

Washington County Museum  
Oral History Interview with Arturo Villaseñor  
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AV: Arturo Villaseñor

LS: It is November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013. I am Luke Sprunger for the Washington County Museum. I'm also a graduate student at Portland State University. Today I'm in Hillsboro, Oregon interviewing Arturo Villaseñor. Arturo is from Mexico and now lives in Forest Grove and works for Adelante Mujeres.

So to begin with the questions—what year were you born in?

AV: I was born in Mexico City on 1965.

LS: Nineteen-sixty-five. And what sort of education did your parents have and what jobs did they do?

AV: My mom just had until primary, or elementary school, as you call that education level here in the States—elementary school's from one to six. And my father also was from one to six back there in Mexico, elementary school both of them.

LS: And what did they do for work?

AV: He (my father) was having a lot of practice on topography and the civil engineering field and the construction industry, and so far he gained himself the title of "engineer" because his practical knowledge on the field.

LS: And I think you said before that you also ended up working as an engineer in Mexico?

AV: Yeah, actually I'm a civil engineer; I graduated from the National Polytechnic Institute in Mexico.

LS: So what sort of education did you receive?

AV: A Bachelor degree, Bachelor degree in Physics and Mathematics and my Civil Engineer title.

LS: How long did you work as an engineer in Mexico?

AV: After I did complete my studios I worked on my profession almost 12 years; then we moved to the states.

LS: So my next question is pretty broad, and that's how was life in Mexico? And maybe you could describe specifically ways that it might be different than life in Oregon?

AV: Well, I didn't know (let my try). Today I can make a comparison. One thing that took me by surprise was the schools (here in the States). In Mexico if you go to the elementary school (at least in Mexico City), everything has walls surrounding the schools. Elementary, middle, you name it. But here in the states you can go to any elementary and you can see everything, sometimes you don't even have even a fence surrounding homes. The homes are quite open here in the states. You don't have a fence covering all the property, but back there, at Mexico City, most of the human space, most of the homes have a wall to enclose everything. All you can see are facades, and we live our private lives behind those walls.

So I used to live at the north of Mexico City. It is a quite populated place. Maybe you know. Right now we have more than 20 million inhabitants, it is one of the biggest cities in the world. And I used to live there with many friends. My family used to have an apartment in a place called "vecindad". It's something like an apartment block with individual homes within, and with a different families living in a small part of the property, with a lot of children and close friends—I used to have my family living nearby.

LS: So you said that was the north side of Mexico City but still inside the city?

AV: Yes.

LS: Okay. So, what motivated you to move to the United States?

AV: Well, It starts with a change before the Fox presidency. We used to have a party called PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) on the power; it was the party that governed Mexico for more than 70 years. I was finishing one work in Mexico City too and then I saw this approaching change, with a new presidency, another political party, the PAN (a right-wing party.) So, I thought "maybe this is the time to move to another place." I was always curious to live in another country—maybe Europe, maybe Canada, maybe the US. And, on that particular time I say to myself: "This is a breaking point, the time to decide to see another culture, to live something different."

LS: And then what was it specifically that brought you to Oregon? Because I know you mentioned thinking about a few different places to live.

AV: Well, in the very beginning we were planning to go to Canada, to Toronto. I love that city. From the beginning I just loved it. I was attracted by some things that I saw there, and that city that was our main target—or our Plan A. And also we have some family here in the states. My wife has family here in the U.S., in California. She later discovered that she had a cousin here, in Hillsboro. So, before we move to Canada, we decided to pass to the US, to see this part of my wife's family and also to see exactly what could be here, to live here on the US.

So, we started visiting Disneyland. We have some family in Santa Ana, then San José. Some tell us all the time, "Well why don't you stay here in the states? Why do you want to go to Canada? We can find a job for you, etc." They were trying to convince us to stay here in the states. We decided to move to Oregon and then she learned about her cousin, a not that far relative. She didn't know anything about her for about 20 years. She was really close to this place. And then we decided, *well, maybe not Canada as our first step. Let's see how is life here in the states before we move to Canada.*

LS: Right. So when you went to California that was just to visit. When you moved it was here then. Okay. So how do your work and financial opportunities here compare to your opportunities in Mexico?

AV: In the very beginning it was really tough because I didn't handle the language very well. As you see I don't really speak English. And even as a civil engineer, was too hard to find a place to work like an engineer. I met some friends from the Mexican consulate that help to find one job, they help to figure it out what kind of sort of opportunity I could find for me. I even make a good friend in the architecture field, an architect from Mexico. And I discovered that NAFTA was not a good treaty, that it was really good for people with a lot of money, with big capitals, but not for a professional like me, even with my experience on the field.

So I was trying to find some other ways to make my living and then I started working as a volunteer. I went to some community centers like a Community Action, then Centro Cultural in Cornelius and other places like PCC [Portland Community Center] where you can have some education. So I started taking some classes. I started working as a volunteer and I said, "Well maybe I can do something different than I used to do there in Mexico."

LS: And what year was that that you moved to Oregon?

AV: In 2000. It was on 2000.

LS: And you said your first job was, it was with Community Action?

AV: Yes—but not really a job, just like a volunteer.

LS: And what were your responsibilities?

AV: At that time I learned that here in the states you can have a certificate or diploma, the GED (General Educational Development) diploma, that get you in the same level of education that you have in high school or what we call *preparatoria* in Mexico. And I just had to take the test. And I thought "Let see exactly what this GED certificate is." So, I started taking some classes with a friend that used to work at Community Action in Hillsboro. And I saw the level and I said, "Well this is"—well I was a civil engineer, it wasn't that difficult. And this tutor, Rosa Torres was the name, she told me, "Arturo, what are you doing here? Why don't you help me with the students that really need help instead of you taking these classes, because you really don't need it." Then I took the test. Since then I have my diploma on my wall and I started working with people that need to learn more about math, Spanish, etc.

LS: Okay and that was at Community Action.

AV: That was in Community Action.

LS: Had you studied English in school in Mexico before you moved?

AV: A little bit in middle school, a little bit in high school—and some, not really in a formal way, at my university, my college. Just by myself.

LS: So you mentioned the difficulties with, obviously, the educational requirements and the language, but were there some other things about moving here that were difficult to get used to?

AV: Well, in the very first time because you don't have any record, so to find a home for your family is really hard. So in the very beginning I had to live with some friends from the church. We are Christians from the Assemblies of God, and some friends from there offered their home to us. And in the very beginning we lived with our friends. It was difficult because in Mexico we used to live, with my children, in my own home. I have to share the place with other family, and that was a little tough in the beginning.

LS: And how long was that until you could get your own place?

AV: It was something like a year, I think, and then we make some credit and we established some relations, we open some accounts in the bank and then we were able to rent a home.

LS: Were there any laws or customs that were different for you or that seemed strange to you here?

AV: Not really. I knew a little of the states because I used to work in an urban place— Mexico City is really a cosmopolitan—so I knew a lot of the American culture, the way you do things and that wasn't really that hard to understand.

LS: Then how did your wife and children handle that process?

AV: Well, my wife used to be here in the country, before or around 1985, 1986. And also she used to work here; at the same time she was taking English classes at the university here in the states, so she knew the place more than me. Our children's, age four and five, they were young but in the school back there at Mexico, they attend a private school where they also learned some English. So for them it wasn't really, really difficult to adapt to the culture here in the States. They knew a little bit about the language, they were children and, you know, the children, they learn pretty fast.

LS: Right. So how often have you been able to visit Mexico?

AV: I used to do it twice a year in the first two years but it's really costly to go back and forth, so I stopped doing that because I decided to buy a home here in the states, so part of my money was to pay my home. So travelling every year wasn't really a good idea.

LS: Then how do you stay in touch then with your friends and family there?

AV: Well right now through the computer, you know Facebook. In the very beginning just the phone, later on, with my computer. In Mexico the cyber cafés are really, really popular so we do that through the internet, Skype and programs like that. Right now we use Skype quite often. Also we use Facebook to keep us in touch with our family.

LS: And do you follow political, economic developments in Mexico? Do you pay attention to the news there?

AV: Yeah really close. Right now, although I'm here I read the paper almost like I used to do in Mexico City—every day. Yes.

LS: So you still try to stay connected to what is happening? Okay. So after working for Community Action or volunteering, rather, how did you end up working at Centro Cultural?

AV: Well Centro Cultural was really close to my home so I used to help, also as a volunteer. And they offered computer classes for the community, my wife was working there as a volunteer, too. And we meet some people there—like Sister Barbara Raymond and Bridget Cooke. 10 years ago Sister Barbara and Bridget Cooke started their own non-profit organization. But in that time (we are talking of about 13 years ago) they were working in Centro Cultural in an educational

program and Sister Barbara offered me a job, a position teaching computer classes and also Spanish classes.

LS: So what skills were you teaching for the computer classes?

AV: Well, very, very basic. People from Latin America especially from Mexico, they don't know technology well, at that time less than today. They don't know how to handle a computer. So, one goal for the coordinators—of this community center, Centro Cultural, was to establish a program to teach computer literacy, at least very, very basic computer literacy. So I started working with them. We launched a program called Adelante Con Tecnología and even we took laptops to worker camps around the area to teach computer literacy there, at their homes.

LS: And then with the Spanish classes that was for people that were Spanish speakers but—?

AV: Yeah that was through PCC. PCC has this agreement with Centro Cultural and I used to teach Spanish to some English Speakers of the community, I even teach it for some of the teachers of my own children, at Neil Armstrong, middle school in Forest Grove. So I used to teach for some of the teachers there.

LS: So was this for people who spoke English to learn Spanish?

AV: Exactly.

LS: So are you familiar at all with the history of Centro Cultural?

AV: Yes, maybe more than a little bit, because—maybe by coincidence— I prepare a lot of Power Points there in Centro Cultural about the history of this place, so I have to research for some information. I also meet some of the founders. Yes, I know well the history of Centro Cultural.

LS: So how long did you work there?

AV: Almost six years.

LS: And then when was it that you began working for Adelante Mujeres?

AV: Just before that, I was working as a translator. I started making translations of technical books, text books for middle school that are or will be sell all over the country. And I was working that from home (I had already left my job at Centro Cultural). And then I learned about Adelante Mujeres working there at Forest Grove and they were also looking for a math and a Spanish teacher. And (as you may remember) I knew Bridget Cooke from the time they worked at Centro Cultural. From time to time we talked to each other and keep contact. My wife

was part of the Board of Adelante Mujeres. And they tell me, "Well you know, our program Adelante Agricultura, the agricultural part of the program is growing. We need another teacher to take the position for the instructor moving from Education to Agriculture, so why not work with us?" And then I started teaching Spanish and math. Later I also start to teach computer literacy.

LS: Had your wife worked for them, or was she just on the board?

AV: Just on the board.

LS: Does she work as well?

AV: She used to work in several places (like schools) but right now she's not working there. She's working different projects, like translations. We make translations for different people, but mainly for companies.

LS: What is your job title or your job titles for Adelante Empresas?

AV: I have maybe two or three different job titles. The main one is instructor, Spanish, math and computer literacy instructor. Also I am the coordinator of the program called Sabor Color and this falls under the umbrella of Adelante Empresas. Adelante Empresas is a program dedicated for people starting or consolidating a business.

LS: And could you explain what the Sabor Color program does?

AV: That part of the Adelante Empresas is dedicated only to food businesses, for people who want to start or consolidate a business in the food preparation area. If people need a kitchen, a commercial kitchen, if people need a license, if people need some capital for their business, we help them to do that—especially people trying to sell some food. And you know here in the states, some Mexican people are famous because they know how to make delicatessens like tamales and dishes like that. So, right now people are making business by preparing food.

LS: And what sort of business model are most people using in terms of—are they using stands or food carts or are they trying to open physical restaurants?

AV: Well, most of them are selling on booths, a formal stand or cart is difficult. We can help them because Adelante Mujeres also manages the farmers market in Forest Grove. We help them [with] a booth for the people that are a part of the Saber Color Program. We also have a partnership with the Forest Grove Senior Center. So, we have access to a commercial kitchen for some, some other are trying to open a restaurant, and a formal restaurant will take more than a month (to start). That will take more time.

LS: So how do you feel about your work? Do you enjoy what you do?

AV: Well, yes I love it. At Centro Cultural I started working with adults, men and women, mostly women in the mornings. Mostly of my student at the afternoons were men. But right now in Adelante Mujeres are mostly women from Mexico, some from other like Central America, that they didn't have total access to education. Also some of them were victims of domestic violence, so they are a group of people that really, really need help, and I love working with them. It's quite rewarding.

LS: And what sort of impact would you say that these classes and this education makes on some of the lives of your students?

AV: I usually think on them and their impact on the next generation, because this particular group, they didn't have a formal education (most of them). Sometimes they don't know how to read or write correctly in Spanish. They don't know how to use technology and their children born here, (most of them are born here), they are making like a quantum leap (if you compare with their moms) to get education. So they need to be aware of what their children are doing or how they are doing in the school and at home on the computer.

So I'm thinking that this generation will be something like a bridge between the Latino community and the Anglo community because their children already know how to speak English. They know how to be in the culture, but they also are Latinos. So I am thinking of that and that's why I love my work with their moms, because I'm trying to build a bridge, to connect this community. So far, the circumstances are quite dividing.

LS: So you mentioned that most of your students—their children are being born here but most of them are from elsewhere that have relocated. Is that correct?

AV: No, no. Their children, mostly of them, were born here in the states, some are from Mexico, some are teenagers but that's another history. Most of my students have children born here, in the states.

LS: Right, but most of your students they are, they're adults. And are most of them from Mexico?

AV: Most of them from Mexico, some people from Argentina, Peru. I am working with people from Peru right now; I used to have one student from Panama. But the answer is yes, mostly Mexicans, on the second place after, people from Guatemala.

LS: And then do you have students from an indigenous background or who might speak an indigenous language?

AV: Some of them, the second language is Spanish, yeah.

LS: Yeah that makes it difficult.

AV: And sometimes it makes it quite difficult because we need to teach in Spanish and then, on top of that English. So these people will speak three languages.

LS: So you mentioned in our last meeting that because you had this background as an engineer and higher level education that your decision to move was maybe made under different circumstances than other people that—some of your students who don't have that formal education? Do you think you could talk about maybe how it was a different decision for you to move than for some people?

AV: It's commonplace to say that some people are looking for a better place to live, maybe to try to catch the American dream and that's somehow is still correct for me. But I used to have my home in Mexico. I used to have my car in Mexico. I used to have my education. For me it was more than to know another culture, to be in another place. It was also like taking a challenge to try to adapt. I wasn't really worried about my children because I knew they would be really young and all children learn really fast. The biggest challenge was more for me and my wife maybe. But also we wanted to taste another culture.

LS: And while you were in Mexico did you know of other highly educated, or professionals, people that were making similar decisions to move abroad or was that rare?

AV: Yeah, once and again you see people that maybe with a quite good education move to Europe or maybe to the states to work. I used to have a couple of friends that did it. Also, one friend of my generation was even going to Japan to live there teaching Spanish. You can imagine that. So I was curious about how they deal with all this change with the culture, the new language and I don't know, I just liked the idea, which was just pulling me somehow. If not Canada, well right now here in the states.

LS: Well it's not that far from Canada. Since you've moved here have you met many other professionals or people with higher education from Mexico that have made or from elsewhere in Latin America?

AV: Not really that far. Yeah actually in the very beginning I met people with low education. Most people are here because they don't have that opportunity in Mexico not even to have a good job. After some years, maybe because the crisis in Latin America, it start looking more and more professional people moving here to the states, maybe because the lack of opportunities, maybe because of this crisis, this economic crisis that hit really hard in Mexico. Well, you can tell Latin America, Argentina, Chile, they are still dealing with that. But yeah, right now I know a lot of people from Mexico, but not just from Mexico with a professional

background, even from South America.

LS: So when you first moved here did you move to Hillsboro or were you in Forest Grove?

AV: I used to live really close to this area in Hillsboro, then I moved to Cornelius and later I moved to Forest Grove.

LS: So maybe my question would be about all three of those areas. Could you just describe the Hispanic community if you feel that there is one or a community of people that speaks Spanish? Do you think there's one that—?

AV: Well that's interesting. For me it was really surprising that people living here for more than 20 years or so, that they didn't speak English. In Cornelius the Latino community is almost half the population of the city. So you can tell it's almost like a Latino town or a Mexican town. Also Cornelius is a thriving community. You can see the change in just ten years. We have Centro Cultural growing, a new expansion of the Virginia Garcia Clinic, and more people to serve Latinos there. And then you can compare that with Forest Grove. A friend told me once, "You know there's a lot of Latinos here in Forest Grove, but you can't really see them." Somehow they hide in the community but if you go to Cornelius they are visible all day, all over the place.

LS: So to you it seems quite different between those two.

AV: Yeah, it's a little different.

LS: Do you see evidence of friendship between people that speak Spanish or a willingness to help other people out, people that they don't know necessarily?

AV: Well yeah. I can tell you a lot of examples of people doing that. Right now in my program we have a partnership with a retirement center, and some of my students go there to try to catch more English in an everyday conversation. But they develop really, really high ties with the people living there. These retired people, sometimes they don't have family and although part of the program is just from part of the day, sometimes I see them go back to them at other times to be with these patients. And that's powerful. It's a good experience because then these people develop this sort of friendship. And my students are really young if you compare with people in a senior center and you see they go there to chat and have a conversation. That helps a lot of these people at this retirement center.

LS: So I think that cultural respect for the older generation is still very strong.

AV: Yeah, I think so because in Mexico we have high respect for elders. I used to be quite respectful with my elders so I think these ladies bring this with them and

they share this to all people.

LS: What problems do you think continue to confront people of Mexican or Latin American descent here—either in Hillsboro, Cornelius, Forest Grove, the whole area?

AV: Well, language is one quite specific that you find every day. In everyday life the language is there, the first one that you find. The second one maybe is the culture. The way to see or to do things here in the states are different from the way we do things in Mexico. And also dealing with democracy—as a chance to vote. Here in the states you can do several things in a different way that we couldn't or used to do in Mexico. In Mexico people are not really confident with the system. They don't trust the authorities and when they move here, well you can see that you can trust the authorities most of the time.

One think that I can tell you that about this area is that most of the people is not racist. Although I found some guys that used to harass people there in Centro Cultural. Every two weeks or so we received visits from this group called OFIR, (Oregonians for Immigration Reform), to harass and to pressure people who were just trying find a job in Centro Cultural. But that's just, I think, isolated episodes, most of the time.

LS: So, OFIR, would they show up in person to disturb, at the office?

AV: In front of the building, across the street, with banners.

LS: Have you experienced other incidents of discrimination or racism?

AV: That's sad, most of the time it's Mexican against Mexican—people established here against the newcomers. I'm not telling that it's not rare to have an American making some statement or be racist against Mexicans. I don't see that every day, but most of the time I saw more prejudice from Mexicans, Latinos against Latinos. I don't know, I don't like that but yet somehow it's true.

LS: Is that mostly one way then, against—people who are established are the ones discriminating against the newcomers?

AV: Sometimes happens that way, exactly.

LS: And have you ever seen a reaction from newer arrivals to that sort of activity?

AV: Well sometimes. But mostly the people already established (against newcomers). Once I hear when someone established said something like, "Oh my, these guys from Mexico are receiving these food stamps and my young son born here in the states doesn't have that kind of help". Something like that—well

that's surprising because children needs help, it doesn't matter where they come from, they just need help. And sometimes they resent this, this help that sometimes people receive from the government. Maybe they just don't know how to find these resources because they don't have enough information, although they are people with more time here in the states. I don't know. But yes, sometimes they are resent against newcomers.

LS: A lot of the first families that settled here were either from Texas or the southwest. Do you feel that there's any sort of divide culturally between these families that had resided in the United States maybe for generations before coming to Oregon, and people directly from Mexico?

AV: Well I don't know. Some of them, the families that founded Centro Cultural are from Texas. I met them before, and they were working here. They were the first Latino here in the area maybe 30 or more years ago. And so far they founded Centro Cultural because they needed to feel welcome, also a place for newcomers. So I don't really think so. It wasn't really a big problem with them.

LS: So my next questions touch on issues of identity. So the first one would be—how important is the Spanish language to your sense of identity?

AV: Well, it's quite important. I love English. Actually I told you before that in Mexico I used to watch American movies, TV shows from the states, The Flintstones, Top Cop, you name it—Star Trek, etc. I am a trekkie, actually [*both laugh*]. But I learn a little bit of English and I like it. I like the sound. I love the language. That's why I am here still trying to learn English. I love my language—Spanish. I love it. I also teach in Spanish for the people who try to have a GED. So it's quite a part of my identity, definitely.

LS: And in what social settings do you use Spanish, with—like your friends, your family, your co-workers?

AV: Mostly with my family, on second place my co-workers although they are American, most of them. And it's interesting because we have these meetings with another part of the staff, the *Anglo* staff, there in Adelante Mujeres and most of the time we speak Spanish. In a day you could have a Latino sitting there and three or four Americans speaking in Spanish with you. That is quite interesting.

LS: So pretty much everyone in the organization--.

AV: They speak or are trying to learn Spanish.

LS: And then with your children—do you primarily speak in Spanish with them?

AV: Well yeah—in part of the childhood they started just trying to speak English and I just stopped them on the spot. I tell them, "You know you have to speak

Spanish.” It was really difficult because they already learned Spanish in Mexico. They loved to read. And at home most of the time we speak in Spanish. From time to time we speak English. We see some TV shows with my children—British and American shows and, of course, those shows are in English. So I really love to be with my children, sometimes laughing with a comedy, enjoying American jokes. We try to communicate with them all the time in Spanish. Sometimes they speak to me in English and I answer back to them in Spanish and sometimes we switch—back and forward, but most of the time in Spanish.

LS: So there’re some terms or labels that some people use to self-identify—like some people that are maybe, especially Mexican-American might say that they are Chicano or Chicana. Some people might identify as Latino. Are there any terms that you ever use to—that you identify with to describe yourself by?

AV: Maybe just Latino. Chicano, well I don’t know. I know what Chicano means. Sometimes could be more like a label of a movement. But not, I’m not Chicano. I’m a Latino from Mexico.

LS: Are there other ways you’d describe yourself or self-identify?

AV: Well, I don’t like the labels and sometimes I try to fight the racism here. And also in Mexico we have a lot of racism—rich against poor, tall against small, fat against everyone else—it’s terrible sometimes. I was talking with a friend and we agreed that sometimes you can see more racism in Mexico than here in the states. Really, just last week a family from Oaxaca, they didn’t allow them to go in a plane and take a flight because the way they look—in Oaxaca, in Mexico.

So you can see and that kind of episode is very common in Mexico, still these days. So, for me I’m just a human. If you want to label me, in a way, well, I’m just a human from Mexico. Yes, I speak Spanish. I try to speak English. And that is. At the end we are just humans.

LS: So you mentioned obviously in Mexico there’s still significant discrimination against people of indigenous descent?

AV: Yeah still.

LS: Do you think other families, the people that come here, do a lot of people still bring some of those attitudes with them or do you think maybe it gets better in the United States, because there are a lot of indigenous.

AV: I think it gets better. Most of the time people that are here from Oaxaca, just to name one state, could be another place, people like that; they are humble people, hard workers most of the time. They don’t like that. And sometimes they are moving out because they can’t find any opportunity there. So they usually don’t bring that part of the culture here from Mexico.

LS: What holidays or cultural practices are important to you, from Mexican culture?

AV: I wasn't really religious back there in Mexico. I saw my grandmother preparing an altar for *Día de Muertos*, for example. *Las Posadas*— we enjoy *Las Posadas* in Mexico, quite a lot. I think it was the best part of the year. *Día de Reyes*—maybe you don't know. *Día de Reyes* is January 6<sup>th</sup>. It's the epiphany's day, when Jesus the baby received presents from the wisdom guys from the Middle East. And in Mexico it's a big deal. I try to keep that tradition here in the states with my own children. Not any more because they are grown up but I used to keep that tradition here, also Christmas is a big celebration.

LS: And do you think you celebrate Christmas differently than most people in the United States?

AV: Not really. At least from the people from Mexico City, making the comparison to here in the states, maybe it's a little bit more religious at home. In Mexico we have *Misas de Gallo* in the churches but it's not that different.

LS: Are there any institutions or organizations either for religious or community or spiritual purposes that you identify with, or that are important to you?

AV: Well, right now I work more with non-profit organizations. Sometimes I have a tie with people at the Mexican consulate. But, with religious organizations? No, not really.

LS: So, if you had to describe maybe your own community, the sense of community that you feel where you live, is there a way that you could describe or define that, maybe with the people that you know?

AV: Right now I have more than six years living in the same place in Forest Grove. And I think that I know the place very well. I have more than one Latino neighbor. I usually say 'hi' to my other neighbors. But I have better friends far from my home. And I don't know what happened, but I have better friends that I visit from time to time, but not in my block.

LS: I see. And do you think that's maybe because of cultural difference with your neighbors very close to you, or is that even true with other Latinos?

AV: Not really sure why, maybe because you have to share more common ground besides nationality. Yet, most of my friends are from my own country. But right now as I tell you before, it's funny because I have other friends living in Beaverton or Hillsboro. I have a Japanese friend for example. How in the world I make a good friend from Japan here in Hillsboro in the states and I'm from Mexico? Don't tell me [how] that's happened.

LS: And do you have many other friends of different cultural backgrounds?

AV: Yes, most of them, they're from Latin America. I know at least three or four from Japan. I used to have some students from Korea in my home. And I still keep the conversation on the Facebook with them. I also received students from Japan and again, I still keep contact with them. Most of my friends are Latinos from maybe Argentina or Chile or Peru—there is a lot of Peruvians over here in this area.

LS: So you've already talked some about your opinions about the English language, but could you talk maybe about how you feel about English-speaking society and culture here in the United States?

AV: I love it. I remember the very second time that I travel here in this area, and I just love the situation that you take the MAX (Metropolitan Area Express light rail) or the TriMet (City and Tri-Country Metropolitan Transportation) bus and people just started talking without previous knowledge of each other. They just met in the spot and they start laughing and talking. I said for myself, "Well, I like that." In Mexico didn't happen that way, and I just love this openness with people here in the states. At least people here. From other places, I really I don't know. I can't tell you in other states, but here I just love the way people is. Portland reminds me a little of Mexico City, it's a smaller city than Mexico City but there is always people on the streets and I love that.

LS: You said that when you were living in Mexico you watched a lot of U.S. television and movies. So now that you live here and you're exposed to English all the time, do you still watch a lot of U.S. programs in English?

AV: Yeah, not that many because I'm working and I really have a tough schedule the one that I have. But yeah, I watch some shows here in the states and also I still watch some shows from Mexico, from Spain and other Spanish-speaking countries.

LS: Would you say it's about half and half?

AV: Almost half and half. I also keep doing that because of my children, because I want to keep my Spanish as fresh as possible.

LS: And do you read many books as well?

AV: In Spanish and English. Right now I'm reading one, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*. I was reading that one with my children and they also read *Game of Thrones* in Spanish or *The Chronicles of Narnia* also in Spanish. So I'm trying to keep them on a good level.

LS: So your children spent their first years in Mexico but obviously they've spent just about the rest of their lives here in Oregon. And I think you said before that one is finishing high school. Is that correct?

AV: Yeah.

LS: And then the other one is at OSU (Oregon State University)?

AV: He will move to that university. Right now he's taking classes here at PCC. They will transfer there later on.

LS: So, obviously you can't speak for them but in your opinion, how important is their Mexican heritage to them, to your children?

AV: Well, that's interesting. I don't want to release the names but one of them is really from Mexico. He loves *salsa picante*. He loves Mexican culture. He just loves it. He likes it here in the states, he loves it. He speaks English like a native would speak it. He speaks Spanish like a native speaker also but you can see the way he balances that. He's more towards Mexico. He still loves Mexico. The older child is more "American". She's like a fish in the water with American people... She loves the American culture and I think she's really confident moving all the time with Americans, more than the other one.

LS: Do you think she still has pride though in being Mexican?

AV: I think so but I think she's more comfortable just keeping the other way, the other culture afloat.

LS: Was it your son, then, that you said liked and really enjoys and identifies with Mexican culture?

AV: [*mumurs agreement*]

LS: Do you feel that the two of you have a similar relationship with Mexican culture? Obviously he hasn't lived in Mexico most of his life. Do you think that he maybe the way he identifies?

AV: Well it's almost the same level of engagement with Mexico than me, maybe because he used to watch me since was young reading the newspaper from Mexico, watching or sorting information from there. He knows really well the situation back there. He's reading books from Mexican history. He's reading books from political people there in Mexico so he's connected with Mexico on a deeper level.

LS: Does he pay attention to the news as well?

AV: Yeah.

LS: So when you moved here—I think you said your main goal was to experience a different culture, and obviously being in the U.S. you felt that that would be, your kids would have access to education and some opportunities. What goals and hopes do you have now for yourself and for your family?

AV: Well for them to have a good education level. Hopefully my son will keep his studying there in PSU. Obviously I don't know if they have other plans. But about myself, I would like to keep helping people on this kind of work in a non-profit. I just really love where I am, the feeling of helping people. I love it and I would like to keep doing that for a long, long, long time. That would be my goal.

LS: What opinions do you have of Oregon overall? I know you've travelled in California some, so I don't know if there're differences that you've noticed in the two.

AV: The Latino presence in California is overwhelming. You can tell the difference. You compare that with here in Oregon. Here in Oregon, well I don't know—this, the weather, the people, the combination of all these situations, I just love it. But people are the main difference. The Latino presence in California is quite different. Here in Oregon it's growing every day. You can see that. It is different. You can feel it, the taste of the American culture. Not *that* presence of Latinos here.

LS: Is there anything about Oregon that you dislike or that you still might be getting used to?

AV: I don't know. Let me see. I love rain [*both chuckle*]. I love the snow. I love the people. The only thing that maybe I do not like is that here are still here in Oregon, some people at some places that are very conservative, that are not progressive. Some people here that are racist or are against new immigrants, wherever they come from. I don't like that. I think Oregon is a wonderful place to live, but maybe they don't understand. Maybe they don't know that the immigration is a good deal for every place, actually.

LS: Does Oregon feel like home to you?

AV: Yeah, right now this is my home. I have another home in Mexico but right now this is my home.

LS: Do you think you will continue to reside in Forest Grove then?

AV: I don't know if could be Forest Grove, maybe another place here in the states. This area surrounding Mount Hood, I just like it. Portland is a place that is like a part of Mexico City on a smaller scale... sometimes. Something that's

really amazing from Mexico City is you have more than a hundred theaters to go to see different movies or spectacles. Or museums, we have several museums there, maybe 20 more times than in the whole metro area. But still it's a lovely city. It's a wonderful place.

LS: Anything else that you feel that you miss?

AV: I think that the one thing that I really love from this area is the people, is always smiling, and is really open. I love that, that why I stay here, that's why I have my home here.

LS: So is there anything else you would like to comment on or add to the interview about your personal, your family history, or just anything else you want to share?

AV: Well I still have high hopes that this place will be a better place, more open to immigrants. Not Latinos necessarily, Right now I'm working with some other minorities in Aloha. We are in a project right now. And you go to one of those project meetings and you can see people from Africa, people who don't speak English or Spanish. Somalis, most of them, and they're facing the very same challenge that Latinos [are].

LS: And you said what meetings are these?

AV: In Aloha area. They are working right now on a project to create a better community in Aloha. Maybe you know that Aloha is not really a city. So I have a chance to see some people from other countries, from Africa, mainly from Somalia. And I saw them and I just see the very same challenges that I face myself.

LS: Okay, so just opportunities for all sorts of people to work together.

AV: Exactly.

LS: Anything else?

AV: That's it, so far.

LS: I think that concludes the interview. Thank you very much.

AV: Thank you.

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