

Val Vargas
Narrator

Lorena Duarte
Interviewer

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Val Vargas - **VV**
Lorena Duarte - **LD**

LD: Today is Monday, February 14, 2011. My name is Lorena Duarte. I'm here conducting an interview for the Minnesota Historical Society's Latino Oral History Project. I'm here with Val Vargas in her office in downtown Saint Paul.

First of all, I just want to say thank you, Val. I know you're very busy so thank you for taking the time.

If you could, please, tell us your name and how to spell it.

VV: My name is Val Vargas. I was born on May 7, 1955, in General Hospital in downtown Minneapolis.

LD: What is your occupation?

VV: I am an accountant by trade and by education, and I morphed into founder and president of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota. We are currently in our eleventh year.

LD: Excellent.

If we could go ahead and start with a little bit about your background. You already gave me your date of birth. Tell me a little bit about your parents and siblings, etcetera.

VV: I am the oldest of six. My father is the baby of a family from [sounds like Tare-tay-hon-os]. Many of those were born as they migrated. My grandparents were migrant workers. My father was born in Dallas, Texas, as they were making the trip up here to southern Minnesota to work in the sugar beet fields. Then, on my mother's side, she is the oldest of nine in an area in New Mexico where they have lived for 500 years. It used to be Mexico and, then, during the war [Mexican-American War, 1846-1848], the border shifted and it became U.S. territory. The people who were there had always lived there, so they just stayed. They speak Spanish today. I remember being in my early young adulthood before they got plumbing. My grandma really never spoke English. She just passed away last fall. She was ninety-seven years old.

My mother met my father in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He was stationed there with the U.S. Air Force. After he was discharged, they came up here. They checked out Michigan. My father's brothers were all war heroes. They received purple hearts during World War II. Two of them were in Michigan and his oldest brother, Cruz, was here in Minnesota. That is Sandy's father [Sandra Vargas, president and chief executive officer, Minneapolis Foundation]. They went to Michigan, but they didn't like it there. They came to Minnesota, and they liked it here, and they stayed. They came up north economic opportunity. They wanted a better life for us and it worked out.

My siblings all have either master's degrees or some post secondary education. They're all gainfully employed. Some are professionals. Some are in more of a managerial role. They're all doing very well.

My parents died very young. We kind of attribute that to the stress. They worked so hard. They sacrificed everything for us, helping us with school, and helping us even after we were married to buy our first homes. There were six of us. They were very devoted to us. My dad passed away at fifty-eight from coronary disease. My mother passed away at sixty-seven from pancreatic cancer.

LD: So you grew up in Minneapolis?

VV: We grew up in Brooklyn Center, and then later in New Brighton.

LD: Tell me a little bit about growing up. What kind of a kid were you? Did you like sports, school? What were the neighborhoods like?

VV: When I was really young in Brooklyn Center, we were the only Hispanic family in the neighborhood. I don't even remember seeing any other Latinos, even at church. We were at Saint Alphonsus [Catholic Church] and this was in the early 1960s. When my mom would make tortillas and frijoles, the neighborhood kids would stand and kind of have their noses pressed to the back door so they could see what it was. I think it smelled good to them.

[Laughter]

VV: We knew we were different. We tended to have a stronger family bond because of that. I remember my brothers getting racial slurs. They called them, "Nigger." and they would get beat up, but I never did. I was a little fairer complexioned and I was a girl. So I never really experienced that until maybe junior high.

It was in junior high when we moved to New Brighton. Again, there was not a Latino family around at my age level, although I went to Mounds View High School and there was one other Hispanic family. I didn't know them. I didn't know that person. I know that today, because of our social networking. The other Hispanic families that I became aware of later were there in the late 1980s, and I was already married and gone. They

were also second, third cousins. Growing up during the 1960s and 1970s on the north suburban side of the Twin Cities, pretty much all of us were related. Our parents were cousins or *comadres* or something.

LD: So all the Latinos were somehow related?

VV: Yes.

LD: You said you went to Mounds View.

VV: Yes.

LD: When did you graduate?

VV: I was really motivated. My father - not just to me but to all of us - always gave the message that you need to go to school. You can be anything that you set your mind to. You just need to do the work. You need to work hard. So I was in a hurry to get to that place, and I took extra classes. Actually, I graduated as a junior, so I never was a senior in high school. Then I started at the University of Minnesota, and I also worked.

I also had a baby when I was nineteen. I had gotten married and had a baby. During that time, I ended up taking a full time job in Oklahoma, and they paid my tuition. It was with the Kentucky Fried Chicken Distribution Services. So I was twenty-one, and my baby was eighteen months old, and he and I went to Oklahoma. My marriage didn't work out. It was just one of those things. We were both really young.

So I graduated from college.

LD: In Oklahoma - or you were here?

VV: I was in Oklahoma.

LD: So where did you graduate from?

VV: Oklahoma City University. I found that experience really different after being Latino in Minnesota where the population was so low. Down in *that* area, everybody knew I was a Latina; whereas, I remember in high school, people saying, "What nationality are you?" I could say, "Egyptian." I could say anything and they would believe me because they didn't know.

LD: Sure.

VV: But down in Oklahoma, right off the bat, they knew what my heritage was. So that was different for me. It was also an eye opener. I started meeting other Latino families and it was just an eye opener, because I had never been in an environment where there was a lot of other Hispanics around.

LD: How long did you stay in Oklahoma?

VV: I was there for two years. When I graduated, I got a job with Sears and I moved to Dallas. I was in Dallas for three years, and then I ended up moving back to Minnesota.

LD: When was that?

VV: That was in 1981.

LD: What made you move back?

VV: My father was having health problems. I was homesick. I was still pretty young, twenty-seven, twenty-six, in that range. I was homesick, and I just wanted to be back here.

LD: So you came back in 1981. What did you do when you came back?

VV: I looked for a job, and I got one right away. I was manager of data entry for National Car Rental in Edina.

I just went about life at that time. There still were not a lot of Latinos around here. Things were pretty much the same. I think there was a growing number, and I believe that there were a couple of businesses on Lake Street in Minneapolis, even back then. It was just starting. Things were still different.

LD: Still pretty small.

VV: Yes.

LD: From there, how long were you in that position?

VV: I was in that position for three years. I remarried and started to raise a family.

LD: So you had more children?

VV: I had more children. I have four children now. They're all grown, except for my baby. She had a *quinceañera* last summer, and she's in driver's education.

LD: [chuckles]

VV: When I grew up here in Minnesota, they didn't allow us to speak Spanish in school. I'm sure you've probably heard that from people fifty-five and over, which I am. We would get sent to the principal's office or put in the corner. If Spanish slipped out, it was bad. My daughter, on the other hand, was born in an era where they embraced cultural differences. She speaks fluent Spanish. She's always correcting me.

It's really a joy. I wish my parents were here to see that, because they would just be so moved.

LD: What are your kids' names?

VV: Matthew—in Spanish, it's Mateo—Gabriele, Lucas Hosea, and Seana[?].

LD: When did you found the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce?

VV: We started working on that in 1998.

LD: Take me through some of those years, a little bit about your career, home life, and, then maybe, any thoughts about the Latino community. Did you start to see changes?

VV: I started my own company in the middle 1980s, and I worked with my dad. He was a retired accountant and my degree is in accounting. I loved my father dearly and I just always wanted to be with him. He was my best friend, and his death really devastated me. He did leave me the legacy of Vargas Company. We did all kinds of tax and accounting services, some real estate, dabbled in a lot of compliance, filling out forms for people, things like that. My kids were babies...my middle kids, so that allowed me to raise my family and keep connected to my professional life.

Fast forward to the early 1990s. I was ready to go back to work. I got a job at MEDA as a business consultant.

LD: MEDA stands for?

VV: Metropolitan Economic Development Association.

I had never heard of MEDA. I thought that was odd, because they had been around since around 1990. I started working there in 1993 as a business consultant. I saw that there were not a lot of Latinos coming in for services. There were a lot of African Americans, Indians from India, and Vietnamese, not Hmong yet, but some Native Americans. But you could count the Hispanics on one hand and that bothered me. I would talk to other people at MEDA about that, and we would try to find ways to get them in, but at that point in time, it was really the language issue. MEDA didn't offer services in any native languages other than English. By the time I left MEDA in 1996, I was determined to find a way to provide access to business services for our community. I wasn't really sure how to do that.

I continued to work Vargas Company, and to do more consulting jobs, but I also started to build a network of individual professionals who felt the same way that I did. So in 1998, there were nineteen Latinos that started getting together with our friend, [sounds like Fed-meen Eh-tah-gohn], in South Minneapolis. We would meet monthly and just kind of slowly tick away at what the name should be, what the mission should be, what

kind of entity we should form, how we were going to fund things. People came and went. There was a core group of individuals that stayed connected through the whole process. I was the lead instigator. Some people I never left alone. I was always bothering them.

LD: [chuckles]

VV: It was a good thing, and in September of 2000, we opened our doors.

LD: As the Minnesota Hispanic Chamber of Commerce?

VV: Yes, as the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota.

We were formed as a 501-c3 for a number of reasons, especially so that we would be viewed as a public charity. There was a chamber in the early 1980s that was focused around procurement. They never really were able to grow. There was not the population to support them like there is today. There are some leaders that are still here today who were involved in that. [sounds like Fed-meen] was one, along with Sandy Vargas and Rick Aguilar.

LD: That's the Sandy you referred to before.

VV: Yes. That was the chamber of the 1980s, and that was different from this Chamber. Yet people remember that, and I don't want to minimize it because, for the time that they were doing that work, it was really opening doors.

Do you know who's behind us? Rick Aguilar.

LD: Oh, my gosh.

[Laughter]

LD: That's too funny.

VV: I can't hide from him. He must have heard me.

LD: [Laughter] That's funny.

VV: Yes, that's the beauty of being downtown Saint Paul here. We have a lot more ability for people to stop in. We have almost a store front.

LD: Yes.

VV: Anyway, it's been a journey observing. When we started, the census had just been released, and there was a lot of media coverage about our community, good and bad. Our goal at that time was to elevate our image in the community. We had a golf tournament. I remember the *Star Tribune* had a headline the next day that said, "Half Empty or Half

Full: Hispanic Professionals in Business.” I’m really pleased the way we were received by the corporate community here, which was very warm, very generous with us in supporting our programs and our events. I *know* we would not be here today without that support.

Then, maybe three or four years later, there were other service groups; CLUES [Chicanos Latinos Unidos En Servicio] had always been here. CLUES was here, but they provided social services and we provided business services. LEDC [Latino Economic Development Center] formed in 1993 or thereabouts. They dealt a lot with native Spanish speakers. They had that expertise that we didn’t have, so they did a lot. There was so much going on in the community in the mid 1990s that benefitted all of us. Look at what happened on Lake Street and on Payne Avenue [in Saint Paul], and then look out farther into the suburbs. If you go to downtown Anoka, there are three Hispanic businesses down there. Check out Chaska and Shakopee, everywhere Latinos call home around the metro area. It would really make our family, my *tios* and people that have passed, like my parents, so proud. They would just be in awe of what’s happened in the community, and even more importantly, there are our leaders in public service, like Carlos Mariani and Alberto Monserrate, who was just elected to the Minneapolis School Board. There is also Senator Patricia Torres Rey, and corporate examples. We have a “25 on the Rise” program. You were one of our first recipients of that award.

LD: Yes.

VV: We’ve had about 150 individuals receive that recognition. There are others on your list, like Frank Fernandez and many, many others, who have received that recognition. The top IT [information technology] person in the state or Minnesota was a Riser. It’s been kind of a way for Latinos to network with other people who are role models.

We have a Latina project right now where we bring about 300 young girls from around twenty area high schools in to a conference for a day. The curriculum is called Choices this year. The value is that it lets them know how every choice they make impacts them later in life. We show them a variety of scenarios – like what jobs and careers would be available to them if they have no school diploma, and what jobs and careers could be available to them if they graduate. It shows them the financial impacts of those choices like having a baby, of having a two-year degree, a four-year degree, and all kinds of things. We actually have Latina women who deliver all the workshops and are on the panel. They get a little fashion show to keep things fun, because they are girls.

They are shown how to dress if they’re going to be looking for jobs. They get a goodie bag with some perfume and nail polish and coupons, things like that. So it’s really just a girls’ day. They’re fourteen to nineteen years old. It’s co-moderated this year by a couple of girls who started with us the very first year. This is our fourth year, and those girls are now in college, so they’ll be helping out on that day, leading the groups. They’ll be co-moderating the panel discussion. They’ll be co-moderating the introductions. So we’re really excited. That’s a phenomenal program that has engaged a lot of the Risers.

LD: Let me just kind of go back real quick. You left MEDA in 1986. The Chamber opened its doors in 2000. You called yourself the lead instigator. What was it that really pushed you to open the Chamber? What was it that was driving you?

VV: The lack of services for our community was really driving me. You hate to admit it as a professional, but I was really upset about that. It really bothered me that there were services for other under-served communities that were here because they were refugees, for instance. They were welcomed with open arms. I don't want to diminish their journey—it was very difficult for them—but they were welcomed, whereas our community many times was not welcomed and not engaged and was belittled for culture and mixed statuses and families with immigration issues and all that kind of thing. I was angry.

LD: Sure.

VV: It was quiet anger that really motivated me. I don't even know if I should say that.

LD: [chuckles] Well, it fueled you.

VV: It did.

LD: Tell me about those early years. That was a huge spike in the Latino population. You talked about the census. Do you remember, roughly, what some of those numbers were?

VV: At that time, they said there were 143,000.

LD: This was in 2000?

VV: Yes, 143,000. All of us in the community knew that census was wrong.

LD: Right.

VV: I knew because while I was meeting to start the Chamber, I started noticing that in 1997 and 1998, when I went to Cub Foods, I heard Spanish.

LD: Yes.

VV: When I went to Target, I heard Spanish. When I went to the movies, I heard Spanish. That was not how things were here. I knew, and we all knew, that the census was wrong.

LD: I guess it was under counted.

VV: It was under counted. But, at that time, in the defense of those census takers, they really weren't tuned in to that like they were this last time.

LD: Sure. If I'm remembering correctly, even with the fact that the Latino community was under counted, the census did show a huge rise in the numbers. Even if the numbers were so low, I remember that the percentage jumped by an incredible amount.

VV: Right. I don't remember the exact percentage right now.

LD: But it was pretty big, I remember.

VV: Yes.

LD: As you're seeing the Latino community grow and you're planning this Chamber, what was the mission statement, shall we say, or the initial founding ideas?

VV: We wanted to facilitate economic development and we wanted prosperity for Latinos. The intent was to help them not just open their business, but to stay in business. We knew in our community that they were vulnerable to any kind of HR [human resource] audit or IRS [Internal Revenue Service] audit. They weren't familiar with what the laws were. One of our goals was to make sure that information like that was made available for our Latino business owners. It wasn't the college people or the people that were born and raised here who needed this information - those individuals were aware. It was the others, and that's where the growth was, with the new arrivals. Even now, the need for that has multiplied. It hasn't reduced. You would think that by now everybody knows, because we've been working on this for eleven years and other agencies have also worked on it. Well, the real bulk of services are just starting to peak. The majority of those kids are just graduating from high school, and they aren't made aware of those things in high school. It's unfortunate, because even though we think that our kids are getting all the information and are treated equally and fairly, I don't believe that they are. I believe that they get information incidentally - not intentionally.

LD: I want to touch a little more on that.

But, first, I just want to finish a little bit of the journey of the Chamber itself. When you started back in 2000, how many businesses were members?

VV: Well, we started with zero money, and zero members. I think in our first year, we ended up with about eighty-seven members. We grew. We grew up to 332 members in 2008. It was a steady kind of a climb, and then the economy tanked and our membership now is down to about 180.

LD: Wow.

VV: Yes. However, I have to say that all chambers have had at least a third reduction. You can ask the Saint Paul Chamber, the Minneapolis Chamber, they've all lost about a third of their members, or more, due to this economy.

LD: Wow. That's terrible. But that's still an incredible amount of growth and change.

In that time, what have you seen as the greatest challenges to Latino business owners in Minnesota?

VV: Everybody will say access to funding. That's true, because right now Americans can't get loans.

LD: Right.

VV: It's really difficult for all of us, at this point. Going forward with some of the new legislation and the documentation that they're requiring, it's going to continue to be an issue. I really don't know what the answers are other than immigration reform of some type. Everybody knows what the rules are right now. Things are just in flux and very confusing and intimidating.

LD: Yes.

VV: Money, operating capital, is a problem. It's still a problem with determining who can be employees, who needs to be employees, who is my family, and worker's comp [compensation]. All of those compliance issues continue to plague our business owners. Then there are all of the other tools that people kind of take for granted, like help with marketing, and help with professional services in this area. It's changed dramatically. We now have professionals in every area of business. We just need to be able to get the information out, and that can continue to be everybody's challenge. It's a vicious circle. If they don't do something about legal status, it's going to continue to be a vicious circle because people are afraid. If I'm legal, everybody in my family might not be. I don't want to bring attention to those people that are not.

LD: Right, right.

VV: That's the vicious circle.

LD: Those are some of the challenges.

What are some of the contributions that you've seen in the last eleven years working for the Chamber? What has the Latino community brought to Minnesota?

VV: Flavor.

[Laughter]

VV: Lots of flavor. We have tamales and tortillas and all of that in the grocery stores. We have more fast food, not the icky kind, but something elevated a little higher in Chipotle. There is clothing, and everything. I think Latinos have touched everything. There is the music, big time music with the kids. My high school daughter had her

quinceañera, and there were not just Latina kids, but a lot of the kids she goes to school with - American, German, Polish, whatever they are, and they're dancing. The kids love that influence in the music. And all that just brought awareness about Hispanic culture into the schools. The teachers are familiar with it. I think it's just been a warmth - our flavor of things.

LD: In terms of the businesses that you've worked with, what have they contributed?

VV: The Hispanic businesses?

LD: Yes.

VV: On the retail side, I think they've brought an awareness of other products that have broadened the scope in Minnesota scope for what's out there. Before, we used to just shop for things that were from the mall. Now, I think more Minnesotans look around and they like some of the things that are imported from Mexico and all the other Hispanic countries.

LD: You mentioned Lake Street and said that your *tios*, that generation, would be amazed to go to downtown Anoka. Talk to me a little bit about those corridors and other kinds of development.

VV: Well, they're predominantly retail.

But I know that there are many areas that we've impacted significantly so that everybody thinks of Hispanics when they think of roofers, when they think of landscapers, when they think of janitorial services, temp [temporary] services, the cooks, the chefs, the restaurant workers, and all of the staff in hospitality. Those are jobs that are not fancy or high level, but they're necessary functions to keep our economy working. They're filled by people from our community. I think a lot of Americans have gotten to the cushy point and don't know that that's in their best interest. A couple of my boys I can include with that, because when you get a college education you're not going to do dishes anymore.

LD: Sure.

VV: All of those industries are hugely impacted by our community. I know people laugh about that movie...

LD: *A Day without a Mexican?*

VV: Yes. If it were true, if they just stayed home, everybody would feel it. There would be nobody that would be untouched.

LD: Yes, absolutely.

You mentioned a little bit about kids and some of the challenges they face, the information they're not getting. I go to education because, obviously, without an education, you can't get a job and it impacts economics and prosperity hugely. Talk to me a little bit about, for example, the girls that you're working with, that the Hispanic Chamber is working with. What are some of the challenges that you see they face?

VV: Many of them are shy or introverted. They may not be at home, but in school they're quieter. They stay within their own group of friends. They don't branch out as much. That is, again, often because they're afraid. They are not Americanized. They're very polite and they don't ask questions. They need to ask questions. To be successful in your education, you need to be encouraged to ask questions. They're very reserved. They will hope somebody else will ask their question. They don't want to bring attention to themselves.

There are some that don't fit that model, but I would say that the bulk of the young girls that attend our conference are quieter than their American counterparts. If you're not asking questions about how did you get in your career, how am I going to get the money to pay for college, how does that daycare thing work, even to getting married and having babies, all those are topics that they need to be asking questions about. They need to be handed that information until the class behind them gets the message that it's okay to ask. It will happen, eventually. I don't know how long that will take. I can already see a little bit of difference in four years. I think a lot depends on where they are in that whole process, if they were born here, if they just got here, and how their parents fit in that cycle.

LD: As you move forward, talk to me a little bit about the Chamber. Where do you hope the Chamber is in a few years, five years, or ten years?

VV: I hope the Chamber can do more work with public policy. That's an area that we are not really skilled at right now. That's part of the reason we're here at the Saint Paul Chamber, but we're here as the Minnesota Joint Council of Ethnic Chambers. The Black Chamber is going to move here. The Vietnamese Chamber is back there with my staff and the Hmong Chamber is moving here. Our hope is—our Chamber will be first—to learn how to do that work so that we can be impactful when legislation is coming up that would be harmful to our business owners on Payne Avenue or Lake Street, and so that we can do more to help some of the rural businesses. Right now, that's work that we don't currently do. We don't have that skill set, but that's something that we hope to acquire. That's the number one goal for the next ten years.

We want to continue doing what we're doing. We want to continue to serve young girls. We hope to expand that to young males. Right now, program growth is not in the budget. However, two years from now when things are likely to be a little more stable for all of us, and we envision that we will be working with both genders of kids. We envision that we will be doing more with the Risers, the group of Risers in the corporate setting. All of the corporations have asked us, "Do you have any career development initiatives for our executives that have moved here from Argentina or other countries?" They come here to

Minnesota and they're hungry for a taste of their own culture. There are many of them within these major corporations. They have their employee club network, but that's fifteen people that you work with at the same company. It's different from 200 or 500 people that you can network with. So we hope to be able to do more and to help them to have more of an influence on our kids in college and on our kids in high school. We do work with some eighth graders, but that's as young as we can endeavor to work with.

LD: Do you think that—this is a conversation that some friends of mine had—Minnesota's Latino corporate executives are tapped into kind of a culture of philanthropy? For example, I'm an artist. So how do we fund the arts? One of the things we talk about is philanthropy and that coming not just from the McKnight and the Jerome Foundations, but actually developing our own sources of philanthropy/

VV: No, they're not. That's a conversation that a couple of us have had as well. In fact, through the Riser network, we talked about including that as a component of development. We're not really sure how that would be received from their employers. They're not as involved on the whole just yet. But many of them are comfortable in that area and are moving forward. I'll use Frank Fernandez as an example. He is involved. He gets it.

LD: Yes.

VV: But there are others who are working that are newer here than Frank is. They've been here three years and they're very corporate, loyal to their employer, and they don't venture too far out. I guess you can't fault them for that, because they've got their families here. But I don't know that they're being made aware of those opportunities that could enrich their lives. They certainly have or will have the resources to do some of that work.

LD: Yes. Maybe that's something to work towards.

VV: That would be great.

LD: Yes, it would.

Stepping away from strictly talking about the Chamber, what do you hope Minnesota's Latino community looks like in a few years, five years, ten years, twenty years, and fifty years?

VV: I won't be here in fifty years.

LD: [chuckles]

VV: But, I already see so much blending, much more so than other states, because Minnesota has been so liberal in the way people have been raised here. If you're a native,

you're a little more receptive to differences. I think that that really is spoken quite loudly by the presence of some of the foundation work that's done here in our state.

I would like to see the Latino community recognized for its potential, and I think that Minnesota really needs to embrace that potential. There's a lot of talk, but I think we have to get action in place, not just lip service. Latinos are the future for Minnesota's workforce. Latinos are the economic engine. They're the tax base of tomorrow. All of those things, they fall off the tongue. They sound good, but if the initiatives aren't taken with the grade school kids, it isn't going to happen.

LD: Right.

VV: Latinos are going to be over represented in the sector of public services. That's a whole other conversation that I hope somebody gets fueled up about, because if you look at the criminal justice system and the jails and the prisons, it's sad. It's just sad what's going on with our community. I think it's a big injustice. I hope that work is being done there. That's not my field. I just know that it really is not right.

LD: Is there anything else that you'd like to share, talk about, and discuss?

VV: It's just so heartwarming. You're smiling right now.

LD: [chuckles]

VV: You've seen a lot of change and so have I. I think it's all headed in a very positive direction. As long as people stay committed and the people that are doing all the good work stay at what they're doing and they mentor others... I know my cousin, Sandy; will have a lot to say on the topic.

[Laughter]

VV: And rightfully so. She's done so much and others, as well. There's a new day coming. I think it will be positive. I look at my daughter now and she speaks Spanish fluently and she loves our culture. She talks about it to her friends and they love our culture. I think Minnesota can be a very bright North Star example of how Latinos have flourished here and grown to be part of the majority. I'm not talking about numbers; I'm talking about living side by side and making this all our home.

LD: That's wonderful. I think that's a very beautiful and hopeful vision to work towards.

VV: Yes, it is.

I have a little tax business and I do a lot of taxes for Hispanics. My Spanish isn't the greatest, but they put up with me. I ask all of them about the snow and the cold, because they've often only been here less than ten years, many for just a few years. It doesn't bother them. We don't think about it. I guess you can put Latinos anywhere and they're

going to thrive.

[Laughter]

LD: That's right. That's right.

I just want to thank you.

VV: Thank you.

LD: I know you're very, very busy, so on behalf of the Historical Society and myself, thank you for taking the time and sharing your story with us.

VV: Great.

LD: Thank you.