

**Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County,
Illinois**

Jonathan Verduzco Gil Adams Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Katherine Adams Verduzco Gil

November 26, 2017

Belleville, Illinois

KA: I am Katherine Adams Verduzco Gil and this an oral history interview with Jonathan Verduzco Gil Adams. It is the 26th of November 2017 and.... can you talk with me about your family and childhood?

JVG: Uhm... Do you have a specific question, or do you want me to just talk?

KA: Whichever you prefer.

JVG: I would like a question please.

KA: [Sigh] OK. How many people are in your family here?

JVG: That are here in the United States?

KA: Yes.

JVG: Uhm... I don't know... [to self] Family in Indiana? There are: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7... 8 maybe?... Uh one of my cousins had a daughter, so now there's like 10. In California, I have lots of family and in Fairview Heights, I have the family of my parents and I also have some cousins that live with my aunt and uncle... I don't know.

KA: Uh... OK well... lots... lots of your family lives here uhm... Uh... Do you have family still in Mexico?

JVG: Yes, almost all my family, but I have lots of family there... Oh let me remember.... I know that I have more family in Mexico than I have in the United States, but I don't know anyone.

KA: OK! Well tell me about your first memory of elementary school.

JVG: Uhm...My memories of when I was young, so I don't remember well, and I don't remember in order, so I don't know what happened first and what happened after... does elementary school.... counts things like [mouths "kindergarten"]?

KA: [silently agrees]

JVG: Uh, OK, Uh, I have a family... No a memory... A memory of when I was young. I was very young like.... I don't know.... Before first grade?... I don't know what age you are when you are.... How old are you in the first grade?... five?

KA: Yes.

JVG: Five. Uh... I should have been like 5 or maybe 4. Uhm, in the kindergarten I went to, they had these metal doors and... I just remember that a boy that did not like me and that I didn't like him... We were playing by the doors and he closed one of the metal doors on my hand... That's all I remember.... I don't know why.... I just know that we didn't like each other.

KA: Oh, OK...

JVG: It hurt a lot.

KA: [Laughing]

JVG: I think.

KA: Uhm.... How was the neighborhood where you grew up?

JVG: Where I grew up? I remember that I didn't grow up with anyone. I think that where.... I was.... I don't remember houses, but I've looked on Google Maps and there's houses near us, so I think I just don't remember them... But I don't remember that there were houses near us. I just remember that where I lived, I lived with my grandmother, and she had a very big house, and uh.... On the other side of the road, there was a school, so I don't remember having people that... houses that... I just remember that there was the school and there was my grandmother's house.

KA: Uhm... how long... Uh... how long has it been.... Uh... That you have lived in the US?

JVG: Uh... I came in like August maybe July of... 2003. So, I have lived two thirds of my life here.

KA: OK. Uhm.... Please tell me about your life here in the US.

JVG: Uhm.... When I came, I came for a bit to the US, and I stayed in California with a my mother's family, no, my dad's, since it was my aunt, Letty. I lived there for no more than 1 or 2 months. I know that we came near time to start classes. We came here to the.... to Illinois... Uhm.... we stayed in the house of my cousin, Cristian, so the family of my aunt. My aunt and my uncle, and there we lived with them for... A long time. I think that until 2005, so 2 years. Uhm.... Uh.... we came in time for me to enter the 2nd grade, and that.... my brother entered the 3rd grade Uhm.... We didn't live in a bad place, so I don't have problems with that, and the school that I went to, I've heard, is better than other schools so I didn't have a problem with that... Uh the teacher of my brother was named Ms. Fish. I had a teacher named Billhartz uhm.... I was the only person that spoke Spanish in the second grade. I think but the teacher of my brother, Ms.

Fish, she spoke Spanish, so Alan didn't have a problem, so when they had a problem with me they just used the phones that they have in the classroom, and they called Ms. Fish and I spoke with her and she spoke to my teacher... I entered ESL that is the English second language something uhm and what I did was... I didn't do anything. I was... they had some computers in the classroom like 3 or 4, like all classes had and I stayed sitting there while others did class I don't know when, I don't know if it was only during a few a few things like history and English, or if it was all day, but I know that I stayed sitting there on the computers playing a game I don't know about what.

KA: Uhm.

JVG: Just that there was a rabbit that taught us English a bit and I don't remember if it was at 1 or 12 that my brother and I left to another place that I think is in Belleville where they taught us English. So Ms. Billhartz is one of those teachers that if you are in her class, you would do good in reading, because she is a teacher that loves reading and all the students that have her class learn to read very well... I... I didn't do anything in that class so I was never one of those kids.

KA: Uhm..so the games for learning English weren't at the other place.... they were still at William Holiday?

JVG: Yes, when I was in William Holliday during class I was playing the games.

KA: Oh OK.

JVG: But also, we learned in ESL when we went there.... There was a lot of people that taught you on the computer and there was also a part that was in a class I don't remember anything of that I just remember that there were levels of what they show you on the computer.... that there were levels and that a teacher taught you. I don't even remember what I did with them.... with the teacher. I don't remember why we needed her.

KA: Uh uhm can you compare the experience of school in Mexico and here?

JVG: Uh it's very difficult because I don't remember a lot of when I was in Mexico uhm for example I don't remember...I I don't remember having homework... I don't remember having taken exams uhm but the most likely is that I don't remember it and we did do it. Uhm I remember having done a lot of homework when I got to the US so I don't know if it is because I don't remember that of Mexico or if it is because that of Mexico wasn't very difficult or if the homework from here is more difficult than what we did in Mexico.

KA: Because you didn't know English well? Or uhm because the homework was just harder?

JVG: I think it is because they gave us more homework in all the.... the.... all the 'subjects' those things that.... that.... they gave us homework in - English, math, history, social studies and those things and in Mexico, maybe they only gave us uhm homework in a few things.

KA: OK uhm.... Why did you move here?

JVG: Uhm I didn't choose to move here I just know that when I was a kid my dad wasn't with us for a long time. He lived here in the US. He moved here before us so much of my life I... I didn't know my dad and everyone talked well of my dad and so I just knew that. Everyone like him and... So I would like him too. Sometimes he sent us videos of him or we sent him videos of us to him. Uh, I didn't know him well. I knew there were times that he came back for a bit or for a long time to Mexico, uhm, but we moved.... I don't know if for a better life or to be with my dad, but we moved with my dad in 2003 for one of those two reasons.

KA: Uhm is there something that you miss from Mexico?

JVG: Uhm I miss... That... I don't know how to speak Spanish well like a person that had been there for a long time, like how my brother knows a bit more and he was only there for one more year. If I had come a bit later I could have... I could understand Spanish and English well but I only understand English well.

KA: Do you think that it would be more difficult to learn English if uhm if you had been in Mexico for more time?

JVG: It it's possible because I came when I was like 7 years old and... Uhm... I just remember that when I was in my English classes after regular class that I finished more quickly than all the other people that were in the program so it's possible that it is because I didn't understand Spanish well, so it was easier to understand English, but my brother my brother learned in almost the same time as me so I don't think that another year would have done me any harm or even another year on top of that either.

KA: OK has there been any barriers for you in the US?

JVG: Like... bad things that keep me from doing things? Is that what you mean?

KA: Yes.

JVG: Yes, uhm, yes, yes a lot... Um. I know that I had problems with speaking English that didn't take long in just a little while I learned it... But I lost a lot of things that would have helped me if I hadn't had to learn English.... like I'm not good at reading and that's very important until I finished Jr. High, uhm, so that wasn't that good. But also other things like uhm.... it was very difficult speaking about.... about... Papers like when we were in class they asked for things. I never knew how to... How to do... Things like turn in information to the school I never liked to go do those things and also my... my dad worked a lot and my mom worked a lot... And even if my mom hadn't worked a lot, my mom didn't know how to drive so... I didn't live far from school but if something happened to me like being sick or not wanting to go to school or... Uh... uhm... Just those things it would be almost impossible to leave school because there would be no one to pick me up from school.

KA: Uhm... what have been the biggest challenges for you?

JVG: Uh... repeat that question please.

KA: What have been the biggest challenges for you?

JVG: Uh... definitely going to university has been very difficult because... I thought it would be very easy... I would be able to only go to classes and stay at school... Uh... I wanted to do two majors at the same time for school and... I had a scholarship that taught me.... well, where I taught mathematics because I wanted to be a teacher but I also wanted to be a psychologist and... I thought a lot of myself and... when it was time to start those things I had troubles and... When it was time to start classes I didn't have money to stay in school and live there like the other kids that didn't have to work and also I didn't have the money to do both majors and so I tried to just do mathematics uhm... And... I did really well in my classes but even then, without the money to pay for those things, I couldn't remain in that university and... It wasn't easy for me because it's very hard to uh, do very well in class and still not be able to continue taking classes because you can't pay for them because it costs a lot... So that... That wasn't easy.

KA: Uhm how has your life changed because of your experience as an immigrant?

JVG: Well when I was very little I had a lot of fear of other people because, being an immigrant there is a lot of things that you don't want other people to know like my mom didn't like that I told anyone that I was from Mexico... My mom always told me those things well after I told a lot of people that I was from Mexico uhm... Like I remember that definitely everyone knew but my mom wanted me to tell other people that I am from the US and that I don't know English very well because my parents only spoke to me in English but yes, there's.... there's.... there's lots of fear from just being an immigrant that it's just difficult to meet people and then it's difficult to meet people that won't think of those things like seeing you as a person that isn't from here. Which is very easy for me now because I know English very well that... there's a lot of people that don't know I'm not from the US... so... At least that's good... Uhm... and although I had all those problems with school how I couldn't pay it's because I didn't have a job at that time and... Even though I didn't have a job at that time it is because I didn't think that I would need it and now that... That I... uh... I don't know how to say... 'come to terms'... with ... with having to work even though I'm a student... Like now I have two jobs that I like a bit... Very very well... Now that I know that I have to work and go to school and do a lot at least now I'm back in classes and I'm... I'm ... doing... Not as well as before I had to have two jobs but... But I'm not doing very bad and that's good.

KA: Um would you like to return to Mexico at some point to visit or to live there?

JVG: It's... it's difficult to say that because I do want to go back but I don't want to leave here... Uhm... like how I see it is that I don't want Mexico to be considered a 'different' place... I would just like it if both places were one... That... that there isn't such a stigma with... With... Mexico being worse than the US and that... The US be better than Mexico uh... I would like it better if both places saw each other like the brothers that they are... That... both are really close to each other and live on the same earth that is North America uh... And that they teach each other that a problem of Mexico is a problem of the US and that a problem of the US is a problem of Mexico. Uhm so yes I do want to return but... I don't like the idea that... That it has that name that I 'go back to Mexico' I would like to go to where I am and it not be a big event but I also have a big dream that one day I return to Mexico and it not be... I know Mexico isn't good right now that there are a lot of problems in Mexico. Um I like the idea that if I go to Mexico that I could help with that to make Mexico better because it is a great place and there are just a lot of problems and I know that... It's not impossible to help that... and even one person with... A big dream can change that... So one day I would like to return there but I would prefer... Helping there so one day there is no difference between the US and Mexico.

KA: Uhm what advice would you give to someone that just got here from Mexico?

JVG: From Mexico? Well it depends... If you are young like my little sister. My little sister only knows English and I would tell the same to someone that is very young and is going to come learn English and forget Spanish like me and that is... When it is your time to go to... High school to take classes... Don't choose something over Spanish... Even if you are very good at Spanish... Or if you are very good at school I was very good at school and I didn't want to pick Spanish because I didn't want to take an easy class and the thing is that it doesn't matter if it is an easy class because I did very well in my class... I am a student that is good at my classes so you will be good regardless so pick the class that will help you be with the people that are of you family... Choose Spanish because in that time you will need... This time will change if you will remember the language you take and if you won't remember it and Spanish will help you a lot so if you are a person that is very young try to take Spanish when you are at that age.

KA: And uhm... For you would you like to take Spanish classes in the future?

JVG: Definitely the answer is yes if I want to take Spanish classes again I tried to take them this year because I needed extra classes to be at 12 hours to be a full time student uhm. But... I couldn't take them this year because I couldn't fit them into my..

KA: Schedule.

JVG: In my schedule, yes, and because I have to work at both my jobs just to pay for school... Uhm... well also because I like my jobs but yeah... I couldn't take them this year so no... but... If I have... I would like to take those classes again... Even just to learn what I lost... That is to say I don't know how to write and how I speak is a bit bad and sometimes I try to think in English and do it in Spanish and that doesn't work so I would love to take Spanish classes again.

KA: Uhm is... There is a bit of a debate about Hispanics that can't speak Spanish and if they are less Hispanic... Uh what do you think?

JVG: The thing is that I don't... I don't think they are less Hispanic... But that they owe it to themselves to learn those things because... Even if they are less Hispanic... Even though they are the same... Those people can't know the things that the people that do speak Spanish know... Like if I... If I would like to know more about my culture, there's things that I will never be able to understand... Even if I try to... Try to read a story in English about Mexico or things like that, I will never understand things like stories or poems or things like that... And there are... There are a lot of things in that culture that can't be said in English like there is music that needs to be understood... There is a lot of things that... You just can't understand without Spanish and regardless... It's a bunch of shit that stuff about saying if you are more Hispanic... it doesn't matter... It's just important to know where you're from and that's it.

KA: What is the thing... Uhm... about being Hispanic that you are most proud of... Like... the music or something like that... The community?

JVG: Definitely I think that it's just everything I love our music like... I like having things that to other people they would never understand in...

KA: The same way?

JVG: The same way as me... Like there's things that I don't know why I understand uhm... And I know that I listened to a lot of music from my parents when I came here but... There's a lot of music I like, and I don't know why and I like it a lot... I like to find music... And just listen to it and that I like it and... There's music that my parents never showed me, and I love to find music that I like, and it be mine... Um... I like to have something Mexican that... That is mine because I wanted it... Not because... Not because my parents gave it to me... I like to know things about me and to all people that are immigrants there comes that time especially kids that you try to not be what you are... and ... my sister is like that right now... She likes to make jokes about being Mexican... And she tries to do other things and the things is... There is a time when you realize that there isn't anything else that you are than being Mexican and you will want to know those things about yourself and... At some point you will like those things about yourself again and the sooner that you learn that the better your life will be...

KA: Tell me about your successes that uhm... That you have right now.

JVG: I don't understand the question.

KA: Tell me about your successes.

JVG: That is the word that I don't understand.

KA: It's the antonym of failure OK... 'Successes'

JVG: Ah! Again ask me the question now that I understand.

KA: OK tell me about your successes that you have right now.

JVG: Right now? Oof... I don't know... I like that I have a job in mathematics. I like that a lot because that is a thing that I want to do and I feel that it is good that I am already there instead of going to school for a long time and then finally being there because you never know when you will die and it is good to know that in the time that I am alive, I have already taught that and although I had to not do my career of being a psychologist, there's a lot of people that I can talk to about the things that are hard about my life or theirs... And I like that in that time that I have been alive I have changed a lot from being a person that has a lot of bad things and a lot of problems to a person that notices their wrongs and tries to change those things or being a person that thinks more about other people than themselves... I like that a lot... I have tried to be the person that I am more and more and I am trying to make plans for to be better or be the person that I want to be.

KA: OK well uhm.... thanks for the interview and see you.