

Washington County Museum  
Oral History Interview with Jose Jaime  
February 11, 2001

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M= Michael  
J= Jose

M= Ok, this is Michael O'Rourke for the Washington County Historical Society, beginning an interview today with Jose Jaime. I guess I'm pronouncing that right?

J= Yeah.

M= And the date is the...

J= Eleventh of February, 2001.

M= Exactly. So Jose, I wonder if we could start at the beginning. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

J= I was born in Mexico, about 60 miles south of Mexico City in a town near Cuernavaca. If I say the name of the town, probably nobody will know about it. But I'll say it anyway, Mazatepec, the state of Morelos. Probably the better known city of the state is Cuernavaca and Cuernavaca is about 40 miles south. So I am still further south; twenty more miles. And that was awhile back. 1942.

M= 1942. And can you tell me a little bit about your family? What were your parents doing at that time?

J= My family is a farming family. We had our land and we cultivated the land in Mexico and it was really a lot of hard work and I will not say that we were really poor but we were surviving. The crops have never been that good in land that is supposed to be, well, giving us the crops only through the natural rain. And sometimes the rain was good, sometimes the rain was not. So it was up and down and we were ten children. I was the tenth of ten. So I probably got the benefit of being the baby and I did not work as hard in the fields as my other brothers and sisters. But a couple of them did see that our family wasn't that well off and decided to come up to the states as braceros in the late forties and it was an experience that I still remember. We were always waiting for their letters and even for their checks cause a lot of times we depended on their

checks to buy the seed, to buy everything that we needed to cultivate the land. So I was just a kid at that time.

M= And so these were two of your older siblings?

J= Siblings, yes.

M= And what were their names?

J= One of them is Tito Jaime and he is still up in the states. He decided to stay up here. He lives in California and the other one is Weuceslao and he is deceased. He developed stomach cancer and passed away.

M= And can you tell me a little bit about your mother and father? What were they like? As persons?

J= I could say that I was very attached to them because they were very loving and as much as they had to distribute their love to ten of us. Since I was the baby I probably got the best of, not only my parents, but also of all my siblings and they were very humble, very uneducated. They only went to, my mother only went to one year of grade school. My dad went to, I think, two years of grade school. And they had to leave school at that time because of the persecution and all of the problems that were happening at the time. So they only knew how to work hard in order to survive and that's how my brothers and sisters were raised. Where you need to work and work hard. In fact, my oldest brother who is down in California, I think he only went to three years of grade school.

M= And just for the record, what were your parents names?

J= My dad is Vincent, or Vicente Jaime. And my mom is Petra Toledo.

M= And are they still living?

J= Both of them passed away. My dad passed away in '79 at the ripe age of 77 years of age and my mother passed away in 1993, the ripe age of 93. So we were counting, just how many children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren my mother knew at the time of her passing away and we counted 210.

M= (laughs). Wow.

J= All together.

M= And you mentioned persecution? As a problem they experienced, can you tell me a little more about that?

J= Well in those days the Campesino Movement, under the leadership of Zapata, Emeliano Zapata, they were trying to fight for, the goal they had was that the lands belong to those who cultivate it. And of course there were a lot of haciendas, owners of large, large amounts of land and they would have all the people to work for them. Just basically like slaves. So they revolted against that and they joined forces and in fact they had a big army. Probably not properly armed but they did have an army, under the leadership of Zapata. In fact my mother's dad, my grandfather, Caprillo Toledo, was one of Zapata's generals.

M= So your mother's family anyway sounds quite involved with Zapata there?

J= Yes. Very much so.

M= And your father as well then?

J= They did not get as much. When they were married it was more like they were probably young at that age. Teenagers. And they didn't get involved as much. Their involvement was more into rearing a family and just be a family.

M= And were your parents religious people?

J= Very religious. Like the majority of our families in smaller towns, they concentrate a lot on the fact that if they don't have anything else, they will have a very strong attachment to their faith and to religion and to the family and such. I think they were part of the rest of the families that were ignorant; very uneducated, but very religious. And I would say that they were also very hardworking. Their families.

M= And so they were active in a church then? Where you lived?

J= They might not have known a true definition of their faith but they could actually die for their faith in the same manner that a lot of the Cristeros in the Cristero movement. They would be saying "Long live our Lady of Guadalupe," and "Long live Christ the King," and start fighting for their lives and willing to give their lives for the movement so even if they didn't know that well what their faith was. At least they couldn't define it but they definitely were committed to it.

M= And so you were brought up in...?

J= In that kind of spirit. Attached to the family. Attached to religion. Attached to looking after each other. Government programs were non-existent so we needed to survive and the only way we could survive is by helping each other. Not only as family but families to families and that was the way to do it. I should also say that because of my parents lack of education I was, when I was a kid I was seeing how hard they were working, my brothers and my dad and I asked my dad one time, "I don't want to be a farmer like you. How can I do something else besides farming?" He said, "The only thing that you can do is educate yourself." And I wanted to be a medical doctor and he says "well you know that we don't have the means to send you to the university." So one time there was a priest that came by and said, they give us a talk in our grade school, he

gave us a talk in our grade school, and they said “Who wants to go to the seminary to study?” And I was like ten or eleven, I didn’t know what seminary was but I understood to study (laughs) and I raised my hand and that’s how I landed to the seminary at the age of twelve. When I finished grade school I went to the seminary at the age of twelve for high school.

M= And this is a seminary in Mexico?

J= In Cuernavaca. And that’s how it started. I went to the seminary for high school in Cuernavaca and then they sent me to New Mexico, to a Mexican seminary for college. We called it philosophy. And then on my fourth year of college I was transferred from the seminary in New Mexico to Mount Angel seminary that coincided with Castro getting rid of the Catholic Church in Cuba as much as he could. So a lot of the seminarians needed a place to stay, so the seminary in New Mexico said we could offer more spaces but we need some of the present seminarians to go to another place. So that’s how I got sent up here.

M= Ah okay. From New Mexico because of the overflow from Cuba.

J= Yeah.

M= And just one other, well you said essentially it sounds like your mother at least, if you consider supporting Zapata a political act, it sounds like she was somewhat politically involved.

J= Very. In as much as she could be involved, being a female. It was more like in the back, not in front. Yeah.

M= And so would you say that both your parents were somewhat political people too?

J= In as much as you can be politically involved in a community where the priorities were basic survival. So belonging to a movement or something like that, you know, not having the education to read about it. They were not that politically involved. They could easily be motivated to do something, which they did. But on a permanent basis to be members of a political party or anything like that. No. They had other more important business to deal with like bringing food to the table.

M= Did they talk to their children about the way the world works though? Or other things like this? Did you get much of that from your parents?

J= Not much. You have to remember that in a small town, people didn’t probably know beyond their town. They didn’t have the means to go out for example to a big city of Cuernavaca or the big metropolis of Mexico City. It was a luxury they couldn’t afford.

M= And you mentioned how you got into the seminary how was school for you? It sounds like you were very interested in studying in school.

J= Ever since then, because I did not want to work in agriculture. I did not want to sweat and toil and just barely survive from all that sweat and toil. I wanted to continue on my education one way or another and if I couldn't get it from my parents I could get it from scholarships or the like. And in fact I went through my career, I got my bachelors at the seminary and then I also got my Masters of Divinity from the seminary and then I got my Masters of Arts from the seminary. And just recently, in '97, I graduated from PSU with a Masters in Social Work, subsidized by OHSU, the place where I was working. I have always believed that education is the way to go if you want to get ahead.

M= Has it been easy for you to be a student?

J= It has because I have always liked to study. I have always liked books. I have always been enjoying reading and I have always like to update myself. In '86 when I got married and we started having children, one of the children that we had was a computer. So I figured my children can grow up with the computers. It's the computer age. So now that they're growing, they're growing up also with the same type of, not as much intensity and commitment to education cause they probably have it better off then I had it when I was a kid so they cannot comprehend that yet. But hopefully they will.

M= And the motivation is not as strong?

J= Not as strong. Yeah.

M= And so you came up here in '63 was it?

J= In '61.

M= '61.

J= Yeah. In '63 I first came to Washington County to work with the Valley Migrant League.

M= In '61 you came to Mount Angel?

J= To Mount Angel to graduate college. Then I went back to Mexico and part of the process in the seminary was that after we finished college we were teachers to the high school seminary for a year or two. And so I was there for two years and I was teaching English and I was also working for the Diocese newspaper as the co-editor of the paper at that time.

M= And then you went back to Mexico and then came up here in '63?

J= And then I came back for post-graduate studies to study philosophy, to study theology after my philosophy years to study theology. In '65, in '63 I came here to work for, help with the Valley Migrant League. '61, '63 I was here. In '65, '67, '65 is when I first came here to Hillsboro, to help out with the Valley Migrant League. I'm misplacing the years. It was '65.

M= Oh '65.

J= Yeah. It's going back too long. (laughs). But '65, '67 I came here to continue my studies in theology.

M= Okay and you came to continue studies in theology. Okay.

J= And then the summer I would work in different places just because we couldn't afford, I couldn't afford to go back to Mexico in the summers. I had to stay here and work in different places that I was able to locate. And then in '67 I went back to Mexico because I wanted to join, instead of being in the seminary, I wanted to join the newly founded Benedictine Priory that Mount Angel was establishing in Cuernavaca. So I joined the Benedictines in '67.

M= And during that '65-'67 period when you very working with the Valley Migrant League can you tell me a little bit about that? What your work was and what the organization was like?

J= The Valley Migrant League was not really having a, how can I put it? The Hispanic community was not really accepting of the programs that the Valley Migrant League was offering to them. There was another lady that used to be the head of the Valley Migrant League and was aware that they were not giving to the Hispanic community what the Hispanic community needed. So she decided to leave that agency and start forming another one with the Hispanic community. And it was called Viva, which was Volunteers in Vanguard Action. Her name was Ruby Illi and I don't know where she is, if she's still alive or what. But anyway she had quite a follow-up with the Hispanic community and they were more politically, how can I put it? More politically...with more political teeth? You know, fight for a cause? Whereas the Valley Migrant League was more or less complacent with having the funding from the federal government to do programs.

M= So Viva was more activist?

J= More of an activist agency than Valley Migrant League. But the person that stayed with the Valley Migrant League was a young man that was full of idealism. He came to the seminary to talk to two of us to see if we were interested in coming to rescue the Valley Migrant League. One of them was Joe Garcia from California and me, from Mexico and we talked about it and Joe and I decided to see if we could rescue the Valley Migrant League at that time so he was the, he got the job of the director of the Valley Migrant League in Hillsboro and I was like a program aide.

M= And who was the person that came to you?

J= His name is John Hughes.

M= And his position at that time?

J= He was like, I don't know if he was assistant to Ruby Illi, Assistant to director or what kind of position he had. But he is the one that asked us to see if we could come and rescue the agency. And we did.

M= And Ruby Illi at that time was...?

J= There were two agencies fighting against each other. (Laughs). One with money and funding for problems and the other more with the commitment of the Hispanic community.

M= Okay. So that would be the Viva organization.

J= So John Hughes, now his brother is the mayor of Hillsboro. Tom Hughes.

M= Okay. But Ruby Illi then supported this idea of reinvigorating the Valley Migrant League?

J= No she left. She left the Valley Migrant League. She was not happy with how things were coming along. Because she was so activist they didn't want people like that in a federally funded agency.

M= And Ruby Illi was not Hispanic?

J= No, but she knew Spanish. She was quite bilingual and I would even say quite bicultural.

M= So she had some real contact with the community there.

J= Very much. Very much so. Whereas John Hughes was not bilingual, was not bicultural and that's why he wanted to get the two of us here to help out.

M= And when you say to rescue the Valley Migrant League was it in actual trouble at that point then? Or was it just the lack of support from the Hispanic community?

J= It was the lack of support from the Hispanic community basically. They had, I mean those agencies were really funded with a lot of money and people were not seeing results. Good results for the Hispanic community. So in a way it was kind of tricky for us because we needed to convince the Hispanic community that the agency did have some problems that were worth their while. And it was going to be only temporarily, for three months during the summer because we needed to go back to the seminary in September. So we decide to give it was try and yeah.

M= And how did it work then?

J= I think it worked fine. It was at that time, one of the projects that we had was to invoke the ability of churches to help out. And at that time, one of the principles that we had was if these migrant families were to be getting out of poverty they need to be out of their cycle of migrancy. So our emphasis was in establishing ways so that families could settle in Washington County. So we had like about twelve or fourteen churches that were able to save for kind of "adopting" a family for six months. They would provide housing and employment for six months so that the

family did not have to worry about anything but to look for good/gainful employment and house. And most of them ended up getting jobs with Tektronics which was, in those years, just beginning.

M= Right. I worked out in Tek in those years.

J= And they were all able to find a house and buy it because they were able to save six months of rent and they could buy their homes. So at least twelve to fourteen families were able to benefit from that program and they settled down and they were really the ones that became the core of the Hispanic community to start a lot of other problems like the Centro Cultural the original clinic and the like.

M= And could you tell me maybe in general what the situation of the Hispanic community was in those days compared to now?

J= The Hispanic community was definitely much, much smaller. The Hispanic community only increased in big numbers during the summer for the crops. To pick up the crops.

M= And this is the migrancy that is the problem you were talking about earlier?

J= Right. Right. Definitely in that time you wouldn't see all the many signs in Spanish. In the different stores and in different malls like you see nowadays. At that time, we were probably thinking that the Hispanic community increased in the state of Oregon, to about 70/80 thousand a year during the summer months. When I came back, years later, the number had increased to more, but it was more single men than families. In those years it was mostly families in the cycle of migrancy. So the camps, in the migrant camps, were really something, well, I should say like slave camps because it was probably, I wouldn't say that this room was much bigger or much smaller. Maybe about this size. In which they would fit a family of 6, 8, 10 people with just two large bunk beds. And everything was in here, the kitchen, and they would go outside for their toiletry needs. So it got only worse because with the years those cabins, as they were called, those cabins became deteriorated and the farmers never really took living conditions seriously. There were about 30 plus migrant camps and we could never say we recommend this camp with good living conditions for the families.

M= Cause there weren't any to be recommended.

J= No.

M= And that's changed now I assume?

J= Well the camps are older, the cabins are deteriorated so they are worse. And that's why families don't even come.

M= You mean now the camps aren't even much better.



J= Yeah they are worse. They are much worse.

M= Uh huh. Ok.

J= There might be one or two camps that could probably say well this has improved a lot. But there are not too many.

M= So it sounds like it's still a problem then.

J= Oh yeah. It is still a problem. There has been housing developed for the migrant families now in the different towns, in Hillsboro, in Forest Grove and it's pretty much improved. It looks like a set of uh, complex of apartments.

M= So there's an alternative anyway.

J= Yeah, there has been an alternative. But the camps themselves have not been improved.

M= So you took that assignment on then for the summer to work on rehabilitating the Valley Migrant League and you mentioned the program that established the twelve or fourteen families...

J= One of the projects that we had, since we knew that we were going to be there temporarily, was to look for people of the community that could take over the Valley Migrant League. And it was then at that time that we got from the migrant families an individual that became the director of the Valley Migrant League in Hillsboro and his name is Sammi Montez and you're going to be hearing that name, or you should be hearing that name quite often. So that's uh, that was our legacy to get some individuals from the migrant families themselves, to take over the Valley Migrant League.

M= So you identified Montez then during this three month time also?

J= Yeah, it was Sammi Montez and John Little. Actually John Little was the director, Sammi Montez was the director later on. But we got him to work for us as a program aide.

M= And would you say what happened to the Valley Migrant League then, after that, did they...

J= A happy death. The Valley Migrant League died a happy death. When the funding doesn't arrive anymore that's it. They just disband.

M= Right...but in the interval, when it still enjoyed some funding, it sounds like they were in better contact with the community than previously.

J= Pretty much so. Pretty much so.

M= So you thought it was improved?

J= It was a quick stint but after we left I think it was improved and we came back and forth during the school year to see how things were coming along just to visit and stay together with them and there was not as much of a problem for them to continue with the programs as there had been before.

M= And in the meantime, Viva was still side by side.

J= Yeah.

M= And did it remain the more activist organization?

J= It did remain the more activist, but of course, after, I don't know how long Ruby was staying here. Not much afterwards. I think she only stayed here for maybe a year or two and then after she was gone Viva went down.

M= Uh huh. Ok. And again the summer? Was that the summer of '65?

J= The summer of...I came back in the summer of '66.

M= The summer of '66. Okay. And then you went back to the seminary in Mexico. Is that right?

J= At the end of the school year 66/67.

M= Okay. And then what came next for you?

J= Well I was there in Mexico, 66/67, I went to Mexico City to continue my Theology studies in '68 and then in '69 I came back here to finish my Theology studies. In '70, I went back to Mexico and after I had completed my theology studies, I went back to Mexico to the Benedictine Monastery and I was just being a member of the community, planting a lot of avocado trees, we decided to, since the Benedictines have the tradition of trying to support themselves without having to live from the handouts from people so we started cultivating the land. So I went back to cultivating the land myself. We were growing corn, but we decided to start planting avocados, avocado trees, because we thought that on the long range planning that would be less work and probably more income. So we planted close to, maybe 2000 trees? And hopefully they are still remembering me, that I planted them. (laughs)

M= So your education brought you back to agricultural work?

J= Back to agricultural work, which I didn't mind because I did not have to sweat and toil in the same as my parents did. My brothers. We were only working a few hours and then go back to church and pray. So it was not too bad. And I stayed there until my ordination as a priest in 1971. And I was working in the seminary, in the monastery and we were in charge of the minor seminary of the diocese. So I was still teaching and helping out with different things until I was sent to Panama to the International Cooperatives Institute to study cooperatives because we wanted to help the community where the monastery was established. We wanted to make sure

that we could be part of their organizing so they could see other ways to bring revenues to their families needs and we thought that co-ops was the way to do it and in a way we were even subsidizing some of those co-ops. We had a rabbit co-op, a pig co-op and a chicken co-op and we involved like about, possibly about 30 families in each co-op so that they would use the animals to increase their income and their revenues as families. And as much as we were helping out the co-ops, the families were doing okay, as soon as we were not helping out, then the co-ops went down the drain. So I don't think we stayed long enough to make sure that the co-ops run by themselves. And the principle of the co-op is that it has to be the co-op members that need to make it survive, otherwise it will not survive. And that's what happened once I left, once the other individuals that were helping with the co-ops left. The spirit was not there.

M= And did you have any sense that that might be the outcome based on your knowledge of the people you were working with?

J= That's why I went to Panama to study and I knew if the people were not going to be taking ownership they were not going to be successful.

M= And what would you say was the problem there. Was it just that, I mean it sounds like you defined the problem. They didn't take ownership. They were relying too much on you.

J= I think it was like big daddy telling them "this is what you need," and them saying "I don't think that's what we need." I think it's the same problem that we had with the Valley Migrant League. The Feds saying "this is what you need. This is the money that we are giving you for your problems." And the people didn't take ownership.

M= Except in this case it sounds like at least big daddy was a little bit closer to the roots of the problem than the federal government.

J= But it was an interesting process. My whole life has been a constant process of education. And the community, especially the community of the poor, it's so difficult to be partial with them if you are not with them. The poor know who is with them and who is not. And I think no matter where the poor live, that's the case. So in order to convince the poor to help themselves, they don't have to do it. People coming from the outside are probably not the best to be part and partial with them.

M= And when you say, the know whether you're with them, do you mean like literally with them in terms of your own economic circumstances? So you have to be one of them, is that what you're saying?

J= Yeah. Basically. That's what happened to Zapata. He was successful because he was one of them. And they knew he was one of them. He was one of the peons working hard in one of the haciendas.

M= And so if you're outside of the poor community, no matter how much you educate yourself and no matter how hard you try to identify with their situation you won't gain acceptance?

J= You are a foreigner to them. So anyway, that was quite an experience. So when I came back in '77 and I came back here because the superior of the monastery was not very happy that I was too involved with the people in the parish and organizing them in co-ops. He wanted me to be more of a hermit and just be in prayers and in the chapel. So he says, "Why don't you just go back to Mt. Angel and learn some more from our Mother Abbey?" (laughs).

So I came back and that's when I started working for my Master's degree in Master of Divinity and Master of Arts in '77 and '78 I got my two degrees and that's when I took the opportunity to get back into the Hispanic community involvement here. The local priest, Father Francisco, I think he should be interviewed by the historical society because he did *a lot* of work for the Hispanic community. He was going through a process of maybe feeling burnt out, so he needed some help. So he asked me if I could help. It coincided with the fact that Centro Cultural had been established, I think Centro Cultural was established in '71 or '72 and had gone through different projects, the Hispanic community were really part of it and that's why it lasted so long. And they were trying to get funding, but not from the feds, more from their own, but they were selling enchiladas and they were selling Mexican meals to raise funds to buy a house in Cornelius. And the church, the Catholic church in Cornelius was always part and partial of Centro Cultural.

So Father Arnie Beezer is the one that founded Centro Cultural with the Hispanic community. The 12/14 families that I told you were settled during the years of the Valley Migrant League, they were the core group that founded Centro Cultural. They had been working together in '77 when I was visiting Centro Cultural and the programs, I got into a good relationship. In '78 they had some serious problems, so they asked me if I would want to come back and work for them and with them. So I said, "Well..I don't know. I don't know. We'll have to wait and see what happens. "

So in '77, I went back to Mexico. I stayed '76/'77, getting my degrees, I left in '77 came back in '78 and I said because they want to see me. They really wanted me to come back and work for them in Hillsboro. So I said, "okay, I'll see if I can get permission from my superiors and I'll go."

So I came back and I was working with Father Frank taking care of the mission church here in Cornelius and I was working full-time. The only way I could come is by being subsidized, not by the diocese because they didn't have any funding or whatever, but I looked for funding for myself. So I got a job with the local Washington County Community Action and they put me to work for the programs for the Hispanic community and one of the programs was to resurrect Centro Cultural because it had been disbanded.

So from '78 to '80 we started reformatting the board of directors of Centro Cultural. We started analyzing the by-laws and getting young blood on the board of directors and my philosophy has always been that if this was an agency of the community, it had to be run by the community. So I gave myself a couple of years to see if I could achieve that. And so the first thing that I did was to get young people as board members. In fact, one of those young people that was a member of the board is Enedelia Hernandez, who is now the principal of Echo Shaw in Cornelius. Another one was Margaret Garza who was the director of the Fairplex here in Hillsboro. I mean those people that were involved became real leaders and not only in the Hispanic community but the community at large. So in a way I feel good about it.

At that time, the city of Cornelius had requested funding to build the community center in Cornelius and they got the money from block ... (?) When they found out that the money did not come with administration monies they said, "We don't want it". I was the director of Centro Cultural at that time and well the money has been approved, we want it. We want to build the community center and we will administer it. We'll worry about administration expenses. So there was, I mean, it was a political battle that polarized Cornelius.

M= I'll bet.

J= So they didn't have a staff at Centro Cultural. They had volunteers. Centro Cultural had always been running with volunteers; either through Vista volunteers or Jesuit volunteers, or volunteers from the community. But we had the power. We had all the people interested in helping out, so we started canvassing Cornelius house to house and convincing them that the money had been approved to build the community center; that we could do it. We even offered a collateral; the old building that we had for Centro Cultural was a collateral, that we were responsible.

Anyway, we finally got the money through a lot of sweat and toil. This was real sweat and toil. Not the migrant sweat and toil. A different kind of sweat and toil! (laughs). But we finally got the money. We have the funding. I was a member of the public advisory board for the program so I started talking to each one of the individuals on the public advisory board saying "hey, this is a good thing for the community at large and we can run it." So all the political involvement, all the political savvy that I was able to grasp from many places, I was able to use it. And we finally got the money. I also wanted to make sure that the Centro Cultural did not have lack of funding at least for the director and a couple of other staff people. And so I went to United Way and I said this is an agency that merits membership in the united way. And through a lot of political maneuverings, through a lot of involvement from the community they finally accepted and they got Centro Cultural as a member. So we secured at least 25% of the revenues for Centro Cultural to pay the executive director and at least one or two other people on the staff. So I said "Ok now we are ready to put somebody as executive director of this agency" and we posted the position and we got Enrique Marina to come and be the director. Enrique Marina was a classmate of mine in the seminary.

M= Oh you were the acting director until that time then?

J= I was the acting director because I wanted to go back to Mexico.

M= Okay, so you weren't interested in becoming the permanent executive director?

J= I was never interested in being the permanent. I always think that if an agency is going to survive, it's the people that form the agency that need to take ownership.

M= But of course you were sort of involved in forming this agency.

J= Uh huh. So when he became the director he got all the funding to build the community center. What originally was going to be a 500,000 community center because of all the time that it took for finally us getting the money and start building and all the problems in the construction project, I think it became an 800,000 dollar building which was fine. I mean we could live with that. And so once it was built I came to the inauguration of the building and it was beautiful to see, you know, that the families had gotten together. The Hispanic community was feeling really good and proud of their center, although it was a community center, but it was the community center of Cornelius RUN by Centro Cultural, administered by Centro Cultural.

So it went fine until '84 and they were having again some more problems. Basically they had been using some of the funding for some other projects. They were going through what the poor go through. They borrowed from Peter to pay Paul. They were using funding from some programs to pay the utilities and then all of a sudden, these programs that provided X number of dollars, the money was not there anymore. And so the board of directors decided to let the executive director go. So they were without a director and without a way to pay for the director. Although they had the funding from United Way it was in jeopardy. So they went back to Mexico and they said "Jose Jaime, can you come to help us out again?"

M= And so you were in Mexico for the interim period?

J= Yeah. So I said "I'll give it a try only for a year." So they said "if nothing else, just to rescue us for a year." So I came back in '84, about May of '84, and started reorganizing the Hispanic community. All the main leaders and started working together again and I think we made a big point of making the agency be of credit to the community at large. My issue was, in a year, I need to get one of the children, of the funding families to be the executive director of Centro Cultural because I knew that that was very important. And we had many candidates that applied for the position, in '85 we had two final candidates for the position and the two of them were members of the founding fathers children. One of them was Arturo Cortez and the other one was Ruma Perez. So the board decided to hire Ruma Perez and he was the director from '85 through '92 I think. I left in '91. He stayed another year of two, '92 or '93. And he was there as the director and in '85 I went back to Mexico again.

In September of '85 we had the huge earthquake in Mexico City and I was down there. I was mopping the floor and because I was staying with my mom and working at the parish nearby and it was a lot of devastation. Luckily, my hometown did not suffer any damages. But I went back to Mexico because I was ambivalent as to continue working as a priest or leave the ministry and I wanted to be near my bishop so I could consult with him and have him as my counselor and advisor. So around November, I made the decision that I was going to leave the ministry. So in December, I came back here to Oregon and I ended up looking for employment here in Oregon and there was a position for a problem I had received a grant for. The education department of Centro Cultural so I applied for that position. The person that I hired as executive director hired me and I thought it was wise because then I could continue helping him, I could be a mentor to him without necessarily being on the spotlight and help him out from the sidelines.

So we started working on other problems like...when I was with the community action agency we founded the translators bureau, which was transferred from community action to Centro Cultural because it was a source of revenue and a source of income for Centro Cultural. So I was the director of the Translators Bureau of the Agency Department and I stayed there until...I was hired in February of '86 and then I married in May of '86 and I worked for Centro Cultural until '91 and then I got a job. I had come to the point of saying if I work for a non-profit agency, I will end up with non-profit, which is the plight of the poor. And being already of age, having family...three young kids, trying to work for a non-profit was really bugging me. And my interest was, I want the families to take ownership of Centro Cultural, they have already taken ownership, it's time for me to go and let them be on their own. So I applied to different agencies and the first one that called me, if I want to work for them was the probations office here in Washington County. I was here for a couple of months. In the meantime, another state agency asked me if I want to work for them they will increase my salary and I went for a few more months and OHSU came and said "we'd pay you better, come to work for us." So I ended up at OHSU from '92 through '99 and then I applied here for the job as one of the supervisors of the immigration center and I was hired. I've been here since September of '99.

M= Okay...let's back up a little bit on these jobs. So you worked for awhile in the probation office here in Washington County government. What was your specific duties?

J= Probations officer.

M= You say you'd talk to people, monitor people that were on probation.

J= Yeah it was basically with the not too high of a risk offenders and it was a group, three of us that were in charge of all those individuals that just needed to come and report and pay their \$25 or \$30 dollars a month and tell them go see no more and come back next month and pay us (laughs). As long as they were compliant....that's what we're doing. If we could also have recommended bench probation for some of them, they were not really doing anything bad. It was only two months so I could not say I did master the job of a probation officer.

M= Were you working mostly with Hispanic clients then?

J= No. All the non-risky clients. I was social service specialist for CSD for a few more months. Also I did not really grasp the job that I needed to do there. You know, usually they put you in through a lot of training. And that was it and then I was transferred, I accepted the position with OHSU.

M= And what was that?

J= OHSU was very interesting because it was really more fulfillment of where I thought I was fulfilling a mission. I was helping families look for funding for their medical expenses. So I was a social service specialist in the financial aspect. Our goal was to help the families bring in revenues to OHSU. So we were helping the families and bringing revenues to the agency. And our group, we were only three of them, when I got there, and when I left we were fourteen. Our group was the only one that increased in number because of the money we were bringing in and we never suffered any cuts. Like some other departments were being cut 10% or 6% or 11% depending on which departments they were. Our department was increasing on a year to year basis, especially when the Oregon health plan came on board and we only had a window of time to make sure that the people who were eligible for that particular program to be enrolled so they could pay their bills. So our group started making around 7-8 million dollars a year when we were only three. By the time I left, in '99, our group was making like 3-4 million a week.

M= When you say making this is like....

J= Bringing in revenues.

M= Money that...on behalf of your clients.

J= From the different providers. And I was dealing with all kinds of clients, not only Hispanic.

M= And what did...how did you raise the money?

J= Basically helping them get into all the different programs available to them. The Oregon health plan, Social Security, disability, aging services, CSD, you name it, wherever they could get funding.

M= Is there an example case that you remember, that demonstrates the creative thinking or whatever you had to do on the job in terms of matching people up with money.

J= Well I am remembering, for example, the case of a little girl, that her dad was making like about a \$100 dollars more and therefore, she was not going to qualify. She had an illness that needed to be treated. Because I don't remember if it was leukemia or what it was but she could have stayed in the hospital for about a month and if she would have spent less than 30 days she was not going to be eligible to get funding for this program of disability. And her dad was saying, "well, even if it's only \$10 a month, I will have to pay \$10 a month but I need the cure



for my child.” Well, anyway, what ended up was a rule in the disability services that the person is hospitalized more than 30 days even if the person is a child. The child can apply on her own right. And as it happened the child stayed more than 30 days, so she, we were able to enroll her on disability and we saved like, at least a million dollars.

M= That would have been her medical expenses you mean?

J= Uh huh.

M= And no way the family could pay?

J= No way. So the family, I mean it was a single parent, it was a single dad with a child. I don't remember how old she was. She was not a baby. She was maybe 7 or 8 or thereabouts. So we got the goal achieved. Funding for the client and revenue for OHSU and most of the cases were like that.

M= You just find ways to make it work..

J= In the case of an undocumented migrant worker who shot himself in the foot, literally. And there was no way that he would have been able to pay for his expenses. But we went through a program called, in the Oregon health plan there is Citizenship Way of Emergency Medical and he was fitting the categories of that program so we got funding for him too. And it was, I mean the cases are hundreds. No. Thousands. Thousands of cases that we dealt with.

M= And each one a little different.

J= I could not say that we were a 100% successful because if they did not qualify, they did not qualify. There was no way. But at least we could talk to OHSU to the fiscal department and this is the conditions that they could not pay much. So because they receive federal funding they have to open other types of earnings to help the people that cannot pay.

M= They had to take care of a certain number of cases.

J= So we were advocates for those that could not pay.

M= And you mentioned that your department was continuing to grow. I know that there were cutbacks at OHSU at that time. It sounds like you had support then from the administration?

J= Oh yeah. Definitely. It only behooved the administration to make our group successful. Our success was going to be their success.

M= Okay. I was wondering if I can backtrack just a little bit to some of the things you mentioned earlier in the interview.

J= Sure. Can we make it about fifteen more minutes?

M= Yeah, I think we can do it in that time. You mentioned there was this polarization in Cornelius in, I guess it was, the late seventies about the community center.

J= Yes the community center. In 78/79.

M= And the city of Cornelius was ready to turn this money down to build the community center.

J= They did. They were not going to. They did turn it down.

M= But you mentioned there was a polarization and a struggle for Central to get the money. Who was on the other side then? Was it the same people?

J= Nowadays, with the success of Centro Cultural, even people that were against it are saying they were part of it. That they were favoring it. So be it as it may, you know, if they want to take credit for it, that's fine. What was important for us was to have it built, and that's what happened.

M= But was it the group that felt they didn't want the money that turned it down, as opposed..?

J= It was the administration, the city administration. Yeah the mayor, the counselors, city administration. I mean, they turned it down. So they would be against it.

M= And they'd be against you taking it over too. And what sorts of arguments did they raise as to why Central shouldn't be allowed to take this project?

J= Well there were a lot of discriminatory arguments. They were saying we were going to be turning it into just a Hispanic agency, only to help Hispanics and arguments that many times didn't make sense. But it made sense to them. To the fact that quite a few of the residents in Cornelius were against it. In fact, we were afraid that people would go by and drive-by shooting, we were afraid. And that's why we had built a wall on the side of the street just to feel protected.

M= You mean so it was that polarized?

J= Oh yeah. When we built it, we built it with a wall. But thank goodness there were no serious incidents that I can remember, that ever happened. And once it was built I think the community has felt much better. I think the take now from the city is that all these non-profit agencies take land, usually good land that could be used for business, that could bring revenue to the city and are not bringing revenue to the city. And I know that there is an agency, a non-profit agency, that is trying to buy land in Cornelius that is trying to establish a Head Start project. And the city was opposed to selling the land because a lot of discriminatory remarks, likes "it's only going to be a bunch of Hispanic kids". Kids running around; it's going to effect the traffic, you know, all kinds of reasons. Anyway, the city finally approved it last week I think. But it took like about a 100 people, Hispanic people, members from the community that showed up to the meeting. And the people that were opposed were very few so they just finally ended up leaving and the measure was passed to approve the selling of the land and to allow this non-profit agency to build the head start.

M= And earlier, the thing I wanted to ask you about too, you mentioned that Centro Cultural was started up in the early seventies and then in...

J= I think it was in '72 that it was registered with the state as a non-profit agency.

M= And in those early days, I mean it was just five years later or so that you said it was already defunct and it needed to be resurrected.

J= Well they didn't have too many programs, it was more like a family agency. Just people getting together. In fact, some of the projects that they had were, one coming from Tektronix, they would send parts to put together, assemble and send them back. So they had about 12 or 14 workers doing that kind of a job. The profit was to fund the utilities of Centro Cultural because that's as much as they could get. There was also another program; they got like 12 sewing machines to do some sewing work in there. And they had an alcohol and drug program. They had English as a second language program. It was a two story house, so they really couldn't have too many programs running there. They also built a garage. A two car garage because they wanted to teach 10 people on how to be mechanics because most of the families had old cars that were breaking down all of the time and whenever they went to any other shop they would be charged an arm and a leg so they said well let's have this as a training program for people to be mechanics so that way we won't charge the clients too much and they could afford it. But it was at that time that a little girl, a five year old girl, Virginia Garcia, died in one of the migrant camps. And that's when we decided to use the garage instead as a clinic and that's where the original Virginia Garcia clinic was started.

M= So the auto mechanic school never really got started?

J= Never took off. And it was at that time that I came back. So the director of the Virginia Garcia clinic and I got on agreement that we would rent the space, the garage, and we would rent an office space in our two story building for him, so that he could be the director there.

M= And this is the house then?

J= The house, before we had Central, the new building. And then it was at that time that I was working for Community Action trying to raise the situation and the OHDC, Oregon Human Development Corporation came from California, it used to be California Human Development Corporation in Oregon and I had the director of that agency rent more office space in the house, to start his program for migrant and agricultural workers. So my philosophy has always been, we need to form coalitions, we need to work together. So that's why Central has always been at the center of these coalitions and other agencies.

M= And what had happened between the beginnings of Center Cultural and the time when you helped resurrect it. How did it fail in those first years?

J= It came to the point in which the board of directors and the community didn't think that the director was doing the job that he was supposed to.

M= And that was the crisis of leadership?

J= Both times.

M= Both times. And I wanted to ask you a little bit about the '84 situation too. You mentioned that they were borrowing money from project funds to pay the utility bills etcetera. And that there was an economic problem and that the board decided to let the director go. But then they got you involved. How was the economic problem solved?

J= What we did was to justify the \$25,000 or thereabouts that were given to this particular project. We were able to justify by bringing in volunteers to do all the work that was supposed to be done by this project and we were documenting on a monthly basis our progress of that project until we were satisfied that we had more than the job that was expected from that project. And the church that gave the money said "you have done it. That's fine".

M= Okay so they didn't care that you did it with volunteer work as opposed to...

J= No, as long as the work was done.

M= And then, one other question that I had, a couple of other questions actually. One, both having to do with you more personally, you mentioned you had some ambivalence about continuing as a priest and that you went back to consult with your bishop in Mexico. This must have been a trusted friend or leader.

J= Bishop ...Mendez may he rest in peace. He was very politically involved in the state, in the nation and in the world. He was going to all kinds of conferences. But at the same time he was very human and I was very attached to him. So that's why I decided to get the wisdom from him to make an informed decision cause it was important. I had been very happy and had worked very well as a priest and I wanted to do likewise if I left the ministry. And to this day I couldn't truly tell you, was I happier in the ministry or am I happier now? I cannot tell you. I am happy as a family person as I was happy as a priest.

M= And was it the desire to live a normal life? To get married and have a family? Was that part of it?

J= That was part of it because I thought, "well I am here at this age, in which I decide to continue in the ministry, I want to be dedicated a 100% to the ministry. I don't want to be having any more ambivalences. But if I am going to be leaving, I need to do it now. So it was, when I went back to my bishop and stayed there for a year, I had not made up my mind one way or the other. In fact, I was probably more inclined to staying.

M= And then how did your decision making process develop then?

J= Talking about it, discussing it out loud, saying what the future would expect from me, in the ministry. And what would be the future if it was not in the ministry. And I thought the challenge was more of a challenge to go into the unknown then staying to the known, kind of a career. And basically it was like somebody saying “okay, this is it.” I don’t know what that is, but I called the bishop. I think this is it. I’m leaving. “you go with my blessing.”

M= And he helped you arrive at that point?

J= Yeah.

M= And how did he do that? How did he help?

J= Listening. Mostly. Mostly listening and orientation; I know that he could not make a decision for me and I was not expecting him to make a decision for me. But at the same time he helped me make a more informed decision and it helped me also to feel good about it because I know that he was supporting.

M= And did you stay in contact with him afterwards?

J= All the time. All the time. Every time that I went to Mexico I always went to visit him.

M= And then you mentioned that you married. In what year was that?

J= '86.

M= '86. Okay. And how did you meet your wife?

J= In Cornelius. She is from Mexico; from Veracruz. But she was working here. She was working in one of the factories. She had an access to come into Central for assistance and help and we started, I started, her sister used to invite me, her sister and her family used to invite me to have meals every now and then, and then I would see her there with her sister. But there was nothing at that time until later where I decided “okay, that’s time”. So I went back in December, came back in December of '85, I started seeing her.

M= And since, you said you have three children now?

J= Three children. She had one of her own that she was raising and we are now proud parents of two grandchildren from him. And all boys. My children are all boys and his children are all boys. (laughs). The two of them.

M= And so the family is doing well?

J= We are making the 210 increase.

M= Okay Jose, well I want to thank you very much for this interview, but before we stop is there any other subject matter that we haven’t discussed so far that you’d like to talk about?

J= Well I think that the presence of the Hispanic community in Oregon is going to be more and more important. I think we are here to stay. And I always like to think that all the territory that was taken away from Mexico back in the 1800's we're going to take it back. One way or another and if nothing else by our presence. Our presence is increasing by leaps and bounds and we are going to be the main source of labor for the nation. In ten years, the white Anglo-Saxon majority will be very old and in need of people to work for them; do the work for them because they won't be able to do it and we are going to do it. And then, I think we are going to be seeing a reversal but the minority of the people here are going to be the whites, the majority are going to be the minorities. Not only Hispanics, but the minorities. Hispanics, Asians, African Americans and the country will turnaround in a different way. And I don't know what's going to be that way because it's kind of difficult to predict you know? We have the ability nowadays of information right the second it happens and not only Hispanics but all the minority groups are not privy to that kind of access to that information. But it's coming. It's just a matter of time and I'm really excited. I'm looking forward to those years to see my children be part of that new movement that is going to be taking place. And I don't know. I don't know what is going to be taking place but I want them to be part of it in the same manner that I was part of it, you know, throughout my life. Sometimes I feel tired, I feel like, sometimes people suggest, why don't you run for office? I mean, all the people who know you, why don't you run for any type of office, political office? And I want to dedicate my life to my kids when they are still in the house. Later on, I will probably be too old. (laughs) But I can influence them and maybe they can run for office and I hope that they will.

M= Okay, anything else you'd like to say about anything we have or haven't discussed?

J= Nope, If anything else comes to your mind let me know. Maybe get together again.

M= Well I want to thank you again Jose for this interview. It's been a great interview I think. A very valuable addition to our project. Thank you.

## Key Terms:

Academic achievement, agricultural laborers—history, agriculture, agriculture history, brothers and sisters, church, Catholic church buildings, children, cities and towns, clergy, clothing and dress—Mexico, college campuses, college graduates, communities, education, education-Higher, education-Rural, electricity, families, families—history, farmers, farms-Oregon, history, labor, labor—United States, local government, local history, missionaries, offices, OHSU, Oregon, political parties, politics, preaching, social participation, student activities, University academics, wages-construction workers, Washington county,

Father Beezer  
Enedelia Hernandez  
Morelos, Mexico  
Bracero  
Campesino Movement  
Emiliano Zapata  
Mt. Angel  
Seminary  
Volunteers in Vanguard Action  
Tektronix  
Cristeros  
Liberation Theology