'll take you back to court.”

TG:

Yeah. Oh yeah. Not only that, they wanted to do even more things than that. They were going to make it a lot smaller than what it was. We had to fight everything. We had to fight square footage. We had to fight the area around there. They didn't want to buy any more—they didn't want to buy any more land for a yard, you know, for a school ground. They didn't want to do a lot of things. They wanted to put in a half-ass gym. All kinds of crap. I mean, we had to fight them all the way. They didn't give anything. Nothing. And [clears throat] I don't know that—I think the schoolboard was probably the hardest persons to fight. I think the city didn't even fight that much. I think the city probably had a little bit more sense than the schoolboard ever did. I don't know why, but I think the schoolboard was infested with super conservative people and

they were probably controlled by super conservatives. You know, they—they created all the problems.

DS:

Have you heard back from anybody? Because I know when I've talked to people this past two or three months, they've been talking about a lot of the schools in that area. The elementary schools have been targeted for closure because of low attendance figures low enrollment. And, you know, I said, "There they go at it again, trying to deny us the education."

TG:

Yeah. And to tell you the truth, I don't know who's left over there to pick up the ball and run because, hell, it was—Albert Perez and I were probably the only ones who were involved in that lawsuit—in the lawsuits, should I say. And Albert's in Fort Worth and I'm over here. I don't know if they've got anybody else to pick up the ball. Maybe they do. I don't know who it would be though. I don't know who all's left there. But they—there's always something that has to be done because there's—you got to understand the general problem. The general problem is that the haves always want to have more and they can only take it away from the have-nots because where else can you take it away from? And so, they're going to keep taking it away from the have-nots, and they're always trying to take advantage of the have-nots because the have-nots don't have the resources. They don't have the ability to fight and that's the way it's always been and that's the way it'll always be. You know, every once in a while, the have-nots will fight back and they'll win their fair share, but they'll have to do that every five to ten years. Every five to ten years, you'll have to fight again because there'll be something new.

DS:

I'm just going to shift a little bit here.

TG:

Um-hm. Thank you.

Unknown Speaker (US):

I didn't want you to bake.

TG:

¿Como? [What]

US:

I didn't want you to bake.

TG:

Oh.

US:

You want me to go get you a cookie?

TG:

Por favor. [speaks to someone off-recorder]

US:

Thank you.

TG:

Thank you. [speaks to someone off-recorder]

US:

Same place.

TG:

¿Si? Okay. I'm sorry. What was your question?

DS:

It was—okay. I was going to change it over and I was going to ask about the time period after the May 11th tornado in 1970, when Lubbock started to grow and all the movement was towards the south and southwest. Was it a drive, really, for just moving in that direction? Or was it, like you said, almost like an urban flight? It's like the Hispanics had been displaced and they were going into other neighborhoods and those from those neighborhoods left.

TG:

If you want to look at urban flight, there's a perfect example of urban flight. Better yet, white flight. [Phone rings] There's a perfect, perfect showing in Lubbock. The one you're talking about isn't. Any city's going to grow. Any city's going to have its new houses, its new areas. They've all got to go somewhere. In Lubbock, it's the southwest side because that's where the developers are opening up the areas. Okay? If you want a house and you got the money, you go to the southwest side because that's where they're selling them. You know? Had nothing to do with white flight. When you did have a white flight was in the late sixties. No, no. Early seventies. Early seventies, right after the tornado. Right after the tornado, with all the families that were displaced out of the Arnett-Benson area—no, out of the Guadalupe area because the Guadalupe barrio is the one that got hit. Probably displaced two, three hundred families. When those families were being—what do you call it?

DS:

Relocated?

TG:

Relocated. Some of the areas that they found houses in was the—what do they call that area? Redbird? No. Red Oak? White Oak? Something Oak. It's the area of town on the northeast side. The old court avenue, which is now Martin Luther King, and 4th Street, there's an area on the northeast corner right there. Know where that is?

DS:

Over there close to Estacado High School area?

TG:

Estacado is south of there.

DS:

Okay.

TG:

Okay? 4th Street—north of 4th Street, east of Martin Luther King and a little bit of west, but just a couple of streets west. Most of it's east. All the way to almost where the loop is.

DS:

Okay.

TG:

I forget the name of that area. If you'll ask around, they'll tell you the name of that area. That area used to be all white. Used to be all white. I know. I used to work that area as a salesman back when I was in college. I used to have a buddy of mine used to live over there. He was white. It was all white. But when they started displacing people and they started relocating them, they started finding them houses in those areas. And also, south of 4th Street, which is also black and Hispanic. I think Estacado is off of 19th Street, isn't it?

DS:

It's north of Parkway Drive as you come up to the Mackenzie State Park. It's still a little bit further up than 19th and that area.

TG:

Yeah, okay. Right there where Estacado is, directly east of it, Estacado wasn't there then.

DS:

It was built in '67, '68.

TG:

Okay. Maybe it was then there. It was brand new. It was all white. When the people started being relocated there, whoo, that was your white flight. By 1980, there was hardly any white people left there. They abandoned the houses.

DS:

And how about the Overton area?

TG:

The Overton area was taken over slowly.

DS:

Oh, it was more gradual?

TG:

Um-hm. Slowly, slowly. People that are still in Overton are old, old families. People that used to have houses in Overton, they noticed the creeping up and they started selling out. You still have a bunch of old families there, though, that are white. They're not going anywhere. They're going to stay. But like, your younger families, they could see creeping up because they were the older homes. Therefore, they tended to be cheaper homes. Therefore, that's where the Hispanics and blacks would go in.

DS:

Because even, like, the area I live in, the Arnett-Benson—I have an aunt that I spoke with about Lubbock [1:19:21]. She said when they moved to that area, they were, like, the third Hispanic family in that neighborhood.

TG:

Um-hm. That was a long time ago.

DS:

Sixty-two.

TG:

That was all white, prior to '62, sixty, it was all white. When the Hispanics started going in there, they left. But the latest one was that area there. Of course, the Overton is also—but Overton was more gradual because it was so much of a student population group.

DS:

Yeah. There's a lot of—what do you call them? The landlords that live there.

TG:

Um-hm. Absentee landlords.

DS:

Yes. There's so many in that area. Okay. You know, we were talking earlier about how when you had gone to school, people were thinking it's a lower GPA. A lower LSAT score. How do you think things like the Hockwood [?] [1:20:20] case are going to affect the—

TG:

The what?

DS:

The Hockwood [1:20:33] case?

TG:

Um-hm.

DS:

Do you think that's going to affect the opportunities for minorities, whose GPA may not be as high? You know? But also, just minorities in general, even those with high GPAs. Do you think that's going—

TG:

I don't think it's ever affected minorities with high GPAs. We'll always have our very, very super intelligent people, just like everybody else does. The problem becomes when if you have a lot of minorities who are first timers, a lot of minorities who don't have people that are pushing them in their own home to go to college, pushing them to do their work at home, [phone rings] pushing them to make sure and study at home. You know, just like kids. You know, kids that are given homework and they go home. If mother has four or five more kids at home, she's busy trying to wash, trying to clothe, trying to feed and do all that. She doesn't have a whole hell of a lot of time to sit down with Junior and do his homework. And daddy works all damn night, all day, or whatever. Of course, ten to twelve hours. Comes home and all he wants is a six-pack of beer. He ain't going to have a hell of a time to help Junior do his homework. These are the kids that are having problems by the time they get to high school and they're having trouble getting into college, see? It doesn't mean they're any smarter or any dumber. It means that they didn't quite have prepare the way the other kids did. And if you had a father or a mother who always said, "Okay. Where's your homework?", "It's right here." "Okay. Let's sit down and get it

done.”, “All right, fine.” Or if he comes over and he says, “Dad, I need you to—what are these? Let me get these—make sure and check these for me, all these additions and subtractions and whatever.”, “Oh okay.” So he sits down and checks them all. Usually, your Hispanics have the tendency—or the blacks—have a tendency to have the harder jobs, the most exhausting, probably. And they have the ones who come home, they’re dog ass tired. They don’t want to talk to anybody. They don’t want to get bothered by anyone. They just want to eat dinner and go to bed. You know? Because they got to get up early in the morning and hit it all over again. Who gets hurt? The kids get hurt. Why? Because they don’t have anybody to talk to. It was the way I was when I was in grade school and high school. My dad never had time. Hell, he was barely ever at home. He was always working. Mother—mother never went to high school. Mother went to the seventh grade, I think. She couldn’t help me. So, you know, but yet, I still made it, mind you, because there were other factors involved. But you understand why the Hispanics or the blacks may have a problem getting to that stage. That’s why the minority programs were always good because they said, “Okay. We’re going to let you in conditionally. You make sure and do good. If you do good, you stay in there and graduate.” That’s how a lot of us got in who couldn’t get into law school, who couldn’t get into medical school, probably, who couldn’t get into other graduate programs. If we hadn’t, we wouldn’t have them. Half of the lawyers in Lubbock wouldn’t be there. The minorities, anyway. Yet, once you go to school, you do well, then you become a very useful person in society. Not only that, but especially the lawyers. More than likely, you still would’ve had the single member district cases. But you probably wouldn’t have had the assistance from the community, the localization of their needs as they did because they did have a lawyer to come to and talk to, or a black lawyer, which thank God for Gene Gaines, that he was there when the black people wanted their voice. You know, Gene Gaines, whatever the hell you may want to say, he was their voice. He made sure he got the ball rolling and maybe he didn’t do a great job of rolling the damn ball, but at least he started rolling it. If it hadn’t been for Gene Gaines, if it hadn’t been for that black lawyer, this thing would’ve never started. And that’s what you’re going to miss. You’re going to miss the—and the other point is that Hispanic lawyers have a tendency to help the Hispanic clientele a hell of a lot more. Many times, the Hispanic people may not want to call someone for advice because he’s afraid they might charge them too damn much. Or they do get blown off. “Oh, I’m sorry. I ain’t got time to talk to you.” Whereas, we know the problems. We know that people have problems and sometimes, there may be stupid little situations that you can’t do anything about. But they at least have somebody they can call. And if you hang around the Hispanic community or the Hispanic people, church or social organizations or whatever, they’ll always take advantage of you. I never mind it. That was my whole purpose is to help. “I got a problem about this. Can you help?”, “Well no, you can’t. But if you’ll call so-and-so, they’ll take care of your problem.”, “Oh, really?”, “Yeah, just call so-and-so. They’ll help you out.”, “Oh, okay.” That’s all it took. They didn’t know. See? So we perform a very big use in the community in that we have—we provide an ear to the community. Even if we couldn’t help them, we may send them somewhere where they can get help.

DS:

So it's almost akin to what, like, the elected officials to. Because like, Gilbert Flores is a county commissioner. He told me, you know, his duty is county budget, basically. But yet, when people call him up on matters on, you know, "Johnny's having this problem," or whatever, he knows who to refer them to and he can help them in that way.

TG:

That's right. That's the whole point. You're there. You gain knowledge about what to do, where to go, who to talk to. A lot of these people don't know so they look to you. If you don't have the minority recruitment program, you have less and less. And you know, they can say whatever they want to say as far as I know some of the white lawyers in Lubbock say, "Well, we always took care of the Hispanic people." No, you took their money and you solved some of their problems. You never helped the people. There's a hell of a lot of difference. If they did help, why in the hell didn't they file these goddamn civil rights suits a long time ago? Because they weren't interested. Nothing in it for them.

DS:

In fact, I think here, during the court case, somebody was talking. May have been—[phone rings]—I interviewed somebody and they talked about how when they went before their state representative with something or legislator, he just kind of laughed in their faces, like, Yeah right I want to help y'all.

TG:

Um-hm. Sure.

DS:

There's a difference between, "Well, we'll listen to you, but we'll be inactive," and "We'll listen and do something about it."

TG:

Um-hm. A hell of a lot of difference.

DS:

So what do you think of—now, that we've got at least some political stake, you think Hispanics should take even a more active role socially, economically? And you know, of course, educationally and politically?

TG:

Well, I think Lubbock is unique in the way it's built and its people there. Austin is completely different. Completely different. But if you're talking about Lubbock and what they should do, I

think the biggest problem you have in Lubbock is that you don't have a unifying force in the Hispanic community. There's too much disunity. Too many factions. Not enough people who are willing to bring the groups together to try and unite them, to try and get everybody to understand each other's point of view and see if there's any way that you can come to a common goal. I think when we first got started in all this, everybody had the common goal and we were all united. And then after we made the goal, everybody spread out and everybody had their own little thing that they were fighting for. And now, I see them bickering at each other more than anything and it's sad because the people that should be leading the way to unity are not doing it. I don't know how, but I guess if I was still there, maybe I'd be helping out.

DS:

That kind of brings me to my next point. You now live in Austin. What brought you here? What circumstances made you come to Austin?

TG:

I moved here because I got a divorce in 1988. I think it was '88, yeah. And my ex-wife moved to San Antonio. Well, I had been very active in the community since '75, and I had neglected my family, which was my own fault. You know, you can do a lot of things [phone rings] and not neglect your family. But when you work eight to twelve hours a day and you need to spend two to three hours a day more trying to keep up with the community because there were very few leaders and so you felt almost an obligation. After a while, you ran out of time. And the ones who wound up losing were the family. So after I got my second divorce, I said, "That's it. I'm going dedicating myself to my family from now on." I had two little ones and I didn't want to lose them. So what I did was I had to come to San Antonio quite often to visit them, and I did. I used to come at least once a month, sometimes twice a month, to San Antonio to spend a whole weekend down here so I could see my kids. Well, after a while, I realized that I was tearing up my car, spending a lot of time. And after she'd been here for two years, or two and a half years—maybe almost three years—I finally said, "Well, you know, it ain't ever going to get any better. I need to figure out what I'm going to do. Should I move?" [Audio cuts] I moved in October of '93 to Austin because my kids were in San Antonio. I didn't want to go to San Antonio. It was too big of a city, so I decided to come here. That's why I'm here. Of course, a year later, my kids moved to Indiana and so I got stuck here without the kids or anything else, so I wound up losing all the way. I gave up my good practice in Lubbock. I didn't have to work hard anymore. I had my clientele and I gave it all up so I could come over here. Start all over from scratch. I damn near starved. But I'm doing all right now. It's only a matter of time if you're patient and I'm here, but I don't have the same feeling yet for Austin that I had for Lubbock. Lubbock, to me, was my hometown, even though it wasn't, but I'd lived there long enough that I felt that it was my hometown, and so I wanted to make sure that I helped do what was right for Lubbock and the people in Lubbock, especially the Hispanic people, and so I always felt an obligation. As a matter of fact, when I was in law school at George Washington University, and I remember I

talked to Lanine [?] [1:36:52]. Lanine was working at housing authority, I think, with the housing something. Vilsen was working for the—some government agency regarding discrimination. Some agency. Anyway, both had government jobs. Both making pretty good money, you know, in those days. Abe had just graduated, or was going to graduate. I think so. I was in my first year, I think, of law school. They had both graduated. Abe was, like, in his second or third year, because he was a year ahead of me or two years ahead of me. They said, “What are you going to do when you get out?” I said, “Well, I’m going back to Lubbock.” They all asked me, “Why?” I said, “Well, what’s the whole purpose of minority recruitment if it isn’t to recruit people to go back to their community to help them out? Isn’t that the purpose?” Said, “Well yeah, but the money’s here.” I said, “Well I don’t give a shit about the money.” I said, “We’re supposed to go help our community.” I said, “And my community, I’ve always felt, was Lubbock.” I said, “I’m going back to Lubbock.” Hmm, well, they beat me back. [Laughs] The little bastards. They beat me back because they both said, “Bullshit. We’ve got a good fat government job here. You know I ain’t going.” I said, “Well, nobody told you to go.” I said, “I just thought that was the purpose of this whole program was for us to go back to our community so we would have some help for our community, provide the help to our community.” I said, “And besides, I think I can make a living. They need help too. They need help criminally. They have auto accidents. They have problems and I think I can make money at it.” Sure enough, by the time I got back, they’d been here a year and a half already, and I went to work for them. But I only worked for them for about a year and a half.

DS:

Okay. You know, that—well, you said, “What’s the purpose of it?” There’s a lot of people, the older generation, in fact, that feel that. Yeah, there’s been a few that have gone through, received all their education, but as soon as they do, they go to, you know, a lot of them, say, Dallas, or somewhere else in search of that fat job.

TG:

Um-hm.

DS:

There’s nothing wrong with that. It’s just—

TG:

No. Nothing wrong with it. System’s not perfect, but there are a lot who did come back to their community and who are serving their community and I think that’s all the system could possibly ask for is that some of those people that were given a second chance did come back to the community. I think it was one hell of a big benefit, you know? We took a lot of the burden from people who didn’t want to help them to begin with. Because I know that, for example, I used to get people that would call me and say, “I need your help.” I’d say, “Okay.” “You know, we need

to file a civil rights suit to get this and that done.” I said, “Okay.” Said, “Aren’t you the one that had a big auto accident last year and made a hundred and fifty thousand dollars off of it?” Said, “Yeah.”, “And who’d you use?”, “I used Johnny Spawn.” I said, “Well go ask Johnny Spawn and see if he’ll file this goddamn lawsuit for you.” He said, “Well no, he doesn’t do that.” I said, “I wouldn’t do it either. The problem is that I need to do it to help, but I also need to eat. I need all your business, not your half-ass business.” And so, I used to get pissed. They understood, so I had to get a little tough sometimes in order to get all the business. But you do. We got plenty of business. I got plenty of business. We made good money in Lubbock.

DS:

So is—that’s a similar situation to Paula Montoya was telling me about her business. It’s like, you know, a lot of the minority community wouldn’t really patronize her until it came time when they needed her support in something.

TG:

Um-hm. Same way everywhere, you know? I guess it’s that way everywhere and you got to understand it. You don’t have to like it, but you’re going to have to understand it.

DS:

You have to understand it. And roll with it, huh?

TG:

[Laughs] Yep.

DS:

Well, I hate to truncate this short, but I parked over there at two hour parking, it’s probably about an hour ago.

TG:

I understand.

DS:

I thank you Tomas.

TG:

You’re welcome.

DS:

You’ve been great and—

End of Recording

