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Jarvis, Lorna Hernandez Oral History Interview: Class Projects

Mark R. Bray

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History 201 Oral History Project
Interviewee Lorna Hernandez Jarvis
3/16/99
Interviewer Mark R. Bray

MB: Your full name is Doctor Lorna Hernandez Jarvis. Is that how you pronounce it?

LJ: Hernandez Jarvis

MB: Date of Birth?

LJ: [date removed], 1962

MB: Place of Birth?

LJ: Boston, Massachusetts

MB: This wouldn't be a question for you then, but where did your family immigrate from? Or did you immigrate?

LJ: I was one that emigrated from Mexico. I was born in Boston, but I basically at the age of a year old I was my parents took me back to Mexico. So I was basically raised there, and as a matter of fact I am still a Mexican citizen and I have a green card to be here. So I immigrated in 1986.

MB: Why did you?

LJ: Several reasons, one starting because my mother was an American so I kind of lived in both countries back and forth in different points in my life, but perhaps the most important reason is because I married an American in Mexico. We lived in Mexico for about four years, and after that we decided, or he really wanted to come back to the US and I wanted to continue my education. So we moved back to the US so he would be home and so I could go to the university.

MB: How was it that your mother was a citizen of the United States?

LJ: She was born in Philadelphia from American parents. She grew up there, but when she

was in her early twenties she went to the Quaker Church to a camp in Mexico to do social service for a summer. My father was working at that camp in Mexico and they met there got married there, well, not that summer but they met there. Two years later he asked her to marry him so she went back to Mexico to marry and she stayed there. So she actually lived most of her adult life in Mexico.

MB: What is your spouse's name?

LJ: Bruce, Bruce Jarvis. Bruce Philip is his middle name. Bruce Philip Jarvis.

MB: What does he do?

LJ: He is a computer programmer. He actually graduated from Hope. When we move here in '93 he finished his degree. He had been taking classes at the University of Akron in Ohio. He only needed a couple of more credits, so when we moved here he just took them here and took some extra classes and he ended up graduating from Hope.

MB: Current address?

LJ: 198 Camelback Drive, that's Holland and the zip code is 49423.

MB: Obviously your current employment is Hope College psychology professor. What other place have you worked?

LJ: I kind of have a different history than what is traditionally development of a psychologist. I actually had another career before I became a psychologist. I used to be classical ballet dancer, when I lived in Mexico. I danced in the National Ballet Company in Mexico for six years and that's where I met my husband who also used to be a dancer then. We danced in the company for about six years. We got married during that time, etc. I had quit school pretty much after high school to do that. (interruption) We were in Mexico we

met there, and I had quit school from basically after I graduated from high school to dance. Spent my time there, and about two years after doing that I decided that I was going to college part time so I did a little bit here and there.

MB: Where did you go to college?

LJ: I, all over, I started in Mexico going part time, and I did what would be the equivalent of my first two years of college going part time in Mexico. I also did one year although I don't really count that at Earlham College, which is one of the GLCA colleges. That's in Indiana. It's a Quaker college. I did actually my freshman year of college there. Then I finished; I actually graduated from college from the University of Akron in Ohio, the same place where my husband started his degree too.

MB: When you were going part time to school you were dancing as well?

LJ: I was dancing full time and that's why it's a full time job. I was dancing for six years; I was employed in that company for about six years. Let's see when we moved to Ohio I also did some teaching of ballet as well for kids while I was going to graduate school. I worked teaching ballet. As soon as I got my Ph.D. I got a job here at Hope. I came straight from my Ph.D. to here.

MB: So this is the only place...

LJ: Only place as a psychologist, yes.

MB: Are you involved in dance anymore at all?

LJ: No, not really. I mean I did probably the first two years that I was here at Hope, I did a little bit through the arts council, the Holland Arts Council. I did some teaching there and things, but I have a four year old son now so since I got pregnant and I had him that was

it, no more dancing. Too busy.

MB: What part of Mexico were you from?

LJ: I actually my parents took me when I was about a year old back to Mexico. We lived in a small town called Tepic, T E P I C, Tepic. In the state of Nayarit, N A Y A R I T, and its basically right in the center of Mexico, but along the Pacific Coast. So if you go right to the Pacific Coast right in the center is that state. That's where my father was from that's where he was born and his family lived there so we moved backed there. I lived there until I was sixteen. At that point my parents decided to move the whole family to Mexico City, because the kids were old enough to go to high school and university, etc. and that's where the better schools were. So the whole family moved.

MB: Considerably better?

LJ: Considerably better, I mean many more options and opportunities and academically much better.

MB: What was the situation of the schools in...

LJ: The small town, Tepic? Well for one there was just one university that had just started developing. So there were only like two or three. In Mexico, when you go to a university, there is no such thing as a liberal arts education. You choose a school, so you go into business or nursing or psychology, but they are separate schools. At that point there were only like two or three options within the university so if you wanted anything else you couldn't. So that was an issue. From high school most of the instructors, which has changed since then but at that time most of the instructors are high school level. Many of them didn't even have a college education. They had what they call "normal"

school which is you get your high school and then you go for two more years to get like a teaching certificate, and then you go back and teach in high schools. They were not as well prepared as some of the teachers in Mexico City which is the capital of the country, where you had much better, better prepared teachers in general.

MB: How old is your is it a son, daughter?

LJ: My son, Victor, he's four.

MB: So you haven't really experienced the schools here too much?

LJ: No, not really

MB: Describe especially the small town, what was it like to live there.

LJ: Well for the fifteen years I lived there the town grew a lot. When we first moved there I think the population I call it small town but for some other people its not that small, population was probably around 30,000 when we moved in. By the time we left it was closer to 100,000. So in fifteen years it had grown a lot. When we first moved there my mother tells a story that she decided to take us to have some ice cream to a little place where they sold ice cream. So we went out and had a ice cream we got home and it was about twenty minutes after we got home that my father called her on the phone to ask her about something and said oh by the way how was your chocolate ice cream. She was like what? It was within a half hour of us being there somebody had told him that we had been at this place and even reported what flavor of ice cream we had. So everybody really knew everybody. But it was also very nice because it was a really close knit community, a very supportive community. I should also say that one of the reasons that my parents went back to Mexico when I was a year old. Actually, back up a little bit.

We were in Boston, Massachusetts when I was born because my father was getting a masters degree in sociology from Harvard. He got his degree and we went back to Mexico. We went back to Mexico because he had been asked to run for lieutenant governor of the state. When we moved there that is basically what we did was for he would be in the government, so he was a government official. That is another reason why everyone kind of knew us or our family because they knew who we were. It was a very small community very with strong values, with people really concerned with growing and developing in all aspects socially and economically. It's mostly a state, that's changed too, but it was mostly tobacco growers a lot of tobacco plantations and those kinds of things so it was a state that had quite a bit of money and a lot of natural resources.

MB: Was the close knit and everyone knowing each other, was that compounded by the fact that your family kind of led a public life?

LJ: Right, absolutely, absolutely.

MB: Keep talking about Tepic and how it compares to, I mean it sounds like it could be a similar size to Holland.

LJ: Also it was a very different time period especially for Mexico. For example, things that people wouldn't even think about. We moved there in '63 and there was no television at all until '68 and that whole area and most of Mexico except for Mexico City and perhaps a couple of the other larger cities in the country there wasn't just no television at all until '68. In '68 when the Olympics were held in Mexico that's when they really realized that they needed to connect the whole country at least based on this event so those were the kinds of things. We grew up with a lot of, well what do kids do? You don't sit and watch

TV you go outside in the street and play with your neighbors. So there was a lot of those kinds of things. Everybody knew each other. A lot of festivities for the town together. The elementary schools were pretty good actually. I feel pretty fortunate with the education that I got. It's still the kinds of things that you wouldn't think about now, but we always had about a half hour to an hour during school hours in which they called crafts hour or half hour. So all the boys will go and learn how to do carpentry and all the girls will sit there in the room and start doing some sewing or cooking that you wouldn't think about it now, but that was an important part of the education at that point for the kids in Mexico. So I had to learn to do all that and I just remember being really frustrated because my family life had kind of very different expectations and values. Now my family has never decided that my only destiny was to get married and sew and cook so I was getting a very different message at home. In school it was like you really need to do this because that's basically what your life like. So that was at times difficult.

MB: As far as the landscape just like the physical appearance of the town, how does it compare to Holland?

LJ: It's quite different. The town is kind of in a valley sort of surrounded by hills and mountains. Very, very green environment. Very great weather, year, I was going to say year round but that's not true. Most of the year the temperatures were between 70 and 80 degrees except for the summer. In the summer it could get up to 100 degrees which is kind of similar to here, very humid kind of environment, not many high rise buildings or anything like that kind of like that the downtown area. The typical colonial Mexican town. You know there's the main square which the one side was the cathedral for the

town which was built in the 1700s. Right across from that was the municipal palace and then all across were just like shops and things all around it. I think the other thing about that town as I remember it in someways similar to Holland you didn't really see anything like poor neighborhoods or bad neighborhoods you know everybody seemed to be doing okay. You didn't find those kinds of divisions.

MB: Stay with the atmosphere, how industrialized was it, you said it was mostly farm, but there is a lot of industrialization in Holland. Was there any of that?

LJ: There was two processing plants for sugar cane which is basically to make sugar. There were two of those and that was it for industry. That was basically it.

MB: There's a lot of street lights and everything here seems to be paved and developed in this radius.

LJ: It was within a certain radius like the center of the city was very clearly that way, paved streets, traffic lights, all that was there. As you move to the periphery of the town you will find unpaved streets or not as well lit or some areas that didn't have water, but it was just as you moved towards the edges of the town.

MB: What was your experience like in Mexico City?

LJ: Mexico City was a big shift and actually my whole family decided to move like I said when I was ready to go to high school because Mexico City even at that time was I think the third largest city in the world and my parents said that we aren't going to let our fifteen year old daughter go move to Mexico City by herself it's the third largest city in the world. So the whole family moved so I could go to school there. It was, for probably the first year, it was a difficult shift. For being in a small town where everybody knew

you and you felt comfortable going anywhere and all of a sudden that was not the case, not to mention in terms of how you use your time because for instance in Mexico City it took three or four times as long because the city is that much larger than it was in the small town. It took a lot of adjusting not knowing people, not feeling the safety of the place where I grew up that I knew everything.

MB: So you were the oldest?

LJ: Actually, no I am the third one. My two brothers and again that also has to do with values, my one brother when he was ready to go to high school my parents decided to let him go because he was a boy he would be okay in Mexico City. They did take care, they placed him with a family that was going to watch him and all that kind of stuff, but they still felt that for a boy it was okay. For my second brother when it came time for him to go to high school he decided he really wanted to go to high school in the US so he was actually, my parents helped find him a scholarship so he was sent to a Quaker boarding school in the US. So he got his degree or his education mostly in the US. Then when it was time for me they said no that was just too risky so the whole family moved.

MB: Here for a whole family to move to have someone to go to high school, its unheard of, but was that something that was common or was that because of your situation?

LJ: It was because of our situation. That's not common at all in Mexico either. Basically what happened is that people would have to go the schools that are available period or they let the kids go to relatives that live in the big city. That's the only way they would let you go if you have close relatives in another city that has better opportunities.

MB: So it was a somewhat privileged situation that you and your brothers had.

LJ: Right, in particular the fact that my father had a masters degree and he had become an expert on several of the indigenous groups as a sociologist from that area and his experiences working in government. He had been asked many times to move to Mexico City to work for the federal government, and he had said no because he wanted to stay in his state and work for his people as he called them. So it wasn't even a question of was he going to find a job what's going to happen. When the family decided to do this he just grabbed the phone and called a couple people and within a day or two he had two or three offers of jobs. So that's why, it's very unusual. It was a very unusual situation.

MB: It was pretty unique that you had that relationship with the Quaker. It's more than a religion it's kind of a lifestyle, How was that in Mexico?

LJ: It was very difficult, we were the only Quaker family in Tepic. Nobody had ever heard of them. Probably 98 percent of the town were Catholic including my father's family. My parents married through the Quaker church but my father had been raised Catholic, and had come in contact with Quakers when he was going to university in Mexico City. He decided that that's really what he believed in and he had become a Quaker. My mother was born in a Jewish family, and was raised Jewish, but in Philadelphia which is one of the main places for Quakers and for Quakerism, so she came in contact with Quakers. Basically when she was about 18, 19 decided that she really was a Quaker and didn't really agree with everything the Jewish tradition taught her. She became a Quaker and they met through the Quaker church. It was very challenging for the whole family. It is a lifestyle but perhaps are more liberal more modern kinds of Quakers. At least my parents were, but not having a church to go to every Sunday like everybody else did. So my

parents would hold Quaker Meeting which is a silent Quaker worship in our home every Sunday so we would still have it, but it was really a challenge for them and kids would always ask, why aren't you going to church and the taunting and people teasing you as a kid because you were not really Catholic that's a bad thing if you weren't Catholic at that point. But again because of the privileged situation we had, my parents made sure that every once in a while when ever possible we had contact with Quaker kids either from the US or we'd make trips every year or every so often to Mexico City to be because there is a Quaker Church in Mexico City. That is another reason why we moved to Mexico City was important as well.

MB: Do you still keep up with the Quaker religion?

LJ: Absolutely, I am a member of the Meeting in Grand Rapids. There is a Quaker Meeting in Grand Rapids, and we have started a Meeting here in Holland. There is a group of about 12 or 15 of us that right now is being held at my home, so people come to my house on Sundays to worship.

MB: Can you tell me why your family immigrated?

LJ: I think there were several reasons, primarily like I said being married to an American who had lived in Mexico for about five years at that time. He felt that he was missing a lot of his culture and his family and all of those things and he really wanted to go back. So that was one reason. The other reason was the economic situation in Mexico there had just recently been some really serious devaluations in the economy. Especially as an artist you can imagine how much money we were making together, even together with two salaries. It was getting rough and the economy was getting worse. We could see that we

were spending most people would consider the best years of your life your twenties not really even saving anything just living day to day. So we really didn't see much of a future. So that was the second reason. The third reason was that I was getting ready to leave my dancing career and concentrate more on my academic career. I left for the kinds of things that I wanted to do I was very interested in cognitive psychology, that Mexico wasn't doing much with that at that point, it was just barely starting. If I really wanted to pursue that, the US was the better place academically for me. Finally for my husband too, because he had at that point he was the first soloist for the company. So he said I have done this for four years I am not going to grow artistically anymore, I have done as much as I could do here and looking for another dance company that would challenge his artist's skills, was another reason. Mostly professional although clearly economic.

MB: Did you have any reservations about leaving?

LJ: Oh yeah, for my husband there really weren't any because he was coming home so it was very different, but for me it was actually coming closer to family because my brother at that point was living in Texas so he was already up here and my sister was going to Earlham College also in Indiana. I had two of my siblings already living here, so at least being in the same country with them. My reservations were being away from my parents who I had a really close relationship with them, and just knowing that I was leaving behind a whole lifestyle. Knowing that I was going to be different than most people when I walked down the street. Those types of issues were of concern, and I was making a complete shift from being a dancer to being a student, from being with my family to not being with my family. A lot of changes.

MB: How much was language a barrier?

LJ: It wasn't as much because my mom was American. Both my parents really tried to raise us bilingually. They weren't as successful as I would have wished but I felt pretty comfortable with English. I did one year of college already in the States, I had done one year of college and then went back to Mexico to dance some more so I knew that that was not going to be an issue, that my English skills were good enough to function just fine.

MB: So obviously you travelled with your husband to the United States. Your family stayed in Mexico basically?

LJ: My sister was going to college in the US so she had kind of immigrated but she hadn't made a decision whether that was going to be permanent or not. She just came to college and then she was going to see what happened. My next brother was actually working for the Mexican government. He works for the foreign service, he still does. He worked for the foreign service for the Mexican government, but he was stationed in the Mexican Consulate in Texas. So he was actually living here in this country, but not as an immigrant. He was here as a diplomat. Then my parents did stay in Mexico. It was just my husband and I that moved to the US. All of my family on my father's side, my cousins and uncles and aunts all were staying down in Mexico and they still live there. That was difficult because we were pretty close to all them.

MB: Do visit a lot?

LJ: We try now. We try to make a trip every year. For the most part we've been successful there was only one year there that we skipped for 18 months rather than every twelve months. We try we really do.

MB: Do they ever come here at all?

LJ: Some of them do not all of them. Both of my parents actually, my mother died in October '93 when I had just moved here she had cancer. She died and my father died two years ago in March, also from cancer. During that time when they were both alive and from '86 to '93 for example when my mom was still alive I would see her probably two or three times a year. Either they would come or we would go. Then when my mom passed away and my dad was by himself then he ended up spending quite a bit of time with us. He would come for extended periods, two or three weeks here and there we would find a way to get away from work for two three weeks and come. And we got to see a lot of him.

MB: You chose the United States basically for the education?

LJ: For the education and several reasons. It gets kind of complicated because in some ways I consider myself to be an American and I am by birth because I was born here. I actually had dual citizenship until I was 18 so that was probably the other reason. It is my country. Because of my mother's background this was her culture, this was her background and she did try to keep that alive. She raised us as much as she could. It was just natural for me to think if I was going to go anywhere else this is my other home. And then because of my husband clearly it was his home too.

MB: You had the dual citizenship. So you felt you had two homes, but Mexico was your...

LJ: Was my primary home. That's the one that I would identify with the most just because that's really where I grew up.

MB: You would say you're from...

LJ: From Mexico, absolutely.

MB: You first went to Akron, Ohio, and that was for?

LJ: That was one of the places where my husband got a job in a company that he was very interested in there was the Ohio Ballet. It gave us different opportunities. For one, it was artistically a company that he was interested in. Secondly, it was affiliated with the University of Akron that would allow me to go in with a reduced fee for school etc., because he was an employee of the university. I would get discounts for school which was very important. Third because there were other universities in the area. It wasn't a very small town. It was a sizable city with many opportunities for both of us. It just seemed like the right place. And we knew a couple of people that live there so we had some contacts and friends in the area.

MB: What were your impressions of Akron when you were basically coming to stay in America? What were your impressions?

LJ: It was actually again a difficult time. In some ways it was good it was positive because coming from Mexico City which by that time was getting to be close to the first largest city in the world. Coming to a smaller place where you didn't have traffic jams and the pollution wasn't nearly the same was a nice thing. It was a nice shift. Akron is an industrialized city too so there is a lot of industry and a lot of activity. Also, what happens to be which is interesting, there are several universities not right in Akron, but there is University of Akron, there's Cleveland, there's Kent State University, so a lot of intellectual activity going on and artistic activity. There were several orchestras and ballet companies and all the things I was very interested in. It just felt like a good place,

and people were quite friendly and open. I also like the fact that it wasn't like other towns that I had seen or been in the US, there was more diversity. You could see Hispanics in the streets. You could see Blacks in the streets. For example here in Holland, you can see Hispanics, but I remember in '93 when I came and after about a month I happened to see an African American walking down the street and I did one of those double takes. Why am I reacting that way? I was shocked. It was because it just seemed so out of context. I realized that I had not seen a black person in Holland since I had gotten here and it had been like two months and I was like wow. It just blew my mind I didn't realize that. Especially coming from Ohio where there were quite a number of African Americans in Cleveland and in Akron.

MB: What did your stay in Akron consist of? Was it basically school and then you came here?

LJ: Yep, that's pretty much it. Like I said I did two years of, I finished my undergraduate at the University of Akron. I still was doing some teaching of ballet and all that. Then I went to Kent State University which is pretty much right next to Akron for my Ph.D. That's basically all I was doing at that point. Just concentrating on school and teaching some ballet classes to keep up with that part of my life. As soon as I got my degree I came over here.

MB: And you got this job that you have right now. You came in 1980?

LJ: '86 to Akron. 1986 to Akron and to Holland in '93.

MB: Obviously the job drew you to Holland, but how did you get the job in Holland? That seems like an odd choice.

LJ: There were several things. For one when, I was looking for an academic job. I was really

interested in working in a small liberal arts institution, so I was applying in different places and I wasn't really linked to any geographically area. We were trying to find a place where my husband would also have some opportunities to finish his degree, that would have some options for him when he finished his degree. I actually ended up getting an interview in Bakersfield, California, one in St. Paul, Minnesota, one in New Haven, Connecticut, one in Indianapolis, where was the other one Indianapolis and here I think that was it. There were five, five interviews. I thought just visit all the places I mean it was what would be the community you know a good community to settle in, because we were making a decision to stay for life. Or at least at that point that's what we thought. So we were looking for a community that seemed to be healthy, with a future and mostly not only socially but also professionally for us. The reason why I decided to apply for a position here at Hope is because I knew it was, I had heard about Hope being part of the GLCA colleges association and Earlham which is a Quaker college that I had been to when both of my two of my siblings graduated from. Having that connection say well this might be a good place to look into. Then when I got an interview and came here I just loved the people particularly in this department. I just felt like I really connected, that there was a place for me where I could bring a lot of things to the college and also that would allow me to learn a lot both as a person and as a professional. So that's really what made the decision at the end it just felt like a comfortable place. And the second part of that is knowing too that there was such a large Hispanic community was a very key point. Even though, Bakersfield, California well there's lots of those people there, but the academic environment wasn't as good. Here I had professionally a good thing but

also in the community there were lots of Hispanics, there were active people that were doing organizations and things to look at how to improve the lifestyle of Hispanics and etc. All of that really attracted me to come here.

MB: That's really interesting that you made all these trips all over the place. How is that, you had only been here a few years, you must have felt really comfortable in the United States, but what was that experience like going basically all over the United States, all the corners?

LJ: It was difficult at times because most of those things I went by myself and I was having to I felt like I was going to have make this decision based on just this information that I had when it was going to affect me and my husband as well, which was a different issue. I felt very comfortable. I felt comfortable because I feel comfortable in my professional identity as well as my ethnic and personal identity, and what I wanted out of life and a job. But it was interesting to see all the different lifestyles and expectations. Like they said in California the people are much more laid back and even in some ways they were much more accepting because I was Hispanic, but almost 50% of the people there were Hispanic so that wasn't a big issue or asset or anything. But the lifestyle was also very different from what I had been dealing with in the Midwest. Then going to, Minnesota felt you know St. Paul just felt pretty similar to what I had experienced you know it wasn't high or very midwest, so I didn't feel anything really different. Same thing with Indianapolis. It wasn't that much different. People were kind of open and willing to talk to you and friendly. Connecticut was quite different because being in the East Coast people were much more cold which is kind of felt indifferent like do these guys really

want me here or why did they invite me? Just because how they relate to people. And also it was a city that has a lot of crime and is not very safe and there were other issues going on there, but it didn't feel as comfortable.

MB: How can you compare that experience kind of seeing the United States, kind of taking a snap shot of the United States, how do you compare that with Mexico?

LJ: I think it is very similar just like with any country, you go to different corners of that country and you are going to find very different experiences. Like I said my life in Tepic was very different from the experiences that I had in Mexico City. Or you go to the northern states of Mexico and you find a lot of US influence, really really strong US influence. You go more toward to central part of Mexico and you don't see that as much. You get the Coca Cola and all that kind of stuff, but in terms of the values and the perspectives that people have, they are different in how they relate to each other. People in central Mexico are in some ways a little bit, I don't know what people would say maybe a little more conservative than people closer to the northern states. You find that in any country as you go across states.

MB: You had a view even though you were both Mexican and American in a way you had a view of America before you came here and what was that view and now what is it?

LJ: That's a great question because that was always kind of conflicting for me because for one I always got my mother's, what I characterize now as romantic melancholic views of the America she remembered. You know when you go away a live somewhere else you remember all the good things. So remembering about all the good things and all the technological advances that you would have. When we would live in Mexico and even in

Mexico City we never had a dishwasher for example or those basic things like that that now you think wow. My mom would always remember those kinds of things or having choices of foods, those kinds of things that she remembered. I don't want to say opulence, but just the availability of things, the richness, the fact that people could do what they want and they had choices and alternatives. Those kinds of things were part of my image of what America was all about and things that I really appreciated, but on the other hand I also got a lot of my father, being sociologist, was very involved in politics as I described so I also came from a family that was very highly politicized about Mexico has to come first that is what is needed. The US is abusing third world countries and the US is doing these things, so I got a little bit of the romantic perspective of what might be the good things, but I also got a lot of the things to be careful with or aware of things that the US has done that they shouldn't be very proud of having done. And one of my experiences coming here was that I started realizing that not many people knew the bad side, that not many people even here knew that their own government officials were doing this and they were being perceived differently in other countries. And that was always a challenge to talk to people, but wait a minute but there is this other side of the story, and a lot of people would say oh your just its because you're Mexican you don't understand or cause you're Mexican you are going to defend your people. It was not like that, it was just a reality to try to understand that we are not all that good at times.

MB: What is that perception in Mexico of the United States?

LJ: I think that just as I was describing, it's kind of a dual relationship. People look at the US as this wonderful country where you can make lots of money, and you can live a great life

as compared to what most people standard of living will be there. Even if you are lower middle class here you are going to be a lot better off than most of the population in Mexico (interruption) of things that people will dream of they want to achieve so they get things like people trying to dress like Americans, to look like Americans. It sometimes isn't even a conscious decision it is just that the imperialism from the US from Western culture that goes down to all third world countries. This is what is beauty. This is what fashion is. This is what you should be eating or thinking or whatever. People don't even think, they just absorb it and accept it as what it is. In some ways it's that perspective that America is wonderful and it's great, and it's what everybody should be trying to achieve. But on the other hand there also is that perspective that, as a country Mexico is in such bad shape because of the abuses of the United States, because they are our neighbors but we can't move. There is still a lot of resentment about Mexico--lost half of its territory to the US in Mexico's terms illegally. But Mexico really didn't have the means to go to war with the US and that is why they gave up the territory. So those things are still very much present on Mexican's perspectives towards the US. There are also other negative kinds of stereotypes about Americans in general. They like to waste their money, they don't have strong family values, they don't know how to take care of old people they just put them in nursing homes, which you would rarely see that in Mexico. They're your grandparents you take care of them in your home. For example, American women just being very loose and free to have sex with anybody. I guess that that's not true, but after all you find those images of Americans in America.

MB: How do your relatives that you keep in contact with in Mexico view you now with that

perspective now that you live in the United States?

LJ: With my relatives it is slightly different in the sense that they had the opportunity to know my mother and my mother clearly did not fit any of those types of stereotypes. So they learned a lot about it and my father too they learned a lot about how America was very different from some of those negative stereotypes. Many of them had actually come to the US to visit us or be with us or we had invited them. So they have had the opportunity to see America. It hasn't really changed their perceptions of me personally. They still see me as the same person and as Mexican as ever. So it does not make any difference for them.

MB: When you made all these trips to different places where you had interviews obviously you had a good impression of Holland. When you came here to stay and to settle down as you have what were your impressions then?

LJ: I am very glad that I am here and that I chose this place. One of the things that I did not expect and I probably couldn't have known it just by visiting Holland for two three days or in the interview. It's how conservative the majority of the people in the town were and the conservative perspectives. Coming from a family from an interracial marriage and from ethnic marriage, that with a father who was a sociologist and worked and fought for indigenous rights in Mexico, and you know all this imagine coming from a very liberal family. I was shocked to see how much to the right some of the perspectives were and that has been difficult, but on the other hand I have also found a lot of people in general, people, individuals that I can identify with very much and that I have made really good friendships and close friendships.

MB: That was the next thing I was going to ask. Did you know many people or no? How have relationships developed from where you came from?

LJ: I knew nobody except, you know the people the people I met during my interview when I came to Holland. Friendships have developed mostly from the Hope community, from working here and getting to know my colleagues, and people in other departments. So that was one way. Another way, was about two weeks after I had gotten here I had had a Hispanic woman knock on my door here in my office and she said I just want to introduce myself. I am such and such. I just heard that there was a Hispanic woman who was hired in the psychology department and I just wanted to welcome you. It was just a very wonderful and very warm reception and she introduced me to other Hispanics in the community, and I started building friendships outside of Hope as well. And thirdly through the Quaker Meeting in Grand Rapids. That was another way which I started establishing friendships and relationships with other people outside of Hope.

MB: From having a Hispanic background you might not notice it as much but there seems to be a more sense of community with Hispanics than with whites. That probably is because whites are the majority and they don't feel they have to stick together as much to maybe protect themselves or something like that. Is that something that you have noticed here or is that something that goes on in Mexico as well?

LJ: No, well its a little bit of both. The Hispanic culture is really based on community so you really do find a lot of that community relation strength and support in Mexico. Particularly in terms of the extended family community. When people talk about it in Mexico they talk about their family, they don't just mean their immediate family. They

mean their uncles and aunts and cousins and nephews and nieces and grandparents and you know, all of those are their family and they don't make any distinction between immediate and extended family. Everybody is the family, and they really are very close knit. For example, with my family all of my father's family would get together for New Year's Eve every year and that's how I grew up. We would have a huge New Year's Eve party, everybody would come, and gosh it was I haven't gone back to those for the last four or five years. But the last time that I went there were about 140 relatives between cousins and spouses and uncles and aunts and you know, and it's my family. They all really are in contact with each other. When somebody's in trouble everybody is there to support and find a way to help out. Part of that I think comes when immigrants or Hispanic immigrants come here, they're bringing that sense of responsibility towards community with them. But it also has to do with the fact that being a minority being, in a position of less power, if they want their rights to be respected and if they want their future to look better, they have to stick together. We have to stick together, and find ways to support each other and develop. So it's both the cultural background but it is also the situation.

MB: When you came here what were the problems that you encountered in adjustment?

LJ: In the community? Well, why don't I briefly tell you a quick story. One of the things that was really surprising to me was when I would be out in the community or I would get introduced to someone new, I would talk to them, mostly with whites I would say, and they would say, well, how long have you been here? Oh, a couple months or a week or whatever. They would say, what do you do? And my natural reaction was to respond

by saying I work at Hope College. Then the conversation would go on, and I often felt like people were kind of funny towards me. I can't really tell what it was. Finally, after awhile they would ask or I would say something that gave them a clue. They'd say, what do you do at Hope College? I'd say well I teach at the psych. department. Oh wow, so do you know this? Immediately, the way they were treating me and talking to me shifted. In my only explanation for that was, when I say I work at Hope College, I'm probably one of the persons who cleans or a secretary or something like that. As soon as I said that I was a professor their attitude completely shifted. My interpretation of that is that as long as I was a teacher or a professor I held high status which meant I'm educated which means I'm more white, so it's okay then, we can take you in. We can accept you. That very clearly gave me the message that there are some clear racial issues in this town that need to be watched. As long as you are more like the whites you're going to be accepted. If you want to keep your identity, well, it's okay, just as long as you're on the other side of the fence, kind of attitude. I think that I'm encouraged thinking that that's, even in the six years that I've been here it's beginning to shift. Both sides, the white majority of some people, the white majority saying that's not right. Those people are here and they're here to stay. What can we do to really get to know them? They are a part of our community, and also the minorities are really being much more active in voicing their concerns in situations as part of the community. I've just been getting involved in a group that just started this year in Holland called, well, they're still searching for a name actually, but right now their temporary name is the Holland Diversity Alliance. It's a group of people from the community that are trying to raise awareness about issues of diversity in our

community, what it means, and what we can do to live together and work together, etc.

Those kinds of efforts are always really encouraging to know that people are working on those.

MB: How did the move to, not only to the United States, but to Holland, affect your family, which I mean your husband, but your entire family as well?

LJ: When I actually moved to Holland, I didn't mention this, another reason why I was attracted, although I knew it was temporary, was that my sister was getting her PhD. at the U of M, so it brought me closer to her too. At least we were in the same state. For the first two years, she graduated in '95, so my first two years here I had my sister pretty close by. We would see each other probably every two or three weeks, which was very important. So in that way, it affected us because we were finally able to be together again, at least me and my sister. For the rest of my immediate family it wasn't as big of a thing because as I said, we were kind of spread out, anyway. Just moving to a slightly different town didn't make that much difference. And same for the extended family in Mexico, it really didn't. It was, interesting enough, it was kind of difficult for my husband's family. His family is from Oregon. They were really hoping that we'd get a job closer to the west coast. They were very excited about the possibility of California, because they wanted us to be closer to them. They were very disappointed. It has affected them in the sense that now they have to rearrange their schedule so his parents come this way once a year to see us, and we try to go over there once a year so we still have that contact with them.

MB: You said you still keep your faith and the Quaker values. What other traditions and

things you did in Mexico that you have brought over?

LJ: Let me think. I still try to do the posadas which is a Christmas celebration. The Hispanic community here holds posadas every year so I try to be a part of that. There's a very important celebration in Mexico called the Day of the Dead, celebration of your ancestors.

MB: Is that Cinco de Mayo?

LJ: No, this is November, November 2nd. Basically the idea is that you, traditionally is that you go visit the tombs of people who have died in your family and for one night or one day, the spirits of those people come to be among you or among the living. You build a little altar in your home for them, like an offering kind of thing with pictures of them and objects and foods, some of their preferred things. You just honor your ancestors. I've done that for my parents for sure since they've passed away, the 2nd of November. Also, Independence Day, there's usually some festivities or a party or a get together. That's on September 15th. That's when Mexico declared its independence from Spain. Then there's the Cinco de Mayo which was the only battle that Mexico won over the French army when the French were trying to take over Mexico. In that case it's mostly just some kind of party celebration.

MB: Is there a festival in Holland?

LJ: Yes. It used to be that they would call it the Cinco de Mayo. Now they've opened it up and called it more as just the fiesta, the Hispanic Fiesta, so it could include all Hispanics, not just Mexicans. So that it would be more general, open to diversity, et cetera. It originally was, it got started as celebrating Cinco de Mayo.

MB: Are you involved in that at all?

LJ: Not in any significant way except going and participating and those kinds of things.

MB: How do you feel about the Dutch heritage in Holland? Everyone thinks of Holland as a Dutch town.

LJ: I think it is, you also have to honor the history of the town. The history of this town is Dutch. There's no denying of that. It was founded by Dutch settlers with a very particular philosophy and people who were searching for a particular lifestyle, et cetera, and I think we need to honor that. That's an important part of the identity of the city. I personally don't have any problem with that as long as now, because the population is changing, we also begin to celebrate the newcomers, the new people that are here and what they bring. It's not to say that it's going to change the identity to say now we're going to be Hispanic or now we're going to be. Our town is changing but we're not going to deny its Dutch roots, but to celebrate the new backgrounds and new histories. It's happening and I feel very comfortable with that.

MB: So you would say that diversity and acceptance, more importantly, that diversity is happening in Holland?

LJ: I think so. It's beginning to happen, let's just put it that way. Seeing there's a lot of room for improvement and to work, but I think it's beginning to happen.

MB: The impression that I get is that Holland is Dutch and there's the Hispanic community...it's there, but it's kind of, okay, that's over there, and Holland is Dutch.

LJ: I think you are right. It depends on how you look at it. If you look at what people live and how it is, you're right. Hispanics live in a particular area of the city, et cetera. But

then, you go to any of the elementary schools and you look at the room and there's no way off. Especially in this light, you can't tell. You can't tell. Perhaps until you get to the dining room and you see the Hispanics sitting together or the Caucasians sitting together. But I think, like I said, even that is beginning to shift. We have representatives in the City Council now.

MB: Now, but that's only very recently, yes.

LJ: Absolutely. That's why I said it's beginning to change. I, myself, have seen some of those changes just in the six years that I've been here. I'm sure there have been many incidents in the past in which immigrants, or even illegal immigrants had been abused. There's lots of stories and documented cases of those, but never before to my knowledge had the community been so strong to voice a position as it has. Just this last summer there was an incident, not too far from here, in which there was a raid, I guess, illegal immigrants. It was done in a very abusive way. The community said, "No more." They got together. They got lawyers. They did everything. They even held a town meeting to discuss some of those issues. Those kinds, and what was exciting about it, that it wasn't just the Hispanic community. There were some Caucasians who were saying, "No, this is not acceptable. This is our community." I think, like I said, it is beginning to change. That acceptance is getting in. In some areas there's going to be a lot of resistance. Another example is for awhile, I don't get the Holland Sentinel anymore, but for awhile they had a Spanish section, every other Sunday I believe, there was part of the Sentinel that had a little edition in Spanish which is acknowledging, "This is here. This is here to stay, let's speak about their issues as well." And a lot of people were upset. There was

comments about it. "This is America. Why do we need this paper in Spanish?" I don't know if they're still doing it or not, like I said I don't get the Holland Sentinel. Just indications that those are happening to me suggest that people at least are addressing the issue. That's a beginning.

MB: Basically, the Hispanics are a large group, and Asians are now becoming a very large group. The opportunities that they have, what are they? How are they different than...?

LJ: They're very different. They're very different. A great majority of the Latinos hold the lower paying, lower status kinds of jobs. On the other hand, you're now beginning to find many professional Latinos. They're starting to say, "No, not everybody is a migrant worker." Even if they were, that's a very good job. I mean, you have blueberries and all of that thanks to those people, so why are we demeaning what they do? No, I think all of those individuals, the great majority are still holding the lower kinds of jobs. So the opportunities are very different. I mean, we see it just here at Hope College. Why is it that Hope is in the middle of Holland, right next to the great majority of where the Hispanics live, and none of them come to Hope?

MB: That's the new kick for the college, is diversity. How do you feel about that as being a program as they want to institute?

LJ: I feel very encouraged that the interest, the acknowledgement that this is an issue. To me, what I tell everybody, to me was keys to understand that educating minorities is no longer just a concern for the minorities. It is a concern for the whole society including whites, because the minorities are not going to go away. They're here to stay. As a matter of fact, by the year 2050 the latest statistic says that we're going to be 50-50. Then, if you

look at, on one hand we're going to be 50-50, but on the other hand, 50 percent of the population is going to be undereducated then if we don't allow them the opportunity. That's very frightening when you think about it. To have 50 percent of the population be completely, how are we going to hold the status that we have worldwide? We're just not going to be able to keep it up. To me, that's why it becomes an issue for the whole society, for whites as much as for minorities to look for acceptance, to look for education for the minorities, et cetera. So, the fact that Hope is at least acknowledging, We don't only need to help educate minorities, it's important to bring minorities to campus to educate the majority about minorities. It's very important.

MB: That's something that I really am interested in, is making the diversity, this is what we're going to do. We're going to make it so the college reflects the community that's around it and the affirmative action that's involved in that. How do you feel as a person who probably benefitted much because of your situation, but, you know, you could have benefitted from affirmative action, how do you feel about those types of programs?

LJ: Actually, I'm a strong supporter of affirmative action because I really believe we need to put history in the context of the discussion. The abuses that we have put some through, and yes, it's not you personally or such-and-such personally. It's not your fault, why should I pay? That's what a lot of people argue is that we need to get away from the individual way of thinking. This is what is best for all of us. You individually will benefit in the next twenty or thirty years by allowing those people to be better educated because the whole society as a whole, our country as a whole is going to be a much better place if we do that. So we can move to that level of thinking, I think it's an excellent

idea. When people say, "Well, I'm also from a poor family. I'm just as bright as this person. Why just because of their race should they have the privilege?" There's several things, not just because of the race, because although you think that you were just disadvantaged, in reality in society, you weren't. You've never had to deal with the kinds of things that these people have to deal with, and that's what affirmative action is doing and saying to me. I don't know. I just think in going back to Hope and I think some of the efforts that are being made are again a beginning. I still have concerns about how things are being done. For example, you know, what are we really doing about bringing in new minorities, but I just don't see the effort being put right here in our community. That's where it should start. What can we do to make this an attractive place for the Hispanic kids in our community? My very first year here I was invited to speak at the Holland High. While I was there, "Hope is a great place, you guys should be thinking." A number of the kids say, "What do you mean? That's where the rich kids go. They don't want us there." That was some of the kids' reactions. And I said, "Wait a minute, where is that coming from? What do you know?" They told me all kinds of stories of experiences that they've had with Hope students or with other people, and that's the message that's out there, that they're not wanted in this community. Or if that's not the message that they get, at least they feel that they're not as welcome. So why come to a place when they could go to Michigan State? Not only that it's cheaper but they feel much more accepted. That's why we mean that in terms of diversity, the education has to come, not so much in educating minorities, giving them higher education, like college education, I think what we really need to do is educate the majority, the white population

about why diversity is important.

MB: I think that goes really a lot with the cultural differences that you talked about how community is really stressed because in white society, the community isn't stressed, the individual is stressed. It's what you alluded to earlier. It's that change in thinking that is going to be the ultimate thing in making diversity happen.

LJ: That's right.

MB: Okay. I think I've taken up enough of your time.

LJ: Good! Oh great, no.

MB: Thank you very much.

LJ: You're welcome. I enjoyed it.

MB: If there's anything else that I go through, little names of people, is it all right if I call you?

LJ: Oh, absolutely. No, no problem. Just give me a call or e-mail me, either way is fine.

MB: Thank you very much, Dr. Jarvis. I appreciate you taking the time. You helped me along and hopefully I got some good history, I guess, is what Professor Wagenaar, that's what he's talking about.

LJ: Sure. Good deal. So what's your major, Mark?

MB: I'm a history major, political science minor.