

11-28-1984

Interview no. 714

José Avila

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Interview with José Avila by Kenneth A. LaPrade, 1984, "Interview no. 714," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Jose Avila
INTERVIEWER: Kenneth A. LaPrade
PROJECT: Class Project/History of the University
DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 28, 1984
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 714
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 714

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Dean of Students, U.T. El Paso.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; experiences as a student at Texas Western College, 1964-1967; experiences as Dean of Students, including the days of the Chicano Student Movement on campus; changes at U.T. El Paso since 1964.

Length of interview: 50 minutes Length of transcript: 25 pages

Jose Avila

By Kenneth A. LaPrade
November 28, 1984

L: Mr. Avila, where were you born and when?

A: I was born in Newark Maternity Hospital on the south side of El Paso on July 23rd, 1942.

L: Where were your parents from?

A: My mother and father were first generation Americans from El Paso. Their parents, my grandparents, were all from Chihuahua.

L: Did you know your grandparents?

A: Yes, I did.

L: When did you attend UTEP?

A: Well, I graduated from high school in '60, came to Texas Western College that same year. It took me three months to realize I didn't belong, I wasn't making it. So I dropped out and joined the service. Four years later in 1964 I came back, and I graduated in three years.

L: What made you choose this school, or what made you come back?

A: Well, I chose the school because, well, I think I can speak for a lot of Chicanos, at least of my generation, but you didn't think about going away. There was only one place to go, and that's here in El Paso, and it's the only university. I don't believe that's changed much. Some of it is finances, some of it is ties to the family, some of it is ties to the culture. A lot of Chicanos don't think about going away. You go where you are, and that's El Paso, and that was Texas Western College. I didn't want to go initially, but my mother was one of those pushers, you know, one of those, "My son is gonna be the best" type of people. So part of the reason I failed was that I didn't want to go. You know, I wasn't motivated to go, I didn't care.

Four years later I came back, because I had been in Air Force Intelligence. And that was in the days of the draft, so a lot of guys would

join the service to get away from being drafted; rather four years in the Air Force than two years in the Army. So I ended up in an intelligence squadron where most of the guys were college graduates who had gone in to avoid the draft, and I was one of the few who didn't have a college degree. And they turned me on to the idea that it was possible for me to go to college. And I envied them somewhat, they knew so much, that through association, being around people who had a degree, and I had gained some confidence--I could do the job as well as they, and they had degrees. So I knew I could make it in college whereas before I wasn't sure. So I came back with the idea that I was going to make it, that I was going to go, and that I could make it. The major difference was that before my mother had signed me up to be an engineer. When I did it on my own, I knew I wanted to be a teacher, so I majored in Education. I was more motivated to be a teacher than an engineer. So that's why I came back.

L: So your degree was in Education then?

A: Education. I have a Bachelor's of Science in Education, Secondary Education, with teaching fields in Biology and History. My Master's [was] in Counseling and Guidance.

L: What other activities were you involved in on the campus?

A: I was a typical Texas Western College student. That's somewhat typical of today. We didn't have as many activities in those days as we do now, things you can involve yourself in. In those days the administration really didn't encourage students to get involved. Now we beat the bushes, "Join this, join that, be a part of that, here's this workshop, improve yourself." But in those days there wasn't much of that.

I was a typical commuter student. I had a wife and two kids, no skills whatsoever other than spying on Russians, which wouldn't get me a job. So my motivation was to get a degree to get a job to support my family. And the sooner I got that done, the better off I was, and my family. So I really didn't have time to spend on the campus, and a lot of it was my ignorance in not knowing really what went on on the campus. I'm not sure that even if I had known whether I would have participated since I was so busy supporting a family, going to school full-time. But it would have made me a better, well-rounded, educated person if I had participated in activities. But the typical commuter, you know: get off the campus, go to your job, go home, study, go back to school. You know, that sort of thing.

L: Backtracking just a bit, you got married before you went into the service, then?

A: I got married just as I joined the service. I went to basic training, came back on 10 days leave, got married, and then went back. So my honeymoon was an Air Force training base in Syracuse, New York.

L: Is your wife from the area as well?

A: Well, I'm no longer married, but at the time she lived four blocks from me. We went to the same high school; we met in high school. She was a sophomore, I was a senior. One of these high school romances.

L: What was the ethnic makeup of the campus at that time?

A: I remember one of the reasons I left in 1960 was because I would go a whole day without seeing another brown face, and that was kind of traumatic for me. You know, the high school I went to was Jefferson High School, and that was 97 percent Chicano and three percent black; there were no Anglos whatsoever. So when the shoe's on the other foot and

you're the minority minority minority, I felt awkward, I felt out of place like I didn't belong, I couldn't relate. This place, to a person that had never been out of the barrio very much, to a person that had lived in the Mexican neighborhood where everything is Spanish, and Anglos don't go in there unless they're there to arrest somebody or to collect bills, it was traumatic and I felt out of place. So I felt uncomfortable. This place was awesome; it does that to you. It's like an entire new world.

Anyway, another part of it is, I didn't have...I didn't want to ask anybody for help. If I missed a test...I never got used to university. You know, in high school it was easy. If I missed a test, I'd make it up; if I missed homework, I made it up. You know, and it was easy for me, I made As, no problem. I never had to hustle. And when I did screw up, the teacher was there to remind me and that sort of thing. And at the university I never did get used to the idea; nobody was going to remind me, I was on my own, I was responsible, If I missed a lecture or something like that, my pride wouldn't allow me to ask for help from an Anglo, and I didn't see another brown face. So I screwed myself up [from] the beginning. So in 1960 there were almost no Chicanos at all. Here and there I'd see one, but I could go days without seeing one.

L: Did it change much when you came back?

A: And then when I came back in '64 it was better, better, much better. But by then I had gotten over a lot of my cultural hang-ups. The Air Force is a great socializer, and I no longer had a lot of the cultural shock. In fact, I was the only Mexican in my squadron, and I got used to it. So it's hard for me to say, but it was better. But I didn't have

these hang-ups anyway by then. Now as a student, as a dean, you know, so on, I guess I've been associated with UTEP since '64. That's 20 years. So I've had an association with this place for 20 years, and more and more and more and more and more and more where I feel it truly represents now a bilingual, bicultural community that reflects El Paso. I think that's healthy, because we do serve El Paso. So it's gotten better and better. But in '60, God! (Laughs) I felt out of place. But a lot of it wasn't the fault of the place, a lot of it was my own cultural adjustment. It's easy to go to a university when your parents have gone to a university, and there's a foundation for you to build on. Both of my parents...well, my mother was a grade school dropout and my father was a high school dropout. So I was the first in my family to even finish high school, much less go to college. In fact, if left up to me, I never would have gone. In those days Chicanos in high school didn't talk about going to college, they talked about which branch of the service to go into. If my mother hadn't pushed me--and I'm grateful for that--forced me literally, I might have missed a great opportunity and I'd be out there digging ditches or painting houses. So I'm grateful to her. But anyway, it's come a long way.

L: Did you feel like you were able to appreciate the university more for having spent the time in the service?

A: Well, it's not a question of appreciating the university more. I appreciate what it did for me personally. It helped me to mature personally, and it helped me to become responsible, to recognize my abilities. I became more confident. Most important of all, it helped me to fit in overall American society. I was the biggest bigot you ever

saw. I wouldn't turn my back on an Anglo; and if he looked at me a certain way, it was time for a fight. Let's settle it. So it did away with my alienation. I'm really grateful. I'm not saying that the military is the only place that happens, but it was kind of a concentrated program in socialization. And that's what I got out of the service. I really appreciate that.

L: When you were in the university later in the '60s, from 1964 on, was there any type of student movement on the campus during that time?

A: Not in the sixties. I was here from '64 to '67. If there was any such thing I wasn't aware of it. The Greek system was still big, the having fun and so on. It's my understanding that it began here at UTEP in the late sixties. So the war demonstrations and these sorts of things, if they happened, as a student I wasn't aware of them. But they probably happened after I had left--'68, '69, '70, that sort of time. When I came to work at the university in '71, I became very much aware of it because I was in the middle of it, it was my job to stop it. So, I missed the Black Movement; I missed the Anti-war Movement. I got in on the best part of the Chicano Movement. I dealt with the Palestinian and Iranian situations. For a while there I dealt with the communist problem, the American Revolutionary Party. So I've dealt with all of these, but I missed the black and the anti-war movements. I have no regrets at having missed those.

L: How did people basically respond to the Chicano Movement--the students, the faculty, the administration?

A: I'm not really sure. I was brand new on the campus. I thought of myself as the Messiah that was going to break the gap in communication because I knew Anglo society and could exist in it, and I knew the

Chicano problems and concerns. I felt that the gap could be bridged and I was that gap. For a while there it was very awkward and I was very confused because there was really no communication. They were talking to each other, but there was no communication, so I was lost.

Most of the students didn't support the Chicano Movement, they just went along with it. When they saw that there was trouble, that there was a mob, they either participated as part of a mob or as spectators. But most of them were not directly involved. In fact, taking over the Administration Building in 1971 was accomplished by about 20 students, period. And all the rest, hundreds that joined in, it was merely a reaction against the police, not in support of the movement; and then there were thousands that were spectators. As far as the staff, they stayed out of it. The faculty, there were some who got into it, but they were basically because of ACLU. They were supporting the movement, the popular movements at that time. But it was a small group that did it. As far as the Chicano Movement and as far as my participation in it being a university administrator at the time, I was the only Chicano who stood against the activists. And I stood against them not because I disagreed with them, but because I didn't like their tactics. I have never...you know, I'm not beyond breaking down a door, even resorting to violence. I'm a human being and everybody resorts to that. But I feel that's always the last resort.

It was my belief at the time that they weren't trying to communicate. And the perfect example of that is in 1971 they posed five or six demands. Now one of the demands was illegal according to state law, so there was no way the university could comply. Another demand, the second demand, was already there; they already had what they

wanted, it was just a misconception. And the others, the administration gave in to them and said, "O.K., you win, we'll give you these." And the administration, the Vice-President for Student Affairs, whose title is now changed to Dean of Students--the guy who sat in my chair then--he went over there to tell them in writing, "O.K., you've won, we're giving in on these three. We can't give you this one and this one you already have." And I thought that was a great victory, and I had been part of the formulation of the solution to give in. So he went over there to the Administration Building 'cause they had occupied it to give them in writing the answer, "You won. This is the end of it." And just as he started to give it to them, they tore the stack of papers out of his hands, and they tore them up, and they threw them up in the air. And then at that point they wouldn't leave the building, and at that point, what else could they do, so they called the police, and it got to be a big mess.

You know, later on I spoke to one of the leaders, one of the activists, and I said, "Why did you do this, when you had won?" And he said, "You don't understand, stupid. We didn't want to win; we wanted the issue, we wanted the publicity, to move on from there." And at that point they became my enemies; I just don't deal with that. If you can settle issues and problems through communication in a nice way, I'm all for it. But if you're going to resort to violence, well then you get what you get. And ever since then I won't deal with people who are out to do violence. I'll trade them violence for violence, and I won't do it anymore. That taught me a lesson. I try to communicate; if it's violence--well, violence for violence.

As a result of that now we have a fully equipped police force. They got rid of the nice deans; they got rid of the social father-

in-absence, mother-in-absence deans, you know, the nice people who wanted to talk. And they brought in people like me, people who are half lawyers, half politicians, half police. And that's what I'm good at, I'm good at politicking. I'm almost an attorney, even though I've never been to law school. You know, I'm half policeman, I know the law better than most police. And that was the new generation dean that those times brought. It hurt me as a Chicano to have to take a stand against Chicanos. But now we think alike. Now they've changed their tactics. Now they know that the way to get things is through legalities, through MALDEF, through communication, by getting people inside the system and change it from within, rather than trying to attack it from without. I'm finally accepted as one of those inside the system who can change it from within; I think I'm halfway trusted. So I'm very active in the Chicano Movement, but I do it in legal, constructive, positive ways from within. I will never resort to violence except as a last resort. And as far as I'm concerned, that last resort has never been reached. In the early seventies, I wasn't welcome in barrios anymore. I became infamous as a sell-out. And that hurts even today. But I think they've come around to my way of thinking about the proper way of doing things. I was a man before my time, because it wasn't popular to communicate in those days, it was popular to use violence and demonstrate and so on. I don't feel that was necessary then, and I certainly don't think it's necessary now.

But that was the Chicano Movement. We had trouble again in 1972, and again I was right in the middle of that. That trouble in '72 had to do with the firing of a Chicano dean. I was an assistant dean in

those days, and this other guy also was an assistant dean; we were the two Chicano deans. He was fired basically because he was not following procedure, he wasn't working within the system. So the Chicano activists preferred to work with him because he was willing to break the rules, whereas I wouldn't. So they didn't acknowledge my presence, my existence, but they did his. I take full credit for getting him fired. I felt he was bad for this office, bad for this university, and bad for Chicanos. And when he was fired, there were demonstrations again over that. And I went out to the Chicano activists and I said, "Hey, look, let's talk about the real truth behind this. I'm the one who got him fired, I'm the one that set him up. If you're going to attack anybody, attack me, don't attack the Vice-President for Student Affairs." And they said, "No, no, we know all that. We know that you did it. No problem. But we can't attack you because... We don't like him. You did the right thing. We don't like him either, we just used him. But we've got to attack the Anglo. We can't attack you because we can't have Chicanos attacking Chicanos. It's got to be the Anglo."

And again, that further demonstrated to me that they weren't interested in communicating, they just wanted the issue. I feel that sort of activity hurt the university, hurt the impression that people have of this university. I think it hurt the movement in some ways, even though it did get people's attention. But once we had these Anglo administration's attention, then these activists should have gotten out of the way and let the... You know, once you break down the door and you're inside the room, then they should have stepped

out of the way and let the professionals negotiate. And no, they wouldn't let the professionals negotiate, they insisted on doing it themselves. So here were these ignorant, non-educated people trying to communicate with educated people, and it just didn't work. So I feel that that hurt the movement because they didn't get out of the way to let other people begin to do the communicating once we had their attention.

L: When did the activist movement subside and other things begin to take place?

A: Well, here at UTEP I guess it began to subside about '74, '75--not just because things began to get a little better on the campus, but more so because the popularity of demonstrations went down. UTEP was behind the rest of the nation. The nation had theirs in the sixties, we had it in the late sixties and the early seventies. It died out around the country and it was no longer popular, it was no longer something to do. So, again, being late, it died out here, too. It was replaced by the stupidity of streaking, which lasted a week or so--one full day of glory. But times changed. The day of activism will come back. We're now back at the nice things, reality; "Let's not do stuff for society; let's do it for ourselves." And I don't _____ that; those are the pressures of society. But it'll come back; activism will come back. And deans like I, who are the professional trouble stoppers, troubleshooters, we have outlived our usefulness. It's a time again for the nice deans, people who take care of other people and help other people. So, my days are numbered. But then it'll come back again and they'll bring in a newer Joe Avila to clean up that mess for someone. You know, there were an awful lot of Deans

of Students around universities around the country who quit or had heart attacks or literally died on the job because they couldn't cope with the activism of the sixties. I grew with it, I became very strong with it. But those times are passed, and I wouldn't want to go through it again. If that ever happened again, I would be one of those resigning. I don't want to go through that again, that was horrible.

L: Back when you were in school, what were popular forms of entertainment, fads, pranks, that type of thing?

A: (Chuckles) Doing the Charleston, eating goldfish. No, I'm not that old. I can't really answer your question 'cause I didn't participate in these things. I remember specifically that freshmen were required to do two things: they were required to paint the M and they were required to wear a beanie, an orange and white beanie. I guess I was one of those that helped to end tradition like that because I refused to paint the M and I refused to wear a beanie. And when this upperclassman threatened to do something, I said, "What are you going to do?" (Chuckles) And he couldn't think of an answer. So I imagine that guys like me who were coming back from the service, who were more mature than somebody just coming out of high school, guys like me helped to end and destroy what I consider now good traditions. But they shouldn't be forced on people. They should be maintained but not forced on people, and they were forcing it on everybody in those days. And guys like me thought it was childish, so we resisted. And legally they couldn't force you to do that. We're trying to bring some of those things back.

L: Really?

A: But we approach it realistically--those who want to. And we're getting more and more who want to. But those are the two things I recollect, because I refused to do it and almost ended up beating up on some poor upperclassman. Here I was a 22-year-old freshman and I refused to wear a beanie. It took too much to humiliate myself. But beyond that I don't really remember. I didn't go to dances, I didn't go to anything. Like I said, I was one of these commuter students. I was here to get an education, to get a degree, to get a job; I wasn't here to have fun. I averaged 18 hours a semester. And biology with labs, in those days you didn't get credit for biology. I didn't have enough to feed my family. And I had a higher calling; I needed to feed my family. So when I could have been dancing or whatever, I was out there checking groceries. That's what I did. So I don't really remember. I'm a good reflection of the political history of UTEP, but not of the social history.

L: When you came back to UTEP to work in 1971, how had the ethnic makeup of the campus changed since you had been there in the mid-sixties?

A: I don't remember specifically the statistics. I imagine probably by '71 we were about 20 percent Hispanic. The black population was basically the same as it is now, not many. It's three percent now. You've got to remember that from '71 to now the student body doubled, the enrollment doubled. In those days it was seven or eight thousand students, now it's fifteen or sixteen [thousand]. So a lot of that growth was in Hispanics. In fact the growth in the last 10 years has been in Hispanics, has been in women; and the decline has been in male Anglos. So it was about 20 percent, I guess. The Anglo population kind of stood still and the Hispanic population grew, and it's been

growing steadily. So in '71 it wasn't bad. Now the early sixties, it was horrible. There was just no opportunity for higher education for Hispanics. But then that was before the glory days of financial aid and so on. The cultural barriers, the mental barrier, and the financial barriers; those are basically the things.

/PAUSE/

L: What do you see as the major reasons for the changes in the last 13 years, as far as the makeup and character of the university?

A: Well, in terms of Hispanics then, right?

L: Right.

A: Well, I think UTEP and El Paso kind of went along the same road. In other words, El Paso influenced UTEP and then UTEP influenced El Paso. The Chicanos of El Paso began to get ahead here and there. We even had a Chicano mayor there for a while. They became businessmen. Little by little they became teachers. More and more became teachers, more and more became doctors, more and more became lawyers. A trickle at first, but then they grew. And as you had more and more role models, more and more thought about it. Then as they went to college, their children thought about going to college and so on. And you put on top of that the financial aid and the opportunity, so there began to be people who began to think about it. They began to have a voice in El Paso.

And as they came to UTEP, this trickle at first--like I like to think of myself as one of the pioneers on that trickle--then as they were graduating, they went back and influenced the community more, and it became a cycle of UTEP influencing the community and the community influencing UTEP. So I think that was it, little by little.

You know, a first generation American became second generation, and that second generation started thinking about schools and so on. So I think it's just a growing sophistication of the Chicano in El Paso. They've grown professionally, they just haven't grown politically. There's no reason why the Chicanos couldn't take over El Paso or the univeristy. They just haven't grown politically.

I think that was it. I think UTEP has had the greatest influence on El Paso Hispanics than any other thing. In my opinion UTEP, in enrolling Hispanics and getting them degrees and getting them the jobs, the professional jobs, has done more for the social and economic advancement of Chicanos than any other thing in El Paso. Certainly there aren't that many opportunities in El Paso, and we lost a lot talent to outside of El Paso. But I think UTEP has really, really affected positively El Paso, but at first it was El Paso influencing UTEP in sending the people here.

That's why my greatest fear about UTEP is the Aaron Segals who promote these high standards. I have nothing against high standards. I think UTEP has high standards, I think it should have higher standards. But I think those high standards should be in the classroom; that in the teaching and testing, that's where you have the high standards. And if they don't make it in the classroom, you don't give them a degree. What I am against is high standards in the admissions process, 'cause I call that elitism that denies people an opportunity to try. I think it's a racist notion to keep out people from the admissions process. They may not be aware of it, but realistically, higher standards in admissions, high school scores, entrance exams-- those things will systematically weed out Chicanos from going to

universities, and universities are the one thing that we need to advance ourselves. So we shouldn't do it in the admissions. I think anybody--not just Chicanos, but anybody--should have a right to try, to be admitted, and then put 'em through hell in the classroom. And if they don't make it, flunk 'em out. And I guarantee you there'll be some who make it. Those are the ones that should get that opportunity to try. You can't categorize human beings and say, "These fit in and these don't." UT Austin and Texas A & M are two institutions that are weeding out Chicanos by having high admissions standards, and I think that's racist. Someday I look forward to testifying against those universities in a MALDEF suit against the state.

There's been some talk at UTEP about doing the same thing, and I will fight that to the death. If UTEP were to ever do that, and we tried our best legally and otherwise to convince them about how it negatively would effect Chicanos and they still did it, then that would be time for violence, and I would be the first to lead it. I'm a strong believer in the American dream, a strong believer in education.

/PAUSE/

I believe in the American dream, that a person can go from poor surroundings and improve him or herself. The American dream, I think, half its way of doing that is through education. And I believe in American education and that it should be available for everybody, and the opportunity for people to improve themselves. And there's a growing trend in this country, in this state, to limit enrollment.

Like in the old days only the rich could go, and that was unfair; and I would like to think that those days are gone. So I'll fight to the death to keep that from happening here at UTEP. If I can't do it as a dean, I'll do it as an outside agitator. I know the system inside and out. I know how to plug it up.

Anyway, I forget what the original question was.

L: I was just curious, after you graduated from college and before you came to work as a dean here, what were you doing?

A: O.K. For four years I was a high school teacher at Ysleta High School. I taught history. Public schools provide horrible counseling. They're paid to shuffle paper, the high school counselors. And a lot of these students would come in [when I was] a teacher and tell me horror stories where they needed counseling. "I'm pregnant, what do I do?" "My mother beats me up." "My father molests me." I didn't know how to deal with that, I had no training. I'm sure of my common sense about such things, but I wasn't a counselor.

So I decided that I could kill two birds with one stone. That, one, I could go to get my graduate degree in counseling and I would be able to help these students, get a little training in it, and at the same time draw on the G. I. Bill rather than working part-time. So I did. Interestingly enough, I went to night school in my graduate school, and never was on the campus during the day, it was always at night. Interestingly enough, I never got a chance to go back and counsel those high school kids, because as I was doing my last course, my practicum supervisor, who was at that time married to the Vice-President for Student Affairs, is looking for bilingual counselors.

"Would you be interested?" I said, "Well, I'll go talk to him."

Based on that interview, I got the job. And one of my first jobs at UTEP was a bilingual counselor here. In the mornings I was a bilingual counselor and in the afternoons I was a "go-fer" here, an administrative "go-fer." So I never went back to the high schools. I'd like to someday--not to counsel because I don't want to shuffle paper, but I'll make myself available for counselling. I was a better teacher than I was a counselor, and I was a better counselor than I have been a dean, even though I've done all three well.

So those are the circumstances. I didn't ask for the job, I fell right into it. I like to think that it was because of my brown skin that I got the job, but it was because of my own abilities regardless of skin that I kept it. But I was at the right place with the right skin color. That was basically how I fell into it, I didn't apply for it.

L: What do you feel has been your greatest accomplishment at UTEP?

A: Well, there's two of them. One is that I've promoted the interests of Chicanos on this campus here and there. Most of them are small victories, but they all add up. The other one is that I took this division, the Division of Student Affairs, which was so fragmented and falling on its ass when I took it over, and I cleaned it up. I brought in over the years my own people. As Vice-President Natalicio calls it, it's a machine. It's a well-oiled machine; it works well. We do serve students. Considering we're understaffed and underfunded, I think it does a damn fine job.

And I think we're doing more beyond just providing services for students' need; I think now we're also... A particular interest of

mine is to provide activities that develop students, that build character, teach responsibility and integrity--these sort of things. So we have a lot of activities that teach these things. It is my personal philosophy that if you graduate from a university that you shouldn't just know the stuff that came out of books, but you should know about life, you should know about responsibility; that only then are you a truly totally developed person and a truly educated person, going beyond the books. I think we're preparing people to survive in a job, but I don't think we're preparing people to survive in life, or at least do it well. If the family influence is deteriorating, I think it's left up to universities to plug up some of those holes the best that we can. And we're trying to do that. So I'm proud of the progress we've made in students' affairs. So those are the two things.

L: How have student concerns and attitudes changed over the last 20 years in the campus setting?

A: I've got 20 years experience with this campus, but it's hard for me to relate when I was a student and when I was an administrator. I don't know what they were when I was a student; I wasn't involved. I don't think I was your typical student. But as an administrator, beginning with say '71 when I started, there were an awful lot of students who majored in liberal arts. There were an awful lot of students who were interested in the social aspects of society, welfare of the individual, welfare of groups, the welfare of society, who sacrificed of themselves--the one shining moment of the Peace Corps and VISTA and all these things that were really, really popular then. And then the students changed and became more pragmatic, more success

oriented. Grades became very important, majors became very important, getting a job became very important--at the sacrifice of feeling some sympathy for the rest of society; the Me Generation. And we're either in the middle of that or near the end of it right now. But those are the two trends that I've seen. And who knows? The pendulum swings. We'll probably go back to that.

L: How do you see your future here at the university?

A: (Chuckles) There is no future. I didn't expect to... In fact I did hesitate to take the job when it was offered, and one of the reasons I hesitated was because of the insecurity of the job. You know, we don't have tenure; as staff we don't have tenure. You screw up once big, and that's it, you're gone. You know, like Dr. Templeton once told me...I was kidding around and I told him I wanted tenure. And Dr. Templeton, who was president before Dr. Monroe, he said, "Joe, the only tenure you have is, you have 10 seconds to get the hell off my campus when I tell you to get off." He and I used to talk like that. I really loved the man.

But I've always known that; there was no security. I was secure teaching in the high schools; and I liked it, I didn't dislike it. I still like it. So it was the insecurity that bothered me; but I sold out for money, I became a mercenary. They gave me double what I was making as a teacher, so that's why I did it. And ever since then it's day to day. I can be fired at any time. And the fact that I've lasted, well, 10 years as Dean of Students is a new world's record for UTEP. The previous record holder was Judson Williams, who was Dean of Students for 10 years, but he was Dean of Students during the nice times, when it wasn't political, when everybody was nice and loved each other,

and they pulled pranks on each other, harmless things, the Greek days, the social thing. So I think that it's a great achievement for me to have made it 10 years because I went through all the politics, all the uprest and this sort of thing. And to have survived, I think it's a great achievement.

I never thought I would last this long, it's been kind of day to day. I look back and the time has passed. There's no magic number to how long I would have stayed or how long I will stay. In fact I had been planning on quitting, and then I changed my mind because I felt my job wasn't done. I stay on for two reasons: one is because there's still a struggle for Chicanos on this campus, the struggle isn't over. And if I leave they'll replace me with somebody who may not know about Chicanos, may be insensitive because he won't know. And the other reason is for the money. (Laughs) I make good money. For El Paso I make outstanding money, and I don't want to leave El Paso for personal reasons. So that's why I stay on. I figure I'm good for staying on for two or three more years, and then I'll either blow my brains out or simplify my life, 'cause it hasn't been easy, the pressure's been pretty, you know... When I get up in the morning I say, "What the hell's going to be waiting for me?" Challenges, you know. I'm supposed to make decisions. But if I make a wrong decision, I end up in jail or in court. My life has been threatened more times than I like to mention. It's taken its toll on me. It ruined my marriage. It's taken its toll on me. I don't want to do this the rest of my life. I want to take it easy, and I don't want to wait til I'm an old man to do it.

So I figure in two or three years, and I'm already planning on the financial part of it, to leave gracefully while I'm still a champion. Not to make a comeback like Sugar Ray Leonard, who's gonna get killed, but just to leave and that's it, draw the line. But just leave and I can look back and say, "Hey, I used to be a dean; I used to be somebody." But never to do anything like this again. And become a retired gentleman, and not work sometimes, and sometimes to do whatever grabs me. I'd like to go back to teaching in the public schools, more for the fun than for the money, till I get sick of that. I've even toyed with the idea of living in Europe until my visa ran out and they deport me. You know, I don't really have a future. Well, my only goal in my future is to simplify it and enjoy it. I don't want to fight with people anymore, I don't want to be a negotiator anymore, I don't want to carry thousands on my shoulders anymore. I've done my part and I'm tired.

I used to love to come. I would get up in the morning and I'd say, "Another challenge. Oh, God, how I love it." Now I get up in the mornings and say, "What the hell. I hope it's a good day. I hope there's nothing waiting for me there." But there always is, there's always some problem. It's just a matter of how big it is. I don't want to go through that; it's not a... You've got to be a glutton for punishment, you've got to be slightly insane to want to be a Dean of Students. There's three really horrible jobs on the campus: one is being the President of the university, the second one is being the Athletic Director of the university, and the third one is being the Dean of Students. If I knew then what I know now, I wouldn't have accepted the job.

L: Really?

A: Yeah. I wouldn't have. But I'm stuck. I need the money. And I've got the social commitment--well, this moral commitment--to my people.

L: What do you see as needing to be accomplished as far as your commitment to your people? I mean, you said that you felt your job wasn't quite through yet, that you needed to stay two or three years.

A: Well, there's no one big goal. But I'd like to see where we continue to have the kind of opportunity for Chicanos to come to schools like UTEP; where we get more Chicano faculty and staff in important positions; where there's an awareness in the sensitivity to a difference in Chicanos--not better, not worse, just the difference in Chicano students; to provide role models to encourage people to hang in there and keep going; and finally to help individuals here and there as they need it. So these are ongoing things, and it's a continuous thing as opposed to something major. So there's no one goal that I can accomplish, and that's it. I just want to keep it going for a little while longer and then somebody else is going to have to take over, do it. I'm just afraid that they won't pick somebody who will care.

But don't get me wrong, Ken. I have a particular fondness for Chicanos, but I will tell you this, I'm proud of the fact that I've never discriminated--since I grew up--but as an administrator I've never discriminated against Anglos or any other group of people. Well, the saying in the division is, "Truth, Justice, and the Avila Way". I pride myself on trying to be fair. If I have been unfair it's been out of ignorance, not an intent. I don't care what a person's or a

student's skin color is or his background. I will help that student to the best of my ability. I just have a special sensitivity to Chicanos. But I'll tell you, I've killed an awful lot Chicanos who deserved it. In fact if anything, which I do, I've been harder on Chicanos because I expect them to work and to act better. So in working for Chicanos, I haven't neglected the other people. In fact, if anything, I've been harder on Chicanos.

You might be interested to know that **there** have been two moves to get me fired from this job in the 10 years that I've been Dean of Students, and both of those moves were by Chicanos. And it was the other students who saved my rear, because I don't neglect them. And I won't be unfair to any particular group, I just have a sensitivity and an awareness of Chicano needs. I pride myself on that, on hopefully getting to the bottom and truth and trying to be just. It's the "Avila Way" that gets me in trouble sometimes. I sometimes cut corners, and I'm not always your most diplomatic person. (Laughter)

But no, I've tried to be fair. I love that student body. Nobody knows the students better than I do. I mean, I was one of them; I grew up with them; I kept up with them; I taught them in the public schools; I've cried with them; I've gotten drunk with them. I know them. They're El Paso for the most part, and I know El Paso. And I'm not cutting down the fact that there aren't good administrators who come in from out of town, there are. But they don't know El Paso; it takes a long time to know the uniqueness and difference in El Paso. It's kind of a laid back city, and I can feel it because I've been part of it. Whereas these people, they can't feel it, unless they've been here a long time. And then they begin to feel it and say, "Oh,

yeah, now I can feel it!" But in the beginning they're lost because they try to apply what works somewhere else here, and it doesn't often work.

L: That's true.

A: So I know my student body, and I love them. They don't always deserve the love because there's an awful lot of them who do wrong things, but there's an awful lot of good people out there. And somebody needs to listen and to care, and hopefully that will be there after I leave.