

Interviewee: Torres, Juan

Interview Date: July 13, 2009

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Juan Torres
Mexican Americans – Magnolia Park

Interviewed by: Natalie Garza
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Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes
Location:

NG: This is Natalie Garza and I am interviewing Juan Torres on July 13, 2009 at his home on Willowdale. Okay could you tell me your full name?

JT: My name is Juan Torres, Jr. but all through my school years I was Johnny Cantu Torres. When I joined the air force I had to change my name because of the way it was written so I changed it to Juan Torres, Jr.

NG: Do you go by Juan or Johnny?

JT: Most of my friends call me Johnny.

NG: When were you born?

JT: October 21, 1944.

NG: Where were you born?

JT: In Houston, in Magnolia.

NG: Were you born in a hospital?

JT: In a hospital.

NG: Okay. Where did you go to high school?

JT: I graduated from Milby High School. I went to DeZavala Elementary and then Edison Junior High school.

NG: When did you graduate from high school?

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JT: 1963.

NG: Did you continue your education after that?

JT: Yes I did. I was taking a business course and I was taking some courses at U of H and I attended Southwestern Business College where I was taking electrical drafting and when I completed that I went looking for a job and it was hard for me to find a job because the first thing they would ask me, because they were drafting for the Vietnam war so I joined the air force with the understanding that they were going to send me to an electronics school, which they did. I spent six months, three months at basic training in Lackland and from there they sent me to Biloxi for a year for electronics training and from there I was a radio technician. From there I was transferred to Sundance, Wyoming at the radar site where I maintained the equipment and the radar site. I did attend Blackhill State College. That was in South Dakota. I took this course called "The New Math" and it was terrible and I just dropped out of it because it was completely different. I made good grades in math but that was hard to understand. When I came back I took some courses in accounting also. That is about it, I never completed college though.

NG: In the air force, with the air force you never had to go abroad?

JT: No I never did. I was stationed in Sundance, Wyoming at the radar site there and from there I came to Perrin air force base in Sherman, Texas.

NG: When did you get out of the air force?

JT: 1968 and I attended a few courses, accounting it was called South Texas College which is now University of Houston Downtown.

NG: When you got out of the air force where did you go to work?

JT: Well my dad, I worked with P.I. in Dallas for about a year and then my dad kept

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calling me to come home because they were in tax problems so I came back and got them out of the tax problems that they had so I stayed working with them until one year, 1974. In 1974 I started my own tortilleria out of old equipment that they had, my dad had. So I repaired it and started my own tortilleria. I did real good with it except it was long hours and I could not find the right personnel to supervise my routes and it was a 24 hour job. Sometimes they would call me to go, you know the machines broke down and I would have to go repair them. That was that. Now what I am doing now is just distributing. I'm buying the tortillas and reselling them. Now I only work two and a half days. Before I had, when we had like 11 trucks when I had my tortilleria, I had some Kroger stores, Safeway and I kind of outgrew myself and I couldn't find the right personnel to help me. So I decided just to go into distributing.

NG: So you said you grew up in Magnolia?

JT: Yes.

NG: Where did you grow up?

JT: 7626 Avenue H, it is right there well it's almost in the heart of Magnolia, near DeZavala Park. I remember walking, well DeZavala was right there a half of a block away. But I enjoyed walking from my house and you know a whole group of us would go and walk down Avenue H to Williams and then Edison was right there. We walked like a good 15 blocks before we got to Edison but on the way we kept picking up other students. Then when I went to Milby I took the Metro, what is Metro now? They gave us the bus card which we got to ride on the bus free.

NG: Can you describe what Magnolia what the neighborhood was like?

JT: For us it was fun. DeZavala Park was there and then we had the Junior Forum

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which was on the same block that I grew up on. Ms. New, I remember there was a director there at the Houston Junior Forum and they used to take us during the summer to different trips, the ice cream manufacturers and the bread Mrs. Baird's bread, different trips to the zoo and all that. Other than that we did have gangs there but not as bad as now. Before it was hand to hand now it is guns and chains and all that but it was mostly hand to hand. We, the guys I grew up with I guess we were more lovers than fighters. But we were friends with... they had the Baches, they had the Olympics but we were friends with both of them I mean both gangs.

NG: Those were two gangs the Baches and the Olympics?

JT: Yeah. One time we did make the newspapers. I think it was New Years Eve and the Baches were friendly with the gang from Denver Harbor called the Fuzzies. The Baches came over and they were, they didn't like the Fuzzies so someone took out a gun and started shooting and one of my friends, Little Joe Garcia, got hit, just grazed on the head and I jumped the fence to go get the station wagon that dad used to deliver tortillas with. It was a tortilla wagon during the day and it was a party wagon at night. So I went and got it and got Joe and took him to the Parkview Clinic Hospital, it was a hospital then. But it was closed so we finally had to go downtown to Ben Taub and when I jumped the fence a dog bit me I still have the dog bite mark on my leg. We made the papers, The Houston Press at that time it was The Houston Press. I did everything. I worked for... I always worked. I worked with my Tio Nico in *La Moderna* store and he also had the variety. I think he was in partners with Mr. Flores, Rosa Flores, I think that was her dad that was partnered with my Tio Nico. I guess I had, I was there because my Tio Nico was involved in high society, *las familias unidas*. I always... he used to take

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me and my cousin to those meetings and I got to stand in a lot of dances as an escort to the debutants that they had. I had to wear a tuxedo and everything. It was fun. What else? I worked with my Tio Nico. I worked with Pancho *con La Mejor Pan*. Until I was tall enough to reach the switch on the molino that is when I started working with dad. He put me to work. When my dad had the tortilla factory he used to sell like day old tortillas and there was always people coming during the day and in the afternoon and they were going to buy masa for them to make tamales. It was always busy. My sister was... I think she kept me out of sports because if I didn't do what I did then she would have to do it. My sister was eleven years older than I am. What else?

NG: She didn't work in the?

JT: Yes, well no she was more like the bookkeeper that's all. She did work but she just kept the books and I did most of the selling when they came by and grinding the corn. I also distributed like I said earlier. We used to deliver back then in the station wagon. That is why I said... I used it to go take the products to the stores and then at night it was my party wagon we used to go. It was good and my dad helped me a lot. I remember one time I was playing basketball with my friends across the street and he called me over and he said, "Johnny, change the brakes the brake shoes on that truck." "Why?" He said, "*los frenos*" I said, "what are the *frenos*" I knew them as brekas. I said, "I don't know how to do it." He gave me a book and said, "Here this is going to tell you how to do it." Sure enough I did and it was a book and everything. That kind of helped me because when I went in the air force they had a lot of T.O.'s, which are technical orders, and I guess that's where I learned to read a lot. One time they had a problem with a radar set and Mr. Quito who was the service rep for the company that made the radar

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sets he could not figure it out. Then I recalled reading about a serial number that the CRT tubes, which is the television tubes, the big ones, and I told Mr. Quito about that so I went back and got the book and sure enough that was the serial number of the CRT tubes that were bad. They didn't take out all the water or something.

NG: You mentioned La Morena was that a grocery store?

JT: That was a grocery store that my uncle had...La Moderna

NG: The gangs that were in the neighborhood were they, how were they divided were they by territory?

JT: Yeah the Baches were on 74th and on H most of them and the Olympics they were on 78th and Avenue I. That's where they hung out mostly. But they were all from the neighborhood. There were no drugs at all back then. There was all just beer that we consumed. But I never saw anybody really taken drugs. There was a little bit of Mary Jane or weed. One time I did have to go we were over at my friends, Tony Telles house and his brother was, I guess he was selling weed and we were there and he called my friends brother's called the house and said that the police were going to be there. He told my friend that there was a coffee can of weed in the closet. So we put all the beer in the car and we went down on Old Galveston Road and we just poured all that weed into the commode because we didn't want to be caught with it. So we just flushed it down the commode. But as I say it wasn't that heavy as far as the weed.

NG: What was the background of people in the neighborhood like their, the ethnic background?

JT: Most of them were Mexicans from Mexican decent, most of them, all of them. I think the majority... my dad was born in Lockhart, Texas. He moved to Sugarland where

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he was playing baseball with the sugar group company, Imperial Sugar Company and then he moved to Houston. Well he met my mother in Seguin, Tejas and when they got married they came to Houston. My dad played baseball here in Houston, you know with just a group of guys that just played baseball. But they had all uniforms and it was a park right there on Navigation and Canal Street. He was a good ball player. Then he went into the tortilla business and he made his first... he worked with the water department here in Houston. Then he made his own tortilla machine out of... well he told me it was bed frames and it was right there on 76th and Avenue H which is now Don Arturos or used to be Don Arturos and then the faster machine came and he bought some and he moved the factory to where we lived behind in the garage, 7626 Avenue H. He had like four machines, the modern ones that made at that time, 600 dozen tortillas an hour. Now they are making like 1,000 an hour. From there he moved to 77th and Canal. He built the building and I can say that I... there is a wall there that I laid a brick in because he wanted me to learn that. In fact I was asking my wife if I had, because there was an article in *La Voz* because he built a house right there in Magnolia on Avenue H but on 77th and there was an article that he had been, where he was, he didn't want to move out of Magnolia he wanted to stay there. My dad was very, how can I say it, adventurous. He went, besides the tortilla he was part owner of *La Terraza* night club on McCarty. His partners were Frank Alonzo who had the band *Frank Alonzo y Sus Rancheros* and Chema, my cousin Jose Maria Lombrano was also a partner and they had it for five years. I think I was eleven years old I had to go with my mother because my mother went to *La Terraza* and it was fun. Alonzo was teaching me how to play the drums because he was a drummer and he just passed away he was a real famous drummer. Then my dad brought

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me an accordion and his mother, what was her name? Well she was a real famous accordion and she was teaching me how to play but I hated it, I hated every moment of it. But I learned how to play a little bit. I don't know what happened to the accordion that I had. One of the things that I grew up was Tejano music. I used to go a lot to the Pan American. The matinee was in the afternoon on Sundays, Sunday's matinee. The Tejano music, to me, was the big band. They had like 10 member band and like little Joe was real famous and Sunny Ozuna and they had big bands. In fact that is where I met my wife at one of the Stardust. She kind of liked the way I dance so she tripped me. What they call Tejano music is not what really Tejano music is. It was accordion it was more like Conjunto music than Tejano.

NG: Pan American was a movie theater?

JT: No it was a night club. It was located on Main Street. They had the, Friday and Saturday they had dances and then on Sunday afternoon they had a matinee and mostly everybody from... mostly it was what age group? 18 or 19 that went there. They were from different parts of town. We all had to stick the ones from Magnolia stuck together and the ones from north side stuck together. There were a few fights there but no so many. I think there were more fights here in Magnolia then. I recall one when we were at the ILA and there was a gang from south Houston that came to the party, well they raided the party and took a trash can but then somebody managed to take the trash can away. Then the four guys... it was mostly Magnolia there at the party. I remember my cousin barely hanging onto the wall because the police mans were coming and there were three or four guys hanging on the door of the car just to get away.

NG: So the night clubs like that, like the Pan American, I'm not too familiar with

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Houston so was that downtown?

JT: Yeah it was on Main Street.

NG: Was it a night club that on different days, did they have different music?

JT: No they had like the, it was mostly Tejano.

NG: That was a place that mostly Mexicans went?

JT: Right mostly Mexican Americans went. They used to have like on Saturdays they used to have weddings and stuff like that, it was a rental hall and the older people went on Saturdays and Fridays. The younger people went on Sunday matinee. There was another one called The Stardust and that was owned by one of the Neto Perez is that right? Neto Perez was a Tejano, he had a band that was Tejano. Then from there they went to the Starlight which was on Shepherd.

NG: How much did you have to pay to get in?

JT: It was like \$2 I think, yeah. You never went. Yeah my wife is from the valley.

NG: How would you get there to the night club?

JT: We drove we were 18. Like I said I had my party wagon.

NG: How did people dress?

JT: Real nice like me and my guys we went to Duke's Tailors downtown and bought tailor made pants and shirts and _____. They were dressed real not as you see them today with I don't know what they call those pants those loose. They were dressed nice. Everybody, even the girls were dressed to kill. I guess we were dressed to kill. We dressed up real good. Even then like in Edison it was blue jeans and then when we went to Milby, especially, all we did was khakis. Then when we went to Seniors we kind of started dressing up real nice. Like we were going ____ and stuff.

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NG: Where was La Terraza located was it in Magnolia?

JT: No it was in port Houston what they call port Houston on McCarty. That was mostly older people that went there. It was different stars from back then like Frank Alonzo y *Sus Rancheros* and Garzón Ponce and that's all I can remember because I was like eleven years old. We used to have fun because they had, they did have a *terrazza* on top and some living quarters and we used to go upstairs because there was a family. There was a family living up there and they were the bartenders. We used to go up and they had one son. We used to go up there and very nice. After when they had a break the _____ (25.9) they would go up there with their girlfriends and we were just listening.

NG: What other kind of memories do you have of Magnolia? Some of the things that other people told me about are like the ship channel.

JT: One time we had the American Legions there they had like a May fair. They had a pig covered with grease and whoever caught the pig would win a prize. They also had a pole that was also greased and whoever climbed the pole they would win a prize. They used to have a lot of dances there at the American Legion and every time it would get crowded. For a long time they had dances and hosted Tejano bands were playing there but those bands were the local from here in Houston. Like Josefa and I forgot other names that they had but they were local bands that would play at the American Legion. In the back we used to play baseball. The American Legion is in Magnolia and they have two posts there, post 472 and post 302. The *bolillos* had post 472 and they would meet in the big hall and the other posts were all Mexicanos from World War I, World War II and they would meet in a club room so there was discrimination there as far as that. But then

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we took it over, los Mexicanos, the Mexican Americans took it over and which now I am the commander of that post 472. You know I have real good memories about the dances there that we had. Of course there were some fights because of the different people that came from different parts of Houston. The Y, the old Magnolia Park YMCA they had a boxing program and a lot of good boxers came out of there. They went up to the Golden Gloves and won it. Alcala was one and Santo Montemayor was another one and my cousin Bear Torres, he was a Golden Glove champion and I think he went to Chicago for the national title and he lost. We had some good baseball teams. I played with the Magnolia Cats but we had some good baseball players. DeZavala Park they had dances there also. We always played basketball there. I played against different parks.

NG: Who organized the baseball teams?

JT: There was Benito Salmeo was one that started it. In fact they started *Parque Mexicano*, well that is in Central Park but he coached a lot of teams there and he helped baseball a lot. In fact they might name one of the Mason Park, baseball parks after him. He was real instrumental. My dad too he would always sponsor baseball teams. Different companies would sponsor baseball teams. When we had my factory we had the Magnolia Sharks which is a little league football. _____ was a big part having to do with the kids growing up.

NG: Did baseball teams, did they only play other Mexicano teams or did they?

JT: No they played the *bolillos* too. It was just like little league football they would go from here to Friendswood and play against them you know *con los bolillos*. I remember one time my son asked me, "Hey they called me a wet back what is a wet back?" But they played against *bolillos* too. One thing I often wonder where, in the back

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of Milby there was a black section there and I often wonder where they went to school at because being behind in Manchester behind Milby there were some black families there.

NG: But they didn't go to Milby?

JT: Not then they didn't go to Milby, probably now they do. I grew up in the same house my nephews did and when they went to high school they had to go to Austin High School instead of Milby. They kind of... Milby was closer to where I grew up then Austin is.

NG: So when you went to Milby was it mixed Mexicanos and whites?

JT: Yes, right it was. But it was a higher percentage of white. Now it is totally different it is like 98% Hispanics.

NG: Where did you first hear Tejano music was it from the live bands that came?

JT: Yes.

NG: There wasn't Tejano music on the radio or anything like that?

JT: There was a station in Rosenberg that had mostly all Tejano music and Maruca was a DJ, the radio announcer and then it started dying down and then it came back up what three years ago I think. They had a radio station that played 980 full Tejano that played. That was what do they call it, they broadcast from San Antonio in the morning and then in the afternoon they would be here in Houston. But there was only one Tejano music from Rosenberg that played. I think they didn't play every day they played mostly on weekends.

Woman Talking: (Inaudible) (3.2)

JT: Yeah we got involved and there was a group of business or people who wanted to buy I think it was channel 16 and I was part of that but we looked at it and somehow... it

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fell through but there was a group of businessmen that were trying to buy a TV station.

NG: For back then?

JT: Yeah.

NG: What were you trying to buy it for?

JT: Just so we could announce. I think the only one that had a TV program was Carlos Garcia, *Cita con Carlos*, and now days there is more but we wanted something I guess all day long as far as having a TV station.

NG: Like geared towards the Mexican Americans?

JT: Right.

NG: When was that?

JT: Oh gosh around '75, 1975 around there. I was also involved in because my dad was one of the founders of the Mexican Chamber of Commerce. When that Moody Park incident happened and I saw the name of the Mexican Chamber of Commerce I think Johnny Coronado was the one they interviewed from the Mexican Chamber of Commerce so I got interested in it and I joined the Mexican Chamber of Commerce. It was a good experience. I became Treasurer, I became the Vice President but it was mostly Mexican nationals that were involved in that. Like Jose la Cerda from the *Molcajetes*, no *La Cazuelas* and they didn't have any order like Robert's Rules of order and I think me and Mr. Vega, he used to work with Olshan's and we were delegates to TAMACC which is the Texas Mexican American Chamber of Commerce and we brought, me and Mr. Vega brought the first convention here from the TAMACC Convention here to Houston at the hotel Sheridan Hotel it was at. We were instrumental in bringing them to Houston. I remember _____ (35.5) I wanted them to come

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down to talk to us as far as organizing because we were not organized right. They were telling us how to, the bylaws about the bylaws and about Robert's rules of order. But then I was trying to get my friends who were in business to join the organization and then we could change it to the Mexican Chamber of Commerce but they didn't like to join because of the name Mexican Chamber of Commerce. Now you know there is the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and there are other groups. But I had some good experiences in that in the Mexican Chamber of Commerce.

NG: What was wrong with the name? Why did it bother them?

JT: Well it also bothered me because I've been through seven labels in my life. The first one through school is Latin American and Mexican American, Spanish speaking American, Chicano (which is a word) I tried for someone to tell me the definition of it. What else? Chicanos, Hispanics, another word is Latino and the Mexicans called us Pochos.

NG: So it was the label Mexican?

JT: Right it was the label instead of Mexican American. Even on the census I put down, I really don't think that they described us because they even had "Chicano" and I put "Other" I put American from Mexican decent.

NG: What were the goals of the Chamber of Commerce?

JT: Well it's like any other Chamber of Commerce to have seminars as far as setting up a business and helping the small business and having speakers from government to come and talk to us about taking loans from the SBA, the Small Business Administration and to help other businesses in that manner.

NG: Can you tell me about the Moody incident you said that that made you interested

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in?

JT: That was Travis Morales that started a riot there in Moody Park. Yeah it was over Jose Campos Torres he was a gentleman that was killed by the policemen. They stopped him and they arrested him and they beat him up and he was found in the bayou. How long ago was that? During their custody he was killed and there was a riot about that in Moody Park. They burned cars and everything.

NG: What happened to the people that rioted do you know?

JT: No I sure don't. I just read about it in the newspaper.

Woman: Were some of them arrested?

JT: Yeah some of them were arrested.

NG: How did people feel throughout the community about that incident?

JT: Real bad about that, that Torres being under police custody he got killed. That was the riot, the only riot that happened about that. I had a brother in law that was involved in La Raza Unida. There was a political party that was made up of people mostly from the valley, it started in the valley. It was mostly Mexican Americans and my brother in law was involved in that in La Raza Unida Party. One time I went to a, he invited me to go to a rally they had at Moody park. I went to it

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JT: Anyway I went to the rally and they were talking and what really got me off was when they said that, "*Los tenemos que quitar la 'P' de la frente, 'P' for pendejo.*" You know and I really I wasn't interested in joining that party.

NG: Alright you talked a little bit already about your dad's business. Tell me what business he owned?

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JT: He was the second tortilleria here in Houston. The first one being owned by Ninfa Lorenzo's family, they were the Rio Grandes and my dad was... they were in partnership with Tony Villasana and I think Tony Villasana broke away from Ninfa and I really don't know whether they were the second tortilleria or my dad was the second one, either way he was either second or third tortilleria here in Houston. It was mostly a neighborhood distributing tortillas here in the stores in the neighborhood, in Magnolia but then he extended to north side and we used to go out of town to like Rosenberg and El Campo and his biggest customer at that time was the Monterrey Houses, Mexican restaurant. They had a whole bunch of restaurants and we would deliver to the commissary there on Monroe Street. I remember one time I went to go and tell them to see if they would buy our flour because we were also making flour, we had just started making flour tortillas and I had to talk to David Garza, the owner the majority owner of Monterrey House so I had to do my presentation as far as selling. He had a dog right here and I was talking to him and all of the sudden the dog bit David I don't know for what reason. Anyway we got the account for the flour tortillas for 17 Monterrey Houses. But then Monterrey House went out of business they invested I think what I heard heavy in the refinery or in the oil but then they went broke and I got the Casa Ole account for my dad and Larry Foreman was one of... he started with Monterrey House as a dishwasher and went up and now he owns a Casa Ole, the franchise of Casa Ole and when I started my factory I got the Casa Ole's in Beaumont through Tom Sanders I believe was the owner in Beaumont and he made the tortillas and distributed them to the different stores and restaurants.

NG: What was his tortilleria called?

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JT: La Poblana Tortilleria.

NG: Even when he moved it to different locations it was still called La Poblana?

JT: It was still La Poblana.

NG: Did people, was it also available for people in the neighborhood to go buy?

JT: Oh yes the biggest day for us was for masa and all that was right before Christmas because they made a lot of tamales and we used to sell a lot of masa there. We used to have lines outside just waiting for the masa and we used to sell corn chucks and spices. Then my dad was the first one to start tacos de barbacoa. At that time we would go out of town and there were some slaughter houses that were giving away the beef heads. We were on the way back to Houston we would pick up those beef heads, bring them to the factory, and then cook them for the weekend and now they sell them by the pound, but before they were giving away the beef heads. My dad I think that was the first one there in Magnolia to start having a weekend barbacoa and menudo and that's one thing that I didn't like, one of the reasons that I got away from the family because it was all seven days a week. Me and my sister were part owners but then I think in '78 I believe that I separated. You know I sold my part to my sister.

NG: So you told me a little bit about some other products that they sold. They sold corn and flour tortillas?

JT: Yeah, tamales. Well in fact like one time my dad told me, well he held off until I was able to come to Houston because he started a chorizeria and tamales, they used to make tamales also. On the mass production type, they had a machine to make tamales that would put the meat inside the masa and chorizo tambien, chorizo Mexicano and well he had until he, I had to come before he dedicated the business. He waited for me to be

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able to come to Houston on leave from the air force. Also I made a tortilla counter because I had seen one in Dallas and being mechanical and electrical, I did one when the tortillas came off the machine they would count them and when they counted to three dozen it would drop them to another conveyor and all they had to do was put them in a bag. But I made it out of different things I had to buy but it worked.

NG: Where did your dad learn how to make tortillas?

JT: I really don't know. I guess simple. Yeah trial and error, that's the way I learned to make flour tortillas remember? It was just trial and error that's it. How he got into business or why? I don't know. I was one, he started in 1945 I was born in '44. But he was well liked in the neighborhood and he loved to play dominos and he was always at Tony's Drive In there in Magnolia and I guess he stopped drinking in his older age and they would tell him he was no fun no more. So nobody wanted to play dominos but he always went there to Tony's Drive In. Now I go to Tony's Drive In and my wife goes there whenever they have parties and that's just about the only place they have real Tejano music in the juke box. Tony Gonzales just passed away. He had been there for years and my dad used to go when his dad owned it. They both worked in the water department, Mr. Tony Gonzales and my dad, so that is how they knew each other. I thought about something and then I forgot. Now I only work three days a week and I do travel a lot. Like on Tuesdays I travel like 300 miles to go and make my rounds. But now I hire my son in law so he might be the one to do it. I really enjoy, some of these customers I've had for 30 years already. There is one in Hitchcock that I am thinking about because he stopped buying that much merchandise. I'm thinking about dropping him but he's been with me... I've know the family for 40 years so it is kind of hard to

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drop them.

NG: What is your business called now?

JT: Torres distributing.

NG: Where do you buy tortillas from?

JT: You know out of my dad's La Poblana my dad's business there were like four companies that grew out of that. Like now I am buying from Super Lopez and Ramiro Lopez one time I came out of the service and I wrote a letter to immigration so he would get his green card. Now he owns one of the biggest tortillerias. His brother owns another one. But they were four. Yeah they both worked. Everybody worked at La Poblana.

NG: So the tortillerias that grew out of there were from people...

JT: That worked for my dad right. Even La Azteca, Rogelio Rodriguez already passed but like I said there were like four companies that started from employees of my dad.

NG: When you started your business, your own tortilleria what was that one called?

JT: La Suprema

NG: Where was that located?

JT: It was located on 72nd and Hedrick. It was a warehouse that was owned by my dad. Well me and my sister bought it but then when we parted ways I kept our warehouses and that's where I started that.

NG: What happened to that business?

JT: I lost it. I took out a SBA loan and I guess I just lost it and gave up on it. The SBA took it.

NG: La Poblana how did that business end?

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JT: Management, bad management there was. My nephews took it over and it was just a cash management problem they had I think they had.

NG: When the business was... when your dad first started it and when it was thriving was there a lot of competition?

JT: Not really like I said he was the third one. One time a banker from Industrial State Bank he told me, "You'd better be careful because the mafia is coming in through the tortillerias." Sure enough La _____ came in from Chicago and three others started, they came in from La Espiga de Oro was from Chicago and sure enough I saw that. I told them, "Yeah you are right they are coming in from Chicago, the mafia is coming in." That did happen like, that year like four La Michoacana's and all them were also from Chicago.

NG: The meat markets?

JT: Yeah the meat markets. Well people that started in Chicago and then they moved down to Houston but that is who told me that, a banker that the mafia was coming from Chicago to Houston.

NG: At the time were there other places in Houston to buy Mexican food?

JT: Well the Monterrey House was one and they were smaller restaurants, like the one by Crespo's and Don Arturos in Magnolia there were various. Doneraki started in Magnolia right there which is now Don Carlos but their first restaurant was in Magnolia. They have various restaurants. The other thing that started in Magnolia which nobody knows is LULAC started in Magnolia but as far as the restaurants they weren't that famous but Monterey House was the biggest one here in Houston.

NG: You told me about a couple of organizations you were involved in. Were you

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involved in any other political or community?

JT: No well right now I am involved with the Milby Hispanic Alumni. The main purpose is to raise money to give scholarships to Milby graduates. Like this year and last year we gave out \$20,000 in scholarships to Milby graduates. We select 10 and each one gets \$2,000 scholarships. I am also with the American Legion I am commander of post 472 which we have 319 members. I am also the 22nd District Adjutant, in the service they call it Adjutant but it is a male secretary. There are thirteen posts which is almost 3,000 members and my wife is a 22nd District president of the auxiliary and that is the lady organization that is affiliated with the American Legion. My son is the 22nd District Squadron Commander for the Sons of the American Legion. That is about it. I enjoy bowling. We have been bowling for years. I was president of the Latin Bowlers club like I said earlier we were Latin so we called it the Latin Bowlers' Club. I was president for 11 years. From here we started other bowling clubs like in Victoria, San Antonio and Dallas. We even went to go bowling in Monterrey and one year they were bowling in Monterey and the next year they would come bowl against us here in Houston. Other than that that is about it. I am also a member of Knights of Columbus. Yeah I belong to the Grid Iron Tailgaters for the Texans home games.

NG: Where do you bowl in Houston?

JT: I bowl here on Fuqua and one thing about it we used to have the Latin Classic League and we started bowling on Lawndale Tropicana and that closed down and then we moved to Gulfgate and that closed down we went to Belford Lanes and that closed down so we went to Mimosa, the same thing happened it closed down. But finally we went to north side in North Shepherd Lanes and I think that was the last year that that

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league started. It was all Mexicanos. You had to be a Mexicano. Even Latin bowlers you couldn't join us unless you were Mexicano. We had quite a few that said their grandfather; *bolillos*, their grandfather was Hispanic and all that. But we did have, I think we had one of the biggest tournaments here at the Big Texan or the stadium. We had 129 teams but that was from different cities in Texas that came but they were all Mexicanos or Mexican Americans.

NG: What kinds of activities does the American Legion, what kind of activities are they involved in?

JT: We just got through with the 22nd District baseball. Our co sponsor sponsored Milby and Chavez. They played against Austin, Galena Park and different high schools. This Saturday there are playing the Second Division baseball tournament. From there they go to _____ (20.2) which is a state tournament. We also give out scholarships. We have volunteered at the V.A. hospital and we send kids to Boys State. This year we sent three to Boys State. That is sort of like a...they learn politics. They become counsel men for different cities; make believe cities but it is mock politics I guess you could call it. The ladies, the auxiliary send girls and they do the same thing. The boys stay at the University of Texas dormitory and that's where they have all their deals. We volunteer at the V.A. a lot.

NG: Are you involved at all with the 100 year anniversary coming up for Magnolia?

JT: Yes I am. I got to the meetings but I'm not really... I did the application for the 50163, it's now in Nebraska. We haven't heard anything about that other than that just help them when I can. Milby Hispanics they are involved as a group. I am also, there are three members which I am one of them that are involved with the Milby Alumni which is

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the *bolillos* part of it. I am one of the trustees. Like I said there are two other Milby Hispanic alumni. One time they wanted us to merge but we felt like they wanted our money instead so we decided against that. Other than that, that is the only organizations that I am involved in. I would like to say that my wife was the first Hispanic to bowl a 300 a perfect game of bowling.

NG: How do you feel about the anniversary coming up? What does it mean to you?

JT: It means a lot. Like I said, let me give you an example. The American Legion, most of the members grew up in that neighborhood. Like myself, we all moved out. But we all go back with the American Legion...we are proud of being from Magnolia. You can tell that Magnolia was well known even when I was in the air force. When I went from a radar site to a regular base people from San Antonio, they knew Magnolia. It was real famous. I am proud to be from there, very proud. That is why... I have American Legion close like two minutes on Dixie Drive but I would rather go over there because we know each other and we tell stories of what we did when we were younger. We are just proud to be from there.

NG: Is there anything else that you were hoping to talk about or that you would like to say?

JT: I already said everything.

NG: Okay well that's it.

End of interview