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Oral history interview with Jesse Treviño, 2004 July 15-16

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Jesse Treviño on July15-16, 2004. The interview took place in San Antonio, Texas and was conducted by Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Recuerdos Orales: Interviews of the Latino Art Community in Texas.

This transcript has been lightly edited. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

CARY CORDOVA: All right. We are recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Jesse Treviño on July 15, 2004, at Our Lady of the Lake University Library [San Antonio, Texas], and this is session one, disc one.

With that, Jesse, let me ask you when and where were you born?

JESSE TREVIÑO: Yes, I was born; you wouldn't believe it, in a little shack in Monterrey, Mexico. And we had a little house. It had a dirt floor, just like in the movies, you know. Dirt floor. And I was born on Christmas Eve, 1946, and it just – I don't remember, but what they tell me is that I came down the chimney – we didn't have a chimney. We had an opening – it was like a thatched roof, that I came down and that's why I was dark. Because I was wondering why I was so dark, and I – they said, well, you know, you came down the chimney – you got dark, my mother would tell me – and I believed my mom. Anyway, I was born there.

I have 12 brothers and sisters – nine brothers and three sisters. Well, my oldest brother was born in New Braunfels, Texas because my father had been here from Mexico working and met my mother; he was born here in New Braunfels. She was Mexican but she was born here, and they met and all that. So – but they got married and my oldest brother and two older sisters were born here in the United States. They were American citizens.

My mother and my father went back to Monterrey, Mexico to live, and that's where nine of us were born over there. I say nine, I should say seven were born over there. And it was interesting because, the two older ones that were born here grew up in San Antonio, Texas. They were educated over there.

We came back to the United States after 10 years being over there. And that's when I came over, being born over there. And I was about four years old when I came back. That's the story. And my father was – I remember he drove a truck and he would carry materials like dirt, rocks and stuff from the mountains. He wasn't too bad off, but we still lived in a little house. We were the only ones that had water in there, so we supplied water for the rest of the little community there, that little area where we lived.

But it was a time where, you know, people, were looking for opportunity. My father had a better opportunity over here in the USA. So we came and we settled here on the west side of San Antonio, and we lived in a couple of little houses. And I remember living by the creek for a couple years there, and then we moved to another house, and actually we ended up on Monterrey Street there on the west side.

And you know, as a little boy I remember I was going to David Crockett Elementary School, and you have to remember, I was already drawing and I really enjoyed drawing. I was drawing on the walls and stuff there in the house. I remember my mom told me, I was doing little cartoons and she says, you can't do that, you know, because this house doesn't belong to us. So she made me remove the cartoon sketch with soap and water.

But you know – and the thing about it is that, in school, I guess some of my teachers recognized that I could draw. But I was real competitive, you know. I liked challenges, and I remember entering a contest and feeling positive that I was going to win. And I did win. I won a little – it was a wildlife drawing contest, and I remember drawing two little doves on a manila, yellowish paper. And it looked like a professional artist had sketched that.

MS. CORDOVA: How did you even know about this contest at the Witte Museum [San Antonio, Texas]?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, you see that – that slide, the whole thing that – there was probably – I can't remember the teacher but there was – in the first grade I remember that – that I know the things the teachers could see, the things that I could do. So one of them was aware of that contest, and that's how I found out. The teacher introduced me to that contest and said, look, there's a contest over there. Would you like to enter? And wow, that was right there, and then. I figured I must be pretty good to enter the contest. And that's what did it. And I realized that there were a lot of art contests, not just in here, locally, all over the country. And I remember

entering like safety contests – safety poster contests. They all had to do with art, and – and winning so many.

But going back to elementary, that's what I did, and sure, I mean, my teachers – I got away with, you know, not taking some of the classes and things that I needed because I was working on art projects that my teachers wanted me to work on, yeah. And it was just incredible. I remember in middle school working along with my teacher on a mural, you know, that we did. And it was incredible.

I think that – when I got to middle school, that's where you could take an art elective, what they call an art elective, and that was really nice for me because you spent – it was – again, I – in the earlier years, it was like, you know, it felt like I was, I don't know, getting away with it, and at the same time I was – I was really cheating myself because perhaps I wasn't learning the things that I – or missing out on some of the things the other kids were learning because I was doing this, you know? And I mean, I don't regret that, but that's the way it was. I spent a lot more time with my art.

When I got to high school, I remember, you know, not even going out or doing the other things, going to football games with my friends because I'd go directly from my commercial art class, which was half of the day painting and dedicated to all kinds of art. That – when I went home, I would still continue my art work, you know what I'm saying? I would be so involved in my art work that that's what – that's what I enjoy doing. After being half a day in an art class.

MS. CORDOVA: Were your parents supportive?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, you have to understand that such a big family, and I was – this is the truth, is that, my problem was the lack of attention. I need a lot of attention and I didn't get it. Why? Well, because 12 people in my family, they always had other things to think about. The financial aspects of this and all that. So I'm there – so I'm trying to figure out what I could do. And when I won that contest at the Witte Museum, my mother, one of my sisters, a couple of my brothers went to the Witte Museum and to the little auditorium where they were going to present the awards and they sat in the audience with Anglo old ladies sitting there in the museum. And when they announced my name and I went up to that podium, and I was – I was nervous, I was trembling. I went up there and they had my little drawing here on the little easel, facing the audience. Everybody was clapping and I had goose bumps. I remember looking up and saying, ha ha, this is what I want to do. This is the way I want to feel.

And I realized that I could feel that way because of course, I could get compensated if I won, and – and I would come out in the newspaper or TV or something and get the recognition that I didn't get from my family – and I understood. I mean, everybody had their own thing. I mean, nobody really cared about – they didn't know what art was.

You know, I grew up in a – I didn't know, artists, like real artists that worked as – made a living. So it wasn't a field where it was very well respected. I mean really, and so the realist thing about it is that, you know, again, as much as my family – and again, it was a gradual thing. I had to make believers out of all of them really because in our community paintings and art, again, you wouldn't go to places that you see paintings inside houses, you know, in that neighborhood. Of course a poor neighborhood and they weren't exposed to art. They are more now. So there were things like that then.

So who was going to, you know, where was I going to do? The only thing I really knew was that perhaps that I could learn as an artist more and then, as much as I could. Although I knew that there weren't really artists around me that – that were already, successful and making a living out of art. So I think just to educate myself, learn as much as I can about art and, and that perhaps then I could get some type of a job, teaching art or, being an artist or something. That was my idea.

So when I was in high school I won – I didn't win all contests, but I won two scholarships. I won one to the Chicago Art Institute and I won one to the Art Students League in New York. And never been in a plane, never – and for – I was just lucky that my brother's sister-in-law, was married and lived in Brooklyn. So he called her up and said, hey, my brother has won a scholarship. Can he stay with you all?

So I went. Never been on a plane, and went to Brooklyn and all that. And for – for – the first couple of months I, you know, would go to school on the train to Manhattan and go to school. And real soon I got a little job in the Village, a little place that had about 10 artists, little easels, sketching people. I was making – I didn't have any money so I was making a little bit of money and opened a little savings account. I remember, you know, doing that. I loved it, you know, because it was the kind of institution that I liked to go, like an art academy sort of, you know, art – just really – it's an old institution that's been there, a lot of famous artists have been there.

And I remember in 1966 I met Salvador Dali here at the school. It was all staged and everything, but he got there in a taxi. I remember the taxi goes right into the school. He goes into the administrative building, and there's a lady who's the director, has this – I guess this plaster head of, you know – [inaudible] – on her desk.

And he gets there, he goes in there with his cane and everything, takes it, and everybody follows him. He goes out to the – outside on the steps and gets it. He says, this is what I think about art, and he throws that on the ground and breaks it, and he gets in the taxi and leaves. It was really weird, but I mean, he used to do a lot of weird things. At the time I didn't know who he was, you know? He was a famous artist. I was 18 years old.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you – did you always – were you always drawn to portraiture? Like you were doing those portraits?

MR. TREVIÑO: I like – I always loved it. I always liked – but when I got to the Art Students League, I took several courses but I ran across someone that I haven't talked to him lately but I've seen a little bit in some of the magazines, William F. Draper. And William F. Draper is probably known more for – for his – he's a combat artist, you know. He's got murals in the Pentagon. And he's got a lot of stuff.

But I was so impressed because at the school they had a couple of show windows that face the street and they put some of the instructors' paintings there, you know. And I was so impressed with his portraits. And, you know, I remember there was his way, a certain style of painting. It's very spontaneous. He loved – a piece from life, you know. And he culls to different pieces, and he's painted so many important people. Carl Sandburg, a famous painting of John F. Kennedy in the rocking chair, paintings like that. So, you know, to me that – he's probably one that, when it comes to portraits, he's a master at it.

I remember that he asked me – I received my letter, my draft notice – no, it was letter of induction when I was there, and I went there to – when I was here in San Antonio, I remember taking the physical and everything, and I had flat feet or something, or sleepwalk, or something, so I was classified 1-Y. And you know when I moved to New York, I had to re-take that physical, and in Brooklyn they just, okay, you're all right. They don't even check you. They just take you right through there, like cattle, you know. So you're ready to go.

So I got that letter, that draft notice when I was in New York after my first year at the Art Students League. I remember Mr. Draper, he was trying to – also he couldn't believe I was, you know, being drafted and everything. And I remember that he was – recommended me to go to Paris because they had like a program, you know, you could go for the summer to Paris. Man, what a great thing that he was going to recommend, with the school. I was going to stay at the place over there where the students stay. Anyway, I got my notice. I had to come back to San Antonio, just enough time to see my mom and then my family and then get into the training for Vietnam, the jungle training.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you think about not going – not following the draft notice and just going to Paris?

MR. TREVIÑO: I thought about it. And I tell you why, because I wasn't an American citizen then. Now during the Iraqi war –

[Interruption.]

MR. TREVIÑO: During the Iraqi war, there are people that, you know, legal aliens here and that they will serve in the war and they're not citizens. So you know, that's what happened to me. I've lived in the United States all my life, and you know, and I went and I didn't – I didn't – I didn't want to lose those rights, and I knew that – and so I knew people that had gone back to Mexico, you know, that were here for a long time. And you know what? They went back, and people went to Canada.

And, you know, again, I thought, I come from a family, my oldest brother served in the Marines, one served in the Navy, and another one in the Army, and another one in the Navy. I already had, you know, about five of my older brothers had served. But they hadn't been in Vietnam, you know, so I was a little afraid, but it was incredible because when I was drafted, I was part of the 9th Division, which was the whole division that was rebuilt just for the Vietnam War, and we're talking about a whole division made out of companies and battalions. Anyway, talking about thousands and thousands of people. From Ft. Riley, Kansas we went on some trains to Oakland, combat ready with the uniforms. And we went on three merchant marine ships to Vietnam and we landed there. And it was just incredible because we ended up in the Mekong Delta and I was in the infantry, carried a rifle, and you know, went around looking for snipers and, you know. It was a – it was the most dangerous thing that you could imagine.

One day in Vietnam in the Mekong Delta, you never sleep, you know. And that takes a toll on you, being out there, you know, the fatigue and all of that. It was just so incredible. When I got wounded, you know – you know, when we trained, I – I had about 50 friends, we trained together, a whole platoon, probably about 50 people. I was going to be – we all were there for 12 months. After three months, half, 50 percent of those 50, 25 people were either wounded or killed. You know, after three months, and I tell you, it was an afternoon, we were running out of water, we didn't have anything. What to do? So we get on helicopters, in a little village – they put us on helicopters and they take us to areas where they find these snipers, and you know, one time we were there and ready to go back to our camp. But there were snipers shooting at us. So little by little we got up, like

two, three of us at a time. And when I got out, these two other guys were running across the dike, running across the rice paddies, and booby trap, some kind of explosion. And I remember just blasting me. Everyone else – firecracker, you know, popped in my hand. How burnt and painful it is, and burning. And it's so powerful.

Well, this explosion blew me; I would say probably about 50 feet, like pow. I just landed in the mud, I was face down in the mud. And I remember my right leg, which was over, was facing like that, was over my other leg because it was shattered, all shattered from that explosion. And then my arm, I still had my hand, but it was – it was – it felt like it was on fire. It was burning and my hand just was like frozen and it was like – it felt like it was on fire. The pain was – I couldn't believe how painful it was. And I was face down, I thought – it was a lot of blood.

What happened was, back of my knee, my artery was severed with shrapnel, and besides being all shattered and blood was gushing out and I – about 10 different places in my body. I remember laying in the mud and everything. And little by little the corpsmen who got to me, they – I remember put a tourniquet and gave me some shots of morphine. I was there for about 30 minutes waiting. Actually they put me on a like a stretcher and they dragged me all the way to the helicopters to get me on the helicopter to take me back to the – it was something like a MASH camp where the doctors and stuff. And I remember I was still awake. I could still – I was laying down and I didn't know what was – I was, of course they gave me the morphine and everything, but I have to tell you, that moment had to be the – so close to – I guess I felt like I was going to die there because I could see everything.

But one of the things that I – I guess that's what happens, right before you die, too. I started thinking about everything I did, you know. I didn't want to die because I felt like I was still a kid. I was young, but then again, I've been painting since I was a little boy, you know, so I feel like, man, I did a lot. I got all the way to New York and I painted all these paintings. I was a pretty good artist. And I could tell that my hand, I just knew it was gone as far as my – not my hand but my art because I couldn't do anything. It was just – I could feel it. I could, you know, it was – I guess when you're like paralyzed. That's what happened is that one of my nerves was also severed and that paralyzed the whole thing, so I couldn't – I couldn't use it at all.

But I remember that I started thinking, and it was so different because up to New York my paintings, the subject matter – I did all kinds of different things but at that point I thought – I guess it was my family, you know, my mom and my neighborhood, and everything I cherish, I guess. You know, my brothers and my friends. And I, at that moment there I was thinking, what could I do? And then, what if I could get another chance? Or what is – right there at that moment I was running out of time. I needed to get things together in my head about what I wanted to do. And I started thinking, man, paint – these people are the images that I should paint. And there were those images of those paintings that I have done, that you see, you know, as – of that experience, you know. And that's some kind of reawakening, but you know, that – what I woke up to were things that meant something to me. And I was some type of an artist that – that, I could do those things. I could paint, and learning from William F. Draper, I could take violent works that – make them proud of working with other people behind a desk, of being who he is and all of that, and doing it in a very beautiful way. Just as an official congressman or, you know, a queen or a king, or something like that, to do paintings. So I thought about that.

But again, thinking about my family and the images, were so many different images. Like *The Raspa Man* for example, he's a perfect example of that because I knew that, you know – again, weren't images that you would see in homes or businesses or anywhere in our community. Those were things that – oh, why couldn't I do *The Raspa Man*, you know, dignified like that and do it – you know, not just – you know what I'm saying? That this guy would be – so what I did, when I did this painting, this was the front of a hospital over here, where a lot of the people were in that hospital. There were several pick-up trucks that were backed up to the street where they would sell all these things. And some of them were ladies that were – and those, that were the vendors. I remember going to one lady. I had my camera, and I asked her. I was going to take a picture, I was a student, I wanted to do a painting of her. She said, oh, no, no, no.

Then I went to this guy, and this guy had several people there. So he told everybody, get out of the way. And I liked that because in a way he was – being himself, he wanted to be just himself. And then that's what I wanted too. You know, I kind of – take the people out, just put him in. But it didn't. And that's the beauty of this is that he was being real candid, real himself, right? I mean, this – and that's – I thought that was really nice of that.

MS. CORDOVA: He wanted to be –

MR. TREVIÑO: So I did paintings like this, but they were very – they were not popular in that sense. First of all, who's going to buy this? There weren't people, you know, that were just buying this type of a poster or painting. This was a large painting, too. So what I did –

MS. CORDOVA: How large?

MR. TREVIÑO: It's about, oh, '48 by '66, '66 by '48. Pretty large. And I – I remember taking this one – well, I did a

whole series of different paintings and I had my home, the one I was telling you where I did a lot of these paintings, and I had one of them was called *El Carro en La Calle de Zarzamora*. And that painting, there's a story about that painting, but that wasn't part of the painting. And I love that painting because of what it was. It was just an El Carro was that street and it was a real typical sight. And I love the way it would look like it was painted blue, somebody painted with a brush, or whatever, the car, you know.

Anyway, I remember someone mentioning – a good friend of mine saying, oh, those are beautiful paintings but who's going to buy those paintings? Well, first of all, I didn't paint them to sell them. I mean, I painted them because I loved the images, you know. I thought possibly of maybe selling them, but it was because I was motivated to paint that, you know. I thought it was such a good – to do paintings like this and put them in places so that people, introduce them to the – and I remember, or again, that kind of – maybe thinking what I was doing was the right thing, that I was painting because I loved to paint and it wasn't about painting things that were popular to sell or commercially and stuff like that.

And going to my school, my art education, you know, I went to – after getting back – going back to getting wounded, you know, it was very hard for me because as a kid I liked to play baseball, I liked to in school. More than anything I liked construction, constructing things, you know. And I still do that, you know. [Inaudible] – I spent two years in the hospital. After that I was I wasn't first in Vietnam, then they sent me to Japan for a month. Then they sent me to Japan for three months. And my brother here in San Antonio called Henry B. Gonzalez –

MS. CORDOVA: They sent you to Japan for a month and then they sent you to Japan for three months?

MR. TREVIÑO: From – from Vietnam, being in the hospital for like the first month, which was a real critical month, they had to – I lost a lot of blood, the arteries, and I almost lost my leg; they managed to save it. So that one month I was in a body cast because my whole side was shattered. A body cast, and couldn't – you know, I couldn't use my hand. So – [inaudible]. Basically they had to take care of me for that time. And they sent me to Japan, Yokohama, Japan, and they have a hospital where they have a lot of wounded.

So my brother wrote the congressman and told him, Jesse Treviño – because when I was a kid, Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez was, for me was a real role model. I really – I saw him as like the president of the United States because as a kid he – when I won a contest in Washington, D.C., for example, he would send me a picture of the – I didn't have money to go to Washington, but he would send me a picture of the winning entry along with a photo of himself, and then sign it. And I was just so gratified. He was recognizing that, you know. That meant everything to me. And he did that for many years. So –

MS. CORDOVA: When you won any contest?

MR. TREVIÑO: Not – no, a contest in Washington. National contest. Several national contests.

MS. CORDOVA: What was the – which contest?

MR. TREVIÑO: The Merchant Marine poster contest and the "Stay in School" poster contest. There were several safety contests. Something about – different contests. Anyway, I have photographs, so that's what's the nice thing about – of him, and that. I was showing it to everyone, or that would come out in the newspaper, so people would know about that. I thought, oh, what a great person. So he's always known about me as a little kid, so my brother said, you know that artist, Jesse Treviño, the one you knew, he's in the hospital in Japan. You know, he's wounded and everything. Could we send – bring him to the United States in San Antonio? Here we have Ft. Sam Houston.

They sent me the next – the next – well, it takes a whole day to fly over here. They brought me to Ft. Sam Houston here. And I remember getting here to Kelly Air Force Base, where – arriving in a plane and there was nobody there, you know, – [inaudible] – give you a little more, a better reception, and now someone returns from Iraq and they have a parade. But back then they took us in a bus, a bus with stretchers to Ft. Sam Houston. I remember getting here. I spent a total of two years in the hospital.

MS. CORDOVA: Do you know what day you were wounded?

MR. TREVIÑO: I think it was the 23rd of February, 1967.

MS. CORDOVA: And so you had only been in the military for three months?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. Well, it – yes, I really was. Plus the training, you know. It was another three months.

MS. CORDOVA: So you had sort of – been enlisted from mid-1966, maybe, or somewhere in there?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. Right in there.

MS. CORDOVA: And did you ever think about not – or sort of joining up with the Navy, or was it definitely always going to be the Army that you knew you were going to join?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, when you get drafted, you go to the Army. But when I landed, I felt, well – I was optimistic. Maybe, you know, I could – it was – two years was the thing, right? If I could make it through here I could come back and continue my school there at the Art League. And that was my plan, you know, to do that. But that was going to be – was never going to come back.

And when I was in the hospital, that was a – I remember, I guess, you know, being in the hospital is not so bad, but the thing that I couldn't use my right hand, you know. I could just be there and try to use it, I could do things but I couldn't do anything. And I was in a lot of pain, a lot of pain. I remember it was a horrible experience. And I tried – I would try to do things with this hand but it was – I mean, it was so frustrating, you know. I couldn't even write my name, you know. I couldn't write my name.

You know, I really was worried, what am I going to do here? What am I going to do when I get out, when I do get out of the hospital? I couldn't walk for a whole year. I couldn't walk at least – I had that big cast, and that was pretty scary too, thinking I was going to be able to at least walk right, or have trouble walking. I don't any more, but that was – so I didn't know what to do. I thought – my brother, one of my brothers, he went to Stanford and he was the one who called Henry Gonzalez and told him about it. Anyway, he was real active. He was real against the war and everything, and he was in the Navy, you know. But he went to college and everything else when there was attack against the Vietnam War, all of that.

But me, I didn't know how to feel because, you know, as bitter as I was with what happened to me, you know, I still, you know, I'm still an artist, you know. I didn't have the ability to do it at the moment, you know. I couldn't do it. But one of the things I thought really happened to me is I grew up real fast after that happened, and that it pointed me in the right direction. This is what I wanted to do, is really paint the things that I wanted to. And I'm not too sure that tragedy that happened was, you know, what would have happened. Because I know sometimes certain things happen in your life and I think that happened in my life and changed the way I really thought about things.

And during that period also, one of the things that I wasn't – I didn't know it was possible to be able to do something with your other hand if you lack the ability to, you know – like I'd never had the ability to do that. I was just one-handed. So that – I wasn't too sure if you could do that. As day by day I realized how much I loved art and how much I like to do things with my hands. And that there was a way that you could still do it. And just like when you're a child you learn how to do things, and I know that child's – children that are – that perhaps don't have the ability, maybe loss of limbs or legs, that they adapt and they learn how to do things.

That's what I like. Ever since I was a little boy I liked to make little things out of wood, sculpt, anything I could do with my hands, I want to do it. And so I didn't realize – after I lost my hand, it's painful, it's everything was frustrating because the – when I was in New York I could draw a portrait of you, something, a perfect likeness of you and everything, with no – with no problem at all. I mean, all of a sudden I was in a situation where I couldn't do anything, you know. Just like a football player losing his legs, it's over. And that's the way I felt. I was so devastated.

My family, you know, they were great supporters when I was in New York. They were shocked when they saw me in the hospital here in San Antonio when they came in. And they were around my bed, they couldn't believe. I had 300-some-odd stitches in my body. I couldn't – you know, I couldn't do anything. And they're going to cheer me on? I mean, there's no – there's not anyone. There were priests, they couldn't tell me anything positive about what had happened to me, you know. I was devastated by it and I couldn't understand why that happened to me.

I remember doing an article for – we had two newspapers here, the San Antonio Light, and they came to the hospital and said, oh, you're Jesse Treviño. And I'd say – yeah, it's a great article. What are you going to do now? And I was just going to start San Antonio College here. That was the best thing I could have ever done. As much as I thought, I don't want to take literature, you know, all these courses, right? I didn't want to. I just wasn't interested. And if I did, I had to take, you know, refresher courses that you have to take before, you know, just to get to that level, junior college. And I did all that, you know. And I thought, well, maybe I could teach art or something.

But I got involved with the art department there at San Antonio College and Mel Casas was a teacher and he was the only one that I know – but there were a lot of great teachers there, and it was a time that – that I was part of – I would say fortunate to be a part of. Because I could have been an artist in any period, but it was during that period. And that's in the 60's. That's when Janis Joplin was singing at campuses and, you know, I remember having real long hair but nobody knew it because I had it up in a little cap on my head. When I went home I had long hair in school.

And I remember, you know, myself then during those times, and being part of a movement of – forming a group again of artists who were there – yeah, I was an artist, you know, studied in New York. And yet we all had – we all loved art but yet we were also caring about things that were going on. We were in a way active. We were very involved. We cared about everything that was going around with our people and our institutions and everything else. And of course art, you know, of how we as artists could have a venue of exhibiting, where we could exhibit. So I remember one of our high schools, putting our work together, an art exhibit called Con Safo, with Mel Casas, Cesar Martinez, that group, small group.

MS. CORDOVA: I just want to be clear about your hair, though, Jesse. You said you had long hair but you would put it up in a hat? When would you put it up in your hat?

MR. TREVIÑO: I put it first in a rubber band, you can twirl it like that and put a cap, and I had like a cap that I would wear. And because – I would – when I bought my house, I already had long hair. When I got wounded, I lived with my mom, you know, so it took me – I remember going to the house. My mom would put me up in the front room of the house and the neighbors would come and nobody would understand why I had long hair. Because the only people that had long hair were like people that, you know – hippies, and somebody – back then I had long hair and I would have said, look, *en Español, es una promesa adios*. That was it. Okay. It was a promise that I made, which was also true, you know. But again, my mom took care of me and accepting that too because, you know, after what had happened to me – anyway, from there I bought that house at Mistletoe, in San Antonio, Texas. And I remember –

MS. CORDOVA: How did you buy it?

MR. TREVIÑO: In the neighborhood where I bought the house was – most of the people who lived there were Anglo. There was – it wasn't that far from where I lived. Still there were some nice houses. Back then it was 1969, you know, '69 I remember when I went to a realtor, I went to see the house. There was this old man and his son. His son was in a wheelchair. Mr. Walters, his name was. And I had my cap because I knew that if I had walked in there – I was buying it through the VA and all that. And I guess I got a hat to – [inaudible] – not sell the house to this guy. And he liked me because I was a Vietnam veteran, what happened to me and all that. And then his son was in a wheelchair, and it worked out fine. But he never knew that I had any time that I conducted business or – I didn't want the way I – my appearance to have an effect on their decision, you know. On how – that was the time. Later on I could just – but I remember a lot of people, friends of friends would – they never got to see me with the long hair like that because they were – they thought I'm a Vietnam veteran and they wouldn't understand that most of the people that have long hair are anti-war and it would be an insult to me, you know. Insult to me for them to –

MS. CORDOVA: Were you at all greeted with any sort of negative – I don't know, reception as a result of being a Vietnam veteran?

MR. TREVIÑO: No. No. I don't think so, but at the same time it's like everything I did was really, you know, accepted too, either as, you know. Like something good for the country, you know. That – that's – that's what's missing, you know, that people are very accepted at that.

MS. CORDOVA: How did you feel about the war in Vietnam? Did you have any thoughts about it, either before you went in or after?

MR. TREVIÑO: See, you have to understand, I went to Vietnam, when I was in New York during that time, the British invasion of music and all of that. It was so popular, everything. And for some reason I guess I wasn't real interested in the headlines in the newspaper, reading what was going on. And usually it was put in the back of the newspaper. I don't think – other people knew what was really going on.

When I got wounded and ended up here at Ft. Sam Houston, I lived in San Antonio most of my life. I never knew – when I left to go to Vietnam, I didn't know that that hospital was packed with the wounded. I don't think people in San Antonio – if they had the cameras and showing them, that would have had a big impact on the way people thought, you know. Now we see everything that's going on in Iraq and everything, it has great influence to public opinion. Back then, I tell you, if people would have seen what I saw – I saw it when I was part of that. My family didn't know. You know, the only one that probably knew more and was against was my brother that went to Stanford and was against the war and was in the Navy and all that. He protested against the war. He's probably the one that probably nobody would – hey, we're just all the wounded here. Nobody cares. And finally people were starting to care.

So yes, in New York I was – you know, when I was back there, I didn't know people were killing – I mean, how horrible it was in Vietnam. So maybe I didn't think it was that much danger and this. I was naïve. I didn't know. I wasn't educated. Maybe if I'd gone to college and started, you know, gone with my brother, then I wouldn't have gone. But I don't know. But I guess it's knowing more about it. I learned more about world affairs after I came back from Vietnam and started going to San Antonio College and became more of a, you know, Con Safo, the

group, awareness of what was going on. Not just here, because we had our own problems here that we needed to fix, but what's going on in the world. And am I for it or against it, or do I want to be part of that? I guess at 18 years old, not knowing anything, I think I'll take a chance, I'm going to go. I didn't want to go back to Mexico, I wanted to come back to New York, study. And it had a lot to do with that.

And that's why, you know, when I went to SAC and became part of that group and those times, that affected me quite a bit because, you know, after being – coming close to losing my life, and then seeing all the things that maybe I could become part of or make some kind of changes in our system, and having that kind of impact that – that – I want to do that. And through my art it – it was so amazing because I remember having – being in that one show for that group at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, the Dale Gas Show. And there's an article, and I have it framed, called "Chicanisimo," and it has Luis Jimenez, the cowboy with the cow and the rope. It has that piece. They had that right in the center of the museum on the exhibit. But in the whole article it's a review of the exhibit, and it mentions so and so. And it says, however, the heart of the show was the paintings of Jesse Treviño, right. And to me that meant a lot because, again, I mean, I remember even the graduate review, when I got my masters at UTSA, it had – there was an article, I had an exhibit, and the lady that wrote the – the person who wrote the critique also said really wonderful things about my work. So those things were important. That museum show and the – [inaudible] – show.

[END TAPE 1, SIDE A]

Anyway, and then Pam Sakowitz, who worked with Frank Hofheinz, at that time was mayor of Houston. He saw the show, he loved the painting, the *El Carro en La Calle de Zarzamora*. There it is. That's the answer. So the guy said, well, you should buy that painting. He said, the mayor of Houston will have the painting. But he liked the painting, and Pam Sakowitz bought it from me for Houston because he loved it so much. And now I think they have it in Houston in the Esperson building, they have that painting. And I've had it in some exhibits in – [inaudible]. I've even had it at the Smithsonian, but I think so, when I had my show there they – you know, had some – you know, people – being able to do that, to sell the painting to someone like that, you know, it's a lot for an artist to be able to put it on their resume and things like that. And all those things mattered a lot to me, you know. And I remember that exhibit as one of – yes, because I – it was right after I graduated and I, you know, I thought, oh, this is what I wanted to do, too. Just like when I was a kid I thought – because you know, you have to remember coming back to SAC or coming here to Our Lady of the Lake, and then eventually go – see, my plan was after graduating from here, from Our Lady of the Lake, that I would probably teach, like, you know, I was going to do a teaching certificate here to be able to teach art.

MS. CORDOVA: Just to be clear, how long were you at SAC?

MR. TREVIÑO: At SAC, I was there about two and a half years.

MS. CORDOVA: So that was maybe like 1969 and 1970?

MR. TREVIÑO: '71. Right after that I came here.

MS. CORDOVA: Why did you change to Our Lady of the Lake?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, over there, community college –

MS. CORDOVA: – two years.

MR. TREVIÑO: Two years for that.

MS. CORDOVA: And then you came here?

MR. TREVIÑO: Came here, to Lady of the Lake.

MS. CORDOVA: And you were going to get a teaching certificate?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, I was going to get a bachelors degree. And back then there it was only girls here, only women. Of course that's not a bad idea, but anyway, I remember that as a good place – and you know, I was still, I didn't have confidence, you know. I didn't have it. And the students association here, one of the guys, the president or somebody said, hey, Jesse is an artist. I was taking some art courses there, art classes, just for teaching. What about a mural? I said, I don't know. That's too much. Well, we'll get you the paints and materials and everything. Okay.

Where can we go? Well, there was a building right in the middle, back behind these buildings, where everybody would hang out. It's the student union building, you know. They had a pub. It's a nice little place. This would be the place to do it. So we – I got a big roll of canvas and stretched it all out. And just a regular height, and put the mural right in the middle of the wall. Little by little I started working. And people would come around, and it's

just incredible.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you plan it out in advance? Did you have a drawing or –

MR. TREVIÑO: No. Well, I sometime – the way I work with murals is I have a starting point and I have some idea of how I want it to evolve as a mural. But I started building on it. I'll show you some of the murals that I've done. I began with one thing and then from there it evolves and builds and use of space. But I remember starting at one end on this one. No, I – well, I looked at the whole mural, okay, this is the center of the mural, it would start from here. It didn't go all the way around. It started from here, sitting wall. And the center part – I thought, wow, wouldn't it be great – because I'd like for the viewer to look at, and go this way, go this way. I have this figure, revolutionary guy, almost like a Christ figure and I was stuck on that. I just put that guy in the middle and then from over here, I'd start the beginning of the – like it would be the Aztecs and the Spaniards and kind of that start evolving, come further, then go around the revolution, the migration of Mexican to the United States, the farm workers. And then you know, just back to the family. The whole thing going around.

And back then too, if you noticed, I have paintings on canvas and that mural that I did at my home, and the murals What I do, and some guy from El Casos, he said – the painting, the background was black. And I liked that because after I came back from Vietnam I went through a dark period and I was really depressed. People couldn't talk to me very much or anything. I just, you know, I felt terrible. And I liked to be in a dark place. I went in that room and that mural was facing my bed. And I had a window, I boarded it up, no light coming in there. Then I put some lights just to shine on that wall, black wall. And little by little – one of the things that I put – and in there I had a painting of this girl.

MS. CORDOVA: This is the *Mi Vida* self-portrait that you did?

MR. TREVIÑO: Uh huh. And in high school I had – just a girl friend – I didn't have girlfriends.

MS. CORDOVA: A girlfriend from high school?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, it was the one that I met when I was going to graduate. And later on she was killed in a car accident. So –

MS. CORDOVA: You learned that after you did the painting?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. No, no. After I dropped out. But I'm saying, when I did the painting, I wanted to put things that up to that point were part of mi vida, my life. And I remember looking at the wall and I would see her face, first of all, so out of this – I had to paint things – you know, one of the things, go back, because I think it's a very important fact. When I was a little boy, my family would go back to Monterrey to visit, and I remember I must have been, I would say, 10 years old, about 10 years old. And I remember walking downtown through Monterrey, and there were a couple of places where there were artists that would paint these huge – I realized what they were. From the ground up with panels, big panels. I guess they were billboards, big billboards, but they would paint right here, they were painted. It was so incredible to see an eye this big that was painted, or a face. And I'm talking about just painting – and I would learn through the – I'm talking about hand – and I would stand there and look at it. I couldn't – cigarette billboards and everything, the faces, how they could do that. It was so incredible. They were really artists who were doing that kind of stuff, but their art wasn't just real nice bullfighters. I was so impressed with that. I thought – that has always stayed with me.

So getting back to this particular mural, you know, I saw it like that. So first of all, the face, the back, right?

MS. CORDOVA: What was her name?

MR. TREVIÑO: I don't know. I can't even remember her name. I'll think about it.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. And the – and so the cigarettes there –

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, it was about where I was at that time. And this is not over. Anyway, you know, I'm looking at what do I want to say and all that. So first I wanted to put her. I think it was very dominant, just as a figure, a face in the back. And with me, my head. Okay. This Purple Heart, you know. So I thought, how am I going to put – and then everything – I guess I'm very honest about composition, how important it is and where to put it and all that. You know, the idea of a hand, replace my hand, hand holding, this is what you get, Purple Heart, you get wounded for this. These are the pain-killers that they gave me for many, many years that probably hurt me more than helped me. And cigarettes that I smoked for many, many years too that were part of my life. And same with a cup of coffee. My first car. And then over here I'm standing as a soldier. Then there's a beer that kind of – here it poured down.

MS. CORDOVA: It's really an amazing painting. What did that mean to you to receive the Purple Heart?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, I didn't like it, you know. I think why the fact that it's like something that you're awarded, but I have to lose this and lose my hand in order to get this, you know. I think this is enough of a reward, just the hand. But when I think of this, it was – I guess if I would have been shot and then, you know, there were – hadn't lost any limbs, I would be different. But then I thought you know, it said a lot about me, you know. About things I work with. This was, what, '72?

MS. CORDOVA: Yes.

MR. TREVIÑO: Okay, so, you know, that was just to that point.

MS. CORDOVA: And you painted this on the wall of your home, right?

MR. TREVIÑO: On a wall. Across the wall like this. Back then I wasn't thinking anything – but I'll tell you one thing, it didn't take me very long after that, doing something like that, to realize that never again would I do anything that I couldn't save, you know. It was worthwhile, piece of paper, you know, but the image that, when you put it there, it's like it's doomed, you know. I mean, really, because there's no way it would be practical to take it out, you know.

So yes, like I said, after that everything else was done on – in the permanence of – the piece was so important to me.

MS. CORDOVA: And when were you fitted with the hook –

MR. TREVIÑO: See, it wasn't right away. Because 1969 or '70 I went to Temple, they have a hospital outside Temple, VA hospital there. And I still had my hand, but I couldn't – I couldn't bear it any more. The pain was – the doctors started new different surgeries to alleviate the pain. It was like – it felt like it was on fire all the time, my whole arm because of the injury. And they tried to do a series of blocks that they build into your neck where you have a nerve center and they collapsed my lung.

And you know, there was a surgery that they wanted to do on my back, where they go in and cut it, sever one of the nerves. But if they do that, it would probably lose feeling part of your face. So I said, no, I don't want any of that. They had already done a lot of experimenting on me and all that. The last thing they could do was amputate my hand, but I saw it as something – I mean, it took a lot of pressure off of me as far – I still have the pain, but you know, I could do more now because – the way I was, I felt like I couldn't do anything. Now with this, it's incredible – the kind of things that I could do that – but it's just like, a tool in your hand or anything, to learn how to use it to do so many things. Almost everything.

MS. CORDOVA: Has the hook changed at all, or have you kept it the same?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, you know, everything that I've been doing with my arm has so much effect on the pain because I guess what I'm trying to say is, throughout the years of much medication and things that you could take for pain, your body becomes immune to it almost, you know, eventually. So it doesn't really work. And I remember – where I couldn't sleep, the pain was so constant. It's there. But one of the things I've learned more and more is that I can control that pain. And I could control it with my will and my work and all of that. It really makes a difference to be able to work, to concentrate, and be so focused on that that I don't have too much time to think about the pain. And then sort of get used to it, you know? And that's part of it. You can have a pain that is excruciating, but without taking anything, it could be done psychologically, you know, your thoughts and things that you're really into, that mind over matter. It works. And that's what's happened to me because I also depend to take something, or doctors will tell you this and try – you know, whatever operations could be done. But it was really – it came down to me, you know.

When I think about it, it hurts. It does. So causality. It's a burn, pins and needles, pain. You know when you hit – imagine that all the time. Drive me crazy – even then it's hard to focus with this. But I'll tell you one thing, now I'm thinking of all these things that I've liked that – that's how I've done that. Worked on things I wanted, more than just painting on canvas. And then I'm like coming up with the murals and those kinds of projects. You get sort of involved as an artist and you don't have time – to feel pain, you know?

MS. CORDOVA: Yes. You do. I still want to go back to this painting and ask you maybe like what did your first car mean for you? When did you get it?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, you know, they have what they call – it's sort of – it's not a whole lot but it's a car allowance that under the VA I'm entitled to because I'm a disabled veteran. So depending on what percentage – I'm 90 percent disabled. Used to be 100 but now I'm 90.

MS. CORDOVA: Really. [Laughter.]

MR. TREVIÑO: Based on that – like also that's loss of a limb, if you lose a limb, that you're entitled to a car allowance. And so it's money to go toward buying a car. And with that car allowance you also get to put special devices to operate the car, you know. I just need power steering, you know, one-handed. They have stuff for your feet if you lose a leg, or things like that. So it pays for that too. If you get a wheelchair, like you get a home allowance when you build your house or whatever, you get big doorways and stuff like that. But to me, I got a car allowance. And you know what? That was the biggest thing for me because it's not – I always wanted a Mustang and I remember that you're given that real nice car, going to the hospital. Being able to drive, I was still an outpatient, but I'd go back over there. That car is a symbol. And that's what this whole mural is about. It's symbolism, you know. And to me, I mean, the way, again with the images, and what does this mean. They're symbols to me as much as that car, it's just a symbol and it's there in the painting. But it was such a big part of my life. I wanted it in the mural.

And then pan de dulce, I had pan de dulce as a kid. Not any more but –

MS. CORDOVA: You don't?

MR. TREVIÑO: Too much carbohydrate [They laugh].

MS. CORDOVA: When did you start smoking?

MR. TREVIÑO: Huh?

MS. CORDOVA: When did you start smoking?

MR. TREVIÑO: Oh, well, I've been married several times. When I got married in 1984, Theresa Landshaw at that time, I remember I stopped. I had some friends that I'd go eat breakfast with, breakfast club, and we'd go to this place to eat breakfast and tacos in the morning. And I remember going to this La Fogata is the name, a landmark in San Antonio, and I remember we were having a conversation and he was telling me that one of his friends had passed away. This was around – I didn't know him real well. He'd come to the restaurant every once in a while, he said he'd passed away. And he had gone to the doctor and got on a treadmill and passed out. I mean, died.

Me? I had a cigarette before breakfast, during breakfast, and after breakfast with coffee. I would do that with a cigarette all the time. I remember. And I thought, you know what? I – again, I was doing a painting for one of my friends, Juan Vasquez, the guy in *Los Piscadores*. The little boy. He's a judge, a federal judge in Washington, D.C. And I remember, you know what, if I want to live a little – if I want to paint a few more paintings, I've got to stop smoking, you know. It just made me realize right there and then. I guess it kind of scared me right there, to say, hey, let's stop. Look at that guy. Obviously his heart gave out.

MS. CORDOVA: Had you started before you were wounded, or after?

MR. TREVIÑO: Before. Yes.

MS. CORDOVA: Long before?

MR. TREVIÑO: You know, and I can't do it any more, but when I was in the hospital I was smoking there all night, you know. The nurse would make sure I wouldn't burn the place up, but still, give me a carton of cigarettes. When I was drawing portraits I had to have an ashtray to have several cigarettes on there. It's just a nasty habit. But I was just saying, you know, that's why they're on there. They're on the mural. That was a big part of my life. That was a good part of my life.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I'm going to switch to another disc right now. So let's take a quick break.

[Audio break.]

CARY CORDOVA: All right. We are recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Jesse Treviño on July 15, 2004. This is session one, disc two.

And Jesse, I've just laid out a bunch of your work for you. But what I actually wanted to ask you first was, what were the images that you were drawing as a kid? Like what were these contest images that you were winning things? What were you mostly drawing?

MR. TREVIÑO: I was drawing everything. Again, I think one of the important things was ideas, the idea that, a concept to win that contest is what I would concentrate. Maybe technically I wasn't that polished and that great because it was the first grade, but early on I learned that. I remember there was a fire prevention contest and I remember seeing the movie *The Shaggy Dog*, and it was about putting out fires. So I painted this little shaggy dog with his paw putting out a fire, something like that. Oh, everybody thought it was great. And so I guess what

I'm saying is that with every contest there had to be an idea that was clever that, you know, trying to be original, that wasn't done before, and that would be appealing to the judges, for example. Something that people would like it. And that's what I would do with each contest, to look for the clever idea, you know, to illustrate.

MS. CORDOVA: And how did you build your technical skills? Because I mean, there's one thing that's clear. You have incredible technical skills.

MR. TREVIÑO: You know, a lot of that I did all on my own, on my own really. Because of all the art classes that I've taken through school, you know, in elementary school I learned pretty much everything myself. There were no art classes. It wasn't until middle school where I began to take ceramics, painting. I don't know – art, those courses. And I had a great teacher. His name was Mr. Ramirez and he studied at Columbia University and he was a pretty good artist. He knew how to do everything, you know, paint in oils, do watercolors, different things. So I learned some of the things from him.

MS. CORDOVA: Like what do you remember learning from him?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, about mixing colors, like oil paints, oils, you know. And how to, you know, if you transfer an image or something to a canvas, different methods, and things that you can learn – like is in a book, but that's – I was one person, I thought I want to be like him because, you know, he went to art school and he would tell me about school. I think he wanted me to go to art school too. You know, he was a real person that – I remember going during the summer. He would open his class there and I would go work on – he had one painting – dogs playing poker – no, playing baseball, something like that. He would paint on a piece of plywood. So everybody else, I mean, the students when they came back would see what kind of work could be done. Anyway, it was kind of a good – it was a good experience.

But when I got to high school I had a teacher. Her name was Katherine Alsup. And Fox Tech High School, when I went there it was called Tech High School, Tech Vocational High School. Then the name was changed to Fox Tech for Mr. Fox. It was already known for the artists it had produced, some of the artists that came out of there were pretty good, like Joe Esquivel, and Jesse Almazan, Roberto Rios.

MS. CORDOVA: They were already known at that point?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, as an artist, I'd say these guys are good. They were pretty good artists. I learned a little later on how many great artists they had produced out of that. And I could see why. They had a place where a student would go in either in the morning or the afternoon, spend half of the day art, and the teacher – Katherine Alsup was amazing. She wasn't a great artist herself but she was such a great person to the students, and tell about a contest. Oh, man, all the contests. The scholarships. I mean, she knew, and she went to Parsons School of Design, she studied. And again, there was another person that – but the important thing is that, again back, she knew how to work with all the different techniques. I remember doing just about everything with her. Her getting me to work on everything and entering – she was great, you know. It was incredible what I learned from her.

Like she got me involved and became part of – I remember that, you know, they were so good, the students were so good that, you know, if you needed some commercial art, instead of going to a big company you could come to that school and you could get that for practically nothing, you know. And I remember the city had a large scrapbook that they had to put together for a scrapbook competition throughout the country, and we would always win because we'd do this beautiful scrapbook for the city, like a piece of artwork with all the photographs. What a fun place, you know. And I remember that she would get – and I remember certain companies needed a logo and they would actually pay. And I would do four or five logos, see which one you like, you know, and I remember getting paid for that. So they would get us little jobs. It was a great experience for an artist. I think any artist that went there, what a treat to be able to learn all these different things. Spend half of the day there working on your art projects.

I spent all that time going home and continue my ideas on posters, what other contests I could win.

MS. CORDOVA: It's amazing you were doing commercial art in high school.

MR. TREVIÑO: When I won that scholarship to the Art Students League, it was a contest sponsored by *National Scholastic* magazine, okay, and I remember that first the competition was to do a portfolio with examples of your work. So they had a regional competition here in San Antonio, and if you win on that competition then it would go to a national and compete so you could win on the national level. So I won the regional. And I remember I had a portfolio, and inside the folio I had about 20, just matted drawings and paintings of little boys and little girls, just little portraits. The judges, they loved it. It was like, wow. It has three of them that I saved, but the rest I gave away and gave different people. But that portfolio was what won the scholarship. In other words, it won here, then it won over there, and it had watercolors, charcoal, pencil drawings, oil paint. All that, in portraits,

almost like different styles and different children, using different materials. But that's what – that's how I won the scholarship.

MS. CORDOVA: Did Ms. Alsup tell you about that?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, the thing that most of – every year we had, say, most of those same contests, contests that we were already aware of, but that – yeah, she told us about it. But you have to put a whole portfolio together. Not everybody, even then, said had to put – and she recommended that I would do that, and I did. It was great.

MS. CORDOVA: But I mean, did you have any sort of nervous thoughts about going off to New York?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, first of all, I was a real scaredy-cat. I was the type that – it's hard to get me on an airplane. People don't realize that. And you know, I flew to – I think it was American Airlines, and there was this – nobody flying to New York. And it was one of those flights where it's real cheap, I guess, like midnight or 1:00 o'clock in the morning or something. I don't know what time it was. I remember it was really real dark, real late. And there were a couple of flight attendants, and I had my drawing pad. They said, well, do a drawing of us. So on the flight I ended up doing all the flight attendants, did portraits for them.

MS. CORDOVA: That's great.

MR. TREVIÑO: I know, and then I got there and everyone said, okay, go to the taxi with me. So take me – I didn't know where Brooklyn or anything was, but the people were real nice to me, you know. But I was like this little kid with – had a little portfolio. I didn't know what to expect.

MS. CORDOVA: It sounds like portraits became also a way of interacting with other people. I mean, that was –

MR. TREVIÑO: The people that I was staying with, they had a couple of kids. I would take care of the kids so they could go out at night, and now they're grown up and everything, their little portraits, put them in their high chair, something, and I'd be over here and do this little white canvas, this little, colorful little face, portraits of them. They still have those portraits. Those people, they live here in San Antonio now that was in New York. Yes, I do stuff like that, I do those things.

I remember being there in New York, being a student, working at that place, and yes, I still had time to do a painting for my sister had a baby, her daughter, and I sent her this painting that I worked on with a frame, and put it in a crate and everything. Did it all myself and sent her a painting just for her, because I wanted her to have this painting of this little girl, like a little ballerina with this bouquet of roses, this little girl's skirt. I just saw it the other day in her house, and wow. It was like, I couldn't even remember. It took me back when I painted that painting, and the subject matter, you know. It was just this little girl that I painted. It was an oil painting. A little painting like that. It's amazing. Wish I had it now.

MS. CORDOVA: So when you were at Art Students League, was it mostly portraits that you were doing there?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. Portraits, and I had another teacher, Earl Mayan, and he was more of an illustrator. And I also worked for – at a company doing paste-ups and mechanicals, doing their little illustrations and stuff like that for a paperback company that did books and things like that. Anyway, it was just a way of doing something that had to do with art a little bit. So he got me a job. And I liked him because most of the stuff – he did a little bit of painting but he did more like drawing. He would do – he was so good, real loose type of drawing, just continuous lines, stuff like that. Learned a lot from him. And then I took also like anatomy courses. His name is Hale. In that school he teaches anatomy. So it's all about learning how to – and like I said, it was a place that had sculpture. There was paint all over the place. On the wooden floors, there was paint everywhere. Everywhere there was only a little place that didn't have any paint. The easels were just caked with paint. It was incredible. Skylights of the dome windows, you know, angled like that, where the light comes in, still the same way. Been like that for centuries, you know.

So one of the things I liked about New York was the life drawing class because I think that that – I'd never really had that, to draw from the model and do all that. When I got to SAC [San Antonio College], again, I didn't want anybody to know that I was an artist or everything. It was kind of a strange thing because I said, well, I'll take an art course, beginning art courses for people that really didn't have an interest in art but they have to take that as an elective, beginning drawing. And I took that and I really enjoyed it because it was life drawing. And I used to take these newspaper print pads to do drawings. And I guess from New York I realized, wow, you know – [inaudible] – it doesn't have to be exact or anything. And little by little I was getting real control of that aspect.

So in other words, so getting back to how did I do all this, I guess, you know, I guess at a certain point I realized, I'm going to have to learn how to do this all over again, just like a kid. Basically you learn from the very beginning, right? By identifying direct, you know – this, you have to try it. Little by little, learn how painful it is. And little by little, that's the way I learned. Gradually, just as a – with a drawing, the life drawing, it helped me so

much, doing from – in New York I had done some of it, so when I got to SAC, it – that was what I needed. In other words, I didn't need to think so much about, you know, paintings and drawings that were too precise and all that. And the professors liked my drawings. They really liked them, thought they were the best of all these people. I mean, come on, I've – the first one, he didn't really know that I'd been painting since I was a kid, right. And you know, all of that. But I knew in myself kind of what I wanted to do, you know. I positioned the model the way I wanted on the paper. I was just doing feet or hands or something. It became a real interesting piece, you know, because I thought maybe one day it will be worth something. Because I was such a perfectionist in oil that I liked to do that.

But I guess – different people tell me, oh, that's so great, and can I have that? They wanted something that I've done. It was proof that, you know, something was there. And it was that exactly. Up to that point, although I'd learned so much since I was at SAC, that I knew a lot already. All that information since I was a kid, I still had, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: You felt like even though you were learning with a completely new hand, you had all this knowledge for drawing all those many years, and were able to still apply.

MR. TREVIÑO: Right. My hand didn't, but I did. And if I could, you know, send the messages to my hand that I was thinking, and although it might not be easy, might not get it the first time, but I do want to learn it, but that was good enough to – that I had that, that I could work toward that, that I could work to getting what I want, to have the result that – and gradually I would do that.

And I remember when I did the paintings with black canvases and all of that, and working from black to the light instead of light to dark, that I guess, you know – I guess it gave it a certain feeling for me that I liked, that was the unknown, sort of mysterious black. And the other thing is, I guess in high school I learned how to use the air brush and I really liked it a lot. So you know, I thought, hey, I could use this. It doesn't matter if I lost my leg, my hand and everything over here. If I can get that tool I could probably do the things that I want. So technically there was things that I knew how to do that other people probably didn't know. I had an advantage in that sense, that I just had to take time and be patient with my hand to get it to do the things that I wanted to know.

MS. CORDOVA: Do you ever still feel awkward using your left hand?

MR. TREVIÑO: No.

MS. CORDOVA: No? It's become natural.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. But still like this hand – because I can still feel sort of the pain, and it feels like it's a fist almost. That it feels something like, you know, it wants to be part of, and you know, of what I'm doing over here. So it's still connected in a way to where, you know, I'm going with this but I can still feel that's in tune with the other. You know, because otherwise it wouldn't work. But that's what it is.

And then I've learned so much more from I guess – I got out of the hospital, after New York I would say, in so many ways, taken a lot of different courses, I learned a lot more about other artists, art history a little, a little of everything of that, that has made me a better artist in a lot of ways, of the way I think about a lot of things. It's not just about my work. It's about everything else around me. And like I've learned more about that. I've informed myself more about that, and that's a good thing.

MS. CORDOVA: When you went into the Army, you know, it's so interesting that one of your teachers had been a famous combat painter. Did you have any thoughts, like maybe you would be doing that role as a soldier, that you would sort of – I mean, you weren't – I mean, you were still a soldier but maybe you would also be documenting as you were there. Or was that not even a possibility?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, yes, it was, but I guess, you know, it's like everybody else at the times there. You know, the commanders and the people in charge and everything, they're – you know, they're more interested, you know, in having a body, another person, another soldier as opposed to one with a drawing pad. But I would have loved that. And you know, I have one piece, and I don't know if you have it here. And it's called *Vietnam 66* and it's done on a brown paper bag, and my mother – little packages from my mom, sent me some things, you know, to eat and things like that. And she wrapped them with this brown paper bag. I remember taking that piece of paper and flattening it out, and just – during the time I was there I had my little place where I sleep. Out of a box I made like a little desk. And I had that paper and I – first of all I got a little jar of tempera paint, tube, and I had a pencil. I remember drawing this lady with a baby, Vietnamese lady with a baby. A drawing. And then little by little I put a little bit with tempera, painted her hair, the little baby. It was never finished.

Well, after I got wounded and everything, one of my friends, he rolled it up and sent it to me to the hospital. So I kept that. And a couple of years I sold it to a friend of mine because I needed money, but it was just such an important – and the person I sold it to is a person that eventually will give it to a museum. I think that's why she

bought it. And anyway, that's the painting that I think was – it is the last piece that was ever done with my right hand – I remember taking it to the art store here to get it framed and the lady there said, we're going to frame it for you free, but could you let us put it on an easel here in the window so people could see it? So they had it there, framed it for me and everything. I remember putting – for people to see. But that was the only thing that I got back from – I didn't have any other work, of the things I had back, I'm glad my friend sent it back to me, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Were you – maybe to go back to New York first. I mean, that had an amazing impact on you to suddenly be in this new city. You never lived – well, you had lived between Monterrey and –

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, yes. San Antonio did everything. Yes.

MS. CORDOVA: You'd done some traveling. What was New York like for you?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, I mean, that's the only real region – it was incredible, but you know, I could have gone maybe to California, you know, to the West Coast, gone to some school over there.

MS. CORDOVA: Or Chicago, right? The Art Institute there.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. I'll come back to something else because I think it's important, but yes, but I think that New York, again I was sort of convinced that the East Coast and New York, that that was the center, you know. And not Paris so much, but the United States, it would be New York that I would want to go to. And you know, because I'll tell you, after I got out of the hospital I had different thoughts, but when I got to New York, I guess to me I liked the adventure, you know, I was the type, I wanted to learn a lot more, and I knew that that's where I wanted to be. But as a kid I won all the contests and here I thought maybe I thought I'd use something. But when I got to New York there were artists from all over the world at that school, for example. That was – that was it. I mean, I knew that I was in the right place. People just like myself, but from different countries, all over the place.

[END TAPE 1, SIDE B]

So I remember after I got out of school I'd walk all over downtown because I'd go by the galleries. The school's right off of 57th, a block from Carnegie Hall, you know, walk down to Times Square. Do a lot of – just enjoy that part of it. And then later I'd go to Greenwich Village and draw. I was having the time of my life. I remember it was cold before I left, and I didn't want to go, you know. For some reason I was leaving and I thought I might never come back.

What, you know, when I was working at the Village Artist was the place. I still have a big paper bag that they used to put the drawings, called Village Artist. I was 18. Most of the people there were like 25, 30, 40. And there was this black lady that was an artist that was really good. They had five easels on one side, five easels over here. When I got to – they asked me to work there, they put me at the very back. When people come in, they usually go for the artists that are in the front, not the very back. It didn't take me very long to realize that the way—what they were doing too. Anyway, go outside, right there on the street and bring in some people, bring somebody. I was – there were people walking around there and I would get it and sit there and start drawing. As soon as I started drawing, some of the people – you know, always looking and see, ah, can I be next?

And after a few days being there, they put me in the front. I had made portraits of Ringo Starr and different people, artists – it was really nice. But I enjoyed that because, you know, I'm – portraits, again. And a friend of mine, he was a Syrian. He was an artist from Syria, Samir Abdul. Anyway, he was a great. He went to school where I went and he was the one that told me, hey, you want to – and then he lived there – [inaudible] – moved from Brooklyn. I wanted to be on my own too because those people were tired of taking care of me there, everything. And I started – got a little job working in Greenwich Village, in the same apartments where he was, very close to the – it was close to the school and everything, so that was fun, you know. It was just great.

MS. CORDOVA: And then so when you came back to San Antonio and you came back, were you taking classes from Mel Casas?

MR. TREVIÑO: No, I'd enrolled. He was one of the teachers and I – the names of different teachers and I took him, but everybody else that was there too. I took courses from everybody – pretty much everybody else. But Mel Casas was real influential with everybody else there as a teacher. He wasn't head of the department yet. Later on he became head of the department and all that. But Felipe Reyes was also a great artist and a good person. Because I think when you think about a little of Con Safo too and how that – people have different stories of how it originated, but I'll tell you, the main force behind the Con Safo group would be Mel Casas and Felipe Reyes. Those two I think were more active than anybody else, had a lot of influence on our group. They're still pretty big.

MS. CORDOVA: And have you stayed close with both of them?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, I see them once in a while.

MS. CORDOVA: That's interesting that you got the sort of black canvas or black background from Mel Casas.

MR. TREVIÑO: So – yeah. So right – I started painting that mural at the house, and other paintings. Like I had the *Gran Chile*. It's just a bottle with two tomatoes, like that. Okay, that – that was done in this period. *La Fe*, the one with the hand with oranges, painted back then. That's done on a black canvas. So I don't know how many paintings I have that are done on black canvas, but whenever you see paintings with a black canvas, it was done during that – the dark period. [Laughter.] But it wasn't funny then. Oh, man, it was –

MS. CORDOVA: No. So maybe that was sort of like 1969 to what, 1972?

MR. TREVIÑO: The 70's still, yes. Well, I didn't finish this one until '74, the one here.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, this one here.

MR. TREVIÑO: Right after – so right – right then, you know, I graduated from here, dark period, so okay, what am I going to do? You know what, having that – well, doing this mural here gave me a lot more confidence, right. And I wanted to –

MS. CORDOVA: What is this mural called, by the way?

MR. TREVIÑO: *La Historia Chicana*. You know what – let me tell you this. I was all ready to go to Berkeley from here. My brother was living at Palo Alto, going to Stanford. I said, you know what, here in San Antonio there wasn't really – I didn't want to go to Austin. San Antonio, the graduate department, they didn't have one at that time. And right then I remember I went – I went to Berkeley and checked out the art department and everything. I really liked it. It was a good time too, that great art department over there.

And came back and, I don't know, finally fell in love with somebody. They told me that the art department, graduate department was opening at UTSA [University of Texas, San Antonio]. I said, okay, well, I'll go there, you know. So I ended up not going over there, staying here. But I'm really glad. And that was the whole deal, that I didn't want to go venturing again to New York and go anywhere else. I could have gone, after I got out of the hospital, gone to Mexico to San Miguel Allende, somewhere. They would have paid. There was some kind of art school or something. They would have paid. It was kind of a nice program because I got my tuition paid –

MS. CORDOVA: You mean the GI Bill would have paid?

MR. TREVIÑO: It's better than that. It's better than just a GI bill. So –

MS. CORDOVA: Disability.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yeah, right. If you – they paid for your supplies and things like that. So they bought a lot of my art supplies. If you're a law student, your law books, things like that. So it was a great program. I thought, well, I could go – I'd love to go to Mexico. I'd love to go to Berkeley. But then I realized, you know what? This is where I – the things that I'm painting, I'm having success as an artist. Why don't I continue, you know, that? [Inaudible.] Why don't I continue.

So I went to graduate school over here and that was a great experience too, over here. And then I was having a – you know, I was bored. I was involved with Con Safo and doing all that stuff –

MS. CORDOVA: And was it 1974 or 1976 that Dale Gas exhibit?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, 6.

MS. CORDOVA: '76. That's right. And you must have been connecting then with all these people that you knew of as artists that went through your high school, right? Like Joe Esquivel, Jesse Almazán.

MR. TREVIÑO: Exactly. You know, all those artists were surfacing that were – artists like myself, and we had something in common. We had a need to get our work out there so people could see it. [Inaudible.] And we didn't know how. One of the places was the library here, and the library here, they weren't interested in Chicano art. You know, a painting of the Alamo with – what was it, the flag or whatever, you know. So anything like that, they wouldn't dare get close to Chicano art, you know. So okay, you know, much less the Witte – we didn't have an art museum, but the Witte Museum, just no way. It took a long time.

So I remember we went to Kennedy High School here, Trinity University, Ann Arbor, one of the universities in

Ann Arbor, places that –

MS. CORDOVA: And you couldn't find space to exhibit your work.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yeah. No. It was very difficult to get – our people would – no galleries selling, so we didn't have that kind of place. But we still – our big break was with Santos Martinez was the curator, one of the curators there at the Contemporary Arts Museum, and he was really powerful with the Con Safo group. So that helped a lot.

MS. CORDOVA: Were you involved with the planning at all of that exhibit, or he just sort of came up to you and said, I want to include you.

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, I guess, you know, it was a big thing for all of us. I think we were all going to be at that, and I remember we spent a lot of time thinking about, you know. Again, he was the curator and he was real good. I mean, he knew exactly the artists and the things that he wanted to – you know, so it was a great time because we already had the group together, you know, intact. We just needed a place. And the exhibit in a museum of that stature, a Chicano show that was put together. I have a catalogue, this beautiful catalogue. It was very successful. The Corridos played at the opening, so it was a real nice, you know, kind of opening.

MS. CORDOVA: It really must have been quite exciting for you.

MR. TREVIÑO: Oh yes.

MS. CORDOVA: That was your first major museum show, right? Or first museum show.

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, that's just it. Exhibits anywhere, that was one that was more of an official show, that, you know, it wasn't, you know, part of something else. It was – it stood on itself. It was all put together like a regular show.

MS. CORDOVA: So what pieces did you have?

MR. TREVIÑO: I had *The Raspa Man*, and I had *Lydia's Lounge*, and *La Cita Lounge*, and *La Fe*. I had all those. And *El Caro de Calle Zarzamora*. *Los Santos de San Antonio*.

MS. CORDOVA: Now actually those, *La Fe* and – it brings up a question, did you grow up very religious, or how –

MR. TREVIÑO: No, but you know, the thing is that, as visual as I've been, those are the things from where I grew up in the neighborhood. If I go into the houses in that neighborhood, my friends and all that, that they have, you know, what they have on the walls and their surroundings. I was always amused by the things that, you know—

You know, when I did those paintings, I wanted to say something. And I thought, look, I wanted people to see how you can – there's no buildings like – this was done in a drugstore that was downtown that's not there any more. The building's there but the drugstore is not there. But I saw – but I saw it here. It was there already something inside the building, the statuettes, the religious aspects, the city, you know. And the play of those two things, how – how we incorporate in our culture the religious items and businesses.

You know, I had a friend that has – her family had a furniture store, and in that furniture store, within that furniture store they had a little department where they sell – they had spray cans of different—for evil spirits or you know, different, you know, superstitious things. Anyway, they had a little department just like that because in the family believed in a lot of that. But then you would go to – a lot of the businesses, they had little – on the corner or above the door, little cross, little religious – like La Virgin de Guadalupe, little, you know, candle and I'd see it there. Wow, man. Like I was just – you know, but I think my mother was more religious.

There's a little – there's a little church here, called – I guess it was La Iglesia de Milagros, just a little Church of Miracles. I remember my mom, when I was a little kid we went over there so that she was going to light a candle because my brother was in Korea, in the Marines at that time. And I felt, this was serious. This is something very serious, my mom believes in it and everything, so she's going to go in here and light a candle and pray that my brother comes back. We all knew what she was doing when she would do that.

So I always remember that, you know. I even go there once in a while myself, you know. See if it works. Things like that, the religious aspect. But I did these paintings, you know, how – like with the crosses here. The mural that's here at Lady of the Lake, there's like a rosary hanging like that with the cross. It's got to be part of it. I think that was sort of the argument of when we did the *Viladora*, that why were we going to do something like this on that building, the theater. The theater belongs to the city, a public property. And as an artist, again, I see the symbol more as a cultural icon because I know that you don't have to be religious or Catholic or anything, but this is part of our culture. If you take this away completely, if you don't see it, I feel like you're taking something that's been with us forever, for a long time.

And you know like, just like on government buildings where they incorporate it into some of the architectural designs and things. Somewhere along the line that design originated, you know, with some religious, maybe, symbolism, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Was your father religious?

MR. TREVIÑO: No. No. It was my mother.

MS. CORDOVA: Were you raised going to church every Sunday or no?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, it was more like as a little kid, yes, we'd go to church. Then later on we kind of chose our own. We could go or not. So you know, I'm not very religious. Not even church-going, the spiritual, right?

MS. CORDOVA: And maybe, you know, focus a little bit on your parents a little. Now your mother was from here in San Antonio?

MR. TREVIÑO: No. My mother was born in New Braunfels.

MS. CORDOVA: That's right.

MR. TREVIÑO: Her name is Dolores Campos. Campos is her last name. And she lived in New Braunfels, and New Braunfels is a German – again, a German community, and she lived in a Mexican community there because it's been – I don't know how long it's been there. It's obviously been there a long time. She was born there, you know, and her family originally came from Mexico, but when my father came over here to work, he came to San Antonio and then he went to New Braunfels. He met my mother. And of course they got married. My mother was only 15 at that time. They were really young. She got married at 15. Never went to school, you know, and had 12 kids, you know. Worked all her life raising us. But it's amazing how wise she was, you know. And how much – I mean, she wasn't with me because I'm so much a lot like her. I learned so much from her. And she treated us all the same, all 12 of us, you know. And –

MS. CORDOVA: What number were you, or where do you come in?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. I have three younger brothers. So four.

MS. CORDOVA: Four from the bottom.

MR. TREVIÑO: Four from the bottom. [Inaudible] – it wouldn't have helped. Yes.

MS. CORDOVA: And what kind of work was your father doing?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, my – in Mexico he drove a truck and worked in a quarry, like a dump truck would carry materials, like, you know, soil and rocks and things. Construction. There was always a lot of that. So you know, but in the community where we grew up he had something. I guess that truck and then he did that, and then all the kids. But – so I don't think we – we were poor in that sense, but he, you know, he would come over here and work when he was younger, and my uncles also lived – some of them lived in New Braunfels or here in San Antonio, that whole area. I guess different types of work – they did different types of work.

But he was a milkman. He got a job as a milkman when he came here to San Antonio, and he worked for a company called Cream Crest Dairy. It doesn't exist any more. And that's what he did. And then he had a heart attack and he was paralyzed, he didn't work any more. He had a little – had a little fruit stand for a little while, but that was it. My father never, you know, got to know myself as an artist. Never really – when I was – because I was in the middle – I was starting to draw a little bit, he never really had time to notice what I was doing. He was so busy working and drinking, or whatever, you know.

And when he came to San Antonio, again, his uncles were here in New Braunfels. He met my mom and – and my oldest brother, Pedro, and my oldest sister, that's passed away too, that sister, Eva. It's very important in my life because Eva – Eva – you have to understand, she was the oldest one really, older than my brother. Eva. And she was born here in New Braunfels, and then another brother was born. But they went back to Mexico. She was educated over there, so she learned how to speak English. They called her professora. She – [inaudible]. She was real conservative. You know, when she – she was, again, educated over there and she already knew English. So she came over here and she got a job. She was at a job with the YWCA, teaching Spanish to teachers. She knew how to speak English. Anyway, she was really – and she's the one that saw that I liked to draw, I liked to paint. So she knew – she had a love for art, and I knew that she loved art and she loved beautiful things. She was the only one in our family. I was a little boy, and she bought me – one day she came from – she came and she surprised me with some pencils, drawing pencils, a little sketch pad. And then – that was one time.

And then I did some things for her and she really loved it. She loved everything. Next time she bought me a

little set of tempera paint and things like that. And that was it. She loved me after that. But she loved all of us, but I'm saying that her being more educated, knowing a little more about art, she could see that what I could do. And you know, when you see something like that and you know a child – you want to help that person. And you know what? Again, she never really got to see anything that I did, you know, my accomplishments or anything. And of everyone, I think she would have been so impressed with everything that I've done. But you know, she helped so much.

At the very beginning when I needed that encouragement and inspiration and everything, and then I could see her – I wanted to be like her too because she was – again, she loved art and the things that I like too. And then she helped me, you know. To get me those tools that I needed and little things like that. I never asked her for anything but she would get me those things. I thought, how cool to do that for me, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: What happened to her?

MR. TREVIÑO: You know, she got married after my father died and after one of my sisters got married. She waited a little older because she – in a way she was like our father for a few years. And when she did get married, she went to Mexico on her honeymoon, and on the way back they had a collision with an 18-wheeler that was parked to the side and she died instantly. She was killed instantly. And I always thought more about her because although I was a little boy when she passed away, she's still – when I was at the Santa Rosa bureau, for example, I was thinking about her so much because I, you know, to me she was like my guardian angel. She's – when – if I didn't have that direction that I'd learned from her, you know, I wouldn't have done the things that I've done. That had a lot to do with where I'm at.

MS. CORDOVA: How old were you when she died?

MR. TREVIÑO: Probably about 11. Right –

MS. CORDOVA: After your dad died.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. Well, I was – yes. Yes. But you know, my dad was sick and, you know, she was like our father. She'd work and come home. She'd keep everybody straight, you know. It's hard to have 12 kids. We never got in trouble. Really, we had a lot of respect for her and my mom, of course, but for her I guess she thought, okay, my father's gone but, you know, there still has to be some kind of control here in this family. We all went to school. My brothers dropped out to go help work but they went back and became very successful. So my mother, who passed away a couple of years ago, got to see all of us successful, you know. And things we went into, without her ever going to school. But – and you know, we went to school because of her too, because I think it was important to her that we did that, that we continued to stay in school and all that, where we saw our neighbors, that they wouldn't go to school, we always did. I think that was an important thing to learn from her and my oldest sister, and everybody else, I think.

MS. CORDOVA: Did she have to work outside the home?

MR. TREVIÑO: No. She just worked there, at home. And we always made it through because my older brothers, they had to work at some of the stores or at some kind of jobs and everything. Never received any type of assistance. She didn't – my father never wanted it and then she – she worked 24 hours, making our lunch to go to school, washing our clothes. Those were 24 hours – my mother never had – until she got much older she had time for herself and found out – discovered herself, you know. [Laughter.] She was incredible. Late in life she found out who she really was, an incredible person. And you know, of all I remember because when she passed away I wanted to talk to everyone at the eulogy and tell everyone what kind of a person she was. That, you know, I've had a lot of teachers and a lot of people that have taught me a lot of things, but not like my mother. She was the best teacher. If I had a choice, I would say I want her as my teacher because the things that I learned from her are the most important and basic things that you want your kids to learn, you know what I'm saying? About treating people with respect, and being humble, and you know all, all of that stayed with us because of her.

We could see that she was a woman that didn't have a lot but could still – people loved her because of who she was, and how she raised her family, on morals and respect and all of that. That's incredible kinds of things.

MS. CORDOVA: So were you all very close?

MR. TREVIÑO: Very close, all of us. We never – you know, it was wonderful because there was always something to do. We always had someone, you know. I can't imagine being in a family with one brother or sister, something like that. You know, it was a family, we could split up into teams and we could do all kinds of stuff.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, I guess so. It really is a team here.

So I mean, that must have been really traumatic to lose both your father and your sister.

MR. TREVIÑO: It scared me. It scared me so bad because, you know, I thought that was it, you know. My father passed away, what are we going to do? But it's amazing because, you know, my father was a good person. He was an organizer, but then again, you know, toward the end he started drinking and everything and he wasn't himself. But you know, he had a lot to do with us staying together too and being a family, you know. I think that's why he wanted a large family, to have all of us together. And then my mother, she was also very family-oriented, so after my father passed away we would, you know, we were there, visit her. We were always together every day, in fact, with her. She's a great cook, too. One of the reasons.

MS. CORDOVA: That will bring you a lot of return home visits.

Did you all grow up speaking both Spanish and English in the home?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. Well, I went to school – the interesting thing is one of my teachers, his name was Joe Bernal, he became a state senator, legislator. He was my elementary teacher. Well, but he was teacher – he was – I guess you could spank kids, and he got to spank me once and that was the only time, for speaking Spanish. And then I talked about going – I was here. I was a student here and he taught a summer class on Mexican-American politics. And I remember I was at his class, and it was funny back then in the 70's to talk – to say, hey, you know, do you remember? Yes, he remembered. He was so embarrassed and everything.

But he asked me about that. At the beginning you couldn't, you know. Later on they introduced Spanish into the schools and became part of that. And I was fortunate because my mother didn't speak Spanish – I mean, didn't speak English and I think that forced us to keep speaking Spanish, but what a great thing. I remember not being able to speak English, anything hardly. And I learned. Little by little I learned how to speak English, and I never really forgot my Spanish that I learned at home. Then in college I took more Spanish, so I can teach Spanish if I want to speak Spanish. That's what – the degrees that I have and the courses that I have. Yes, Spanish and art.

MS. CORDOVA: I mean, living on the west side of San Antonio and being part of a Latino family, I mean, were you very conscious of the sort of inequalities that were present in this city?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, yes. Well, of course, you know, politically for a long time I could see just on our city council, for example, the mayor. When Henry Cisneros came in and everything, it was great because it opened a lot of doors. But you know, still, we were so new living in the city. It was very, you know, just – you could tell just driving through sort of parts of town how different it was.

And getting back to the exhibiting, for example like at the library, I was – it really wasn't something that was possible back then. You know, there were – well, there weren't any places, but I remember that – I forget my thought. Talking about the library, but –

MS. CORDOVA: Exhibiting?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, we couldn't have the exhibits, have exhibits there. Back then, you know, we went into the library because there were – they had different – photography, different exhibits there, wanted to be part of that. And we couldn't. And you know, many, many years later, again, the way I felt about the library and all that, the library – when they built the new library, and right before they built it, they first – [inaudible] – big award but the library foundation, but I was commissioned to do their new "enchilada red" Ricardo Legoretta Library. I already knew about Ricardo Legoretta, his architecture in London and everything, and I couldn't believe that here I am, a Chicano artist, get commissioned, that they want me to do a mural in their library.

So things have changed a lot, and I am going to say things have come a long way. It's taken me a long time – I'm an artist – I am one of the artists that has fought so hard for everything, and nobody knows it, you know. It seems like it, but the thing is that I could tell you – I mean, where I would be so upset about something. I mean, let's say like the library, although, you know, I've had success in having exhibits in different places that, you know, I would do a mural for them like that. That is an incredible thing to be able to do that. Or well, I mean, there are countless other things, but I guess I'll have to ask regular pieces.

But the library commission is such an important commission because, you know, I would think that for them to get a Chicano artist to do a mural, it goes to show how, you know, where they're at. And even the architecture, to get a building like that passed, you know, representative of what – how they think now, as well as what they think about me, they did that. And real fast going back to this one, when I did is – I didn't have the idea, but there's a brick wall right there with nothing on it. It's been like that, it was facing that park. And that park was – Milam Park went to being a place for no people because during the 60's, the late 60's, urban renewal came through that part of town and took that theater, this theater, and took it out completely. And the park, they built walls, concrete walls as part of an architectural design that that architect, you know, who knows who he was, just went in there and built it. The nurses from the hospital, and people were afraid to go in the park because,

you know, you could get mugged or assaulted there in that park.

So in the late 70's, when I was at graduate school, a student at UTSA I went, a project I created for myself, I went downtown to see, interested in murals, where were the possible places for murals. And that was in '78, '79. And I put a little package together with my friend Santos Martinez, for a proposal with a picture of this wall, stuff that I had done before, artwork and I made packets and I went to individual councilmen. At that time Henry Cisneros was a councilman, Pedro Urieste. About four or five people I knew personally, and yes, I was an artist and I went to them. Made an appointment, went to them. I was doing it all wrong, but still, I felt, politically I went to talk to them and say, it's a great idea. I didn't have the image. I said, I want to do a mural here. I don't know what –

MS. CORDOVA: You just –

MR. TREVIÑO: I wanted to see if you want to support the idea of doing this. I would come back here, I want to make sure – [inaudible] – I want to go to each one and tell them my plan. I want to do something. But it didn't happen. It didn't go anywhere, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: When you say you were doing it all wrong, what should you –

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, the whole – how I was thinking about this whole thing –anyway, this is a hospital, and first of all I'll go to the city – first I went to the city and they thought it was great, a good idea. But – and then I thought, well, it stops there because I said, of course you're going to have trouble with this with the hospital because where are you going to get the money to do something like that? The city doesn't have the money. The hospital – I mean, they don't want to spend money on anything except, you know, the hospital. Really. That was it. I mean, that's – and you know, I was – I did an interview with a cable station here in San Antonio, at Paragon cable, they had a feature on me, a half an hour feature at my house, right in front of that mural that I have.

MS. CORDOVA: *Mi Vida*.

MR. TREVIÑO: Right there. I sat there and did an interview. I did an interview with them on this mural. Not on this mural, about me.

And just did all the research on doing that mural for the Santa Rosa, and anyway, after that, the interviewer said, is there something that you'd like to do? What would it be? I mean, as far as – I said, there's a wall on that hospital, Santa Rosa, that faces the whole plaza. That would be a great place – that would be a great place for a mural. And also, during my research on this, I went to this company here in San Antonio that does mosaics, Cavallini. They do stained glass and they do mosaics. And I went and talked to that person. I said, look, I want to do a mural. How could – how could I do it? He says, well, you have to – it could be made – you have to design, send it to Europe, to Italy, and they – they'll actually make it, send it here, and his company will install it, mosaics. Okay. How much is that going to cost? So he did a proposal. It would cost about $350,000, okay, for that. Back in the 70's.

And that was – I remember those figures and stuff, what it would cost. Okay. Anyway, but that interview, years later – okay, that was done in '78, '79, whatever. In '92 – no, '94, 1994, the girl that was interviewing, Patty Elizondo, was working for the Santa Rosa Hospital, and doing PR, and she mentioned it to the administrators, doctors there, chief of staff. And said, you know what? I did an interview with Jesse Treviño and he was telling me that he wanted to do a mural on this wall. So one day I get a call, and at that time I'm working with a friend of mine, George Cortez, at Mi Tierra, was hanging around there. And I get a call and they say that they'd like to talk to me about that.

So my friend George Cortez, owns Mi Tierra, the restaurant, he's really good, too. He's good – he's good at marketing and salesmanship. He set up a little luncheon, the CEO – I mean, we're talking about for the Santa Rosa about four or five people, representatives came to the luncheon. Myself and George Cortez and his secretary. We start talking about, and that girl Patty Elizondo, about what in the world, here you have – and again, I was trying to – I wanted to do something. And I said, yeah, well, I mean, 1979, whenever I had my idea of doing something. But it's different now, you know. I said now I don't want to do a mosaic like that. What I want to do is I want to do – I want to make it out of ceramic tile and I want to do it myself. I don't want to – and not only that, I want to get a group of young artists, people that really need help, you know, and make them a part of this project. And this is the way I want – and they loved the idea of doing that.

And then I had just met with this other construction guy, who we had been working on how I could do something like this. So with the construction guy and some architect friends of mine, engineers, worked out a way of how to do the pieces on panels that would last forever. I mean, something that – so we, we took a fiber panel, light fiber panel, wrapped it with a fiberglass mesh, and then gave it a coat of latex paint, and it became a very rigid, very sturdy panel, very light and strong. And that would be the panel that it would be cemented to the brick wall, would be anchored, and the picture would be put together.

So we built a couple of the panels, and tested it on the wall, and then they tried – not this one, to pull them off, and literally you have to tear it off in order to bring it off. So it really worked good. It's so hard, they had to make sure, first of all, that what's holding the bricks, they went behind the wall to check how all that structure was, and then to add the weight. We're adding weight, but believe me, it's not as heavy as it would other materials. But along with that, that that would withstand.

MS. CORDOVA: Right, so you wouldn't pull the wall off.

MR. TREVIÑO: And then every 10 feet there was a joint, an expansion joint for – I mean, I thought it was only for airplanes, but for wind shear, so that when there's movement that it can move in there. Instead of all being one piece, although they're pieces, that it still has room for expansion. So every 10 feet there's a groove there, the same color as the grout and everything, that's an acrylic. You can't see it there, but what I'm saying is that you can't even see it really close but it's there and it shows if there's any movement. So it's been designed to where it really – the only thing you have to do is wash it like you do a window or something. And then later to check to see the grout, or maybe they're like gaskets, that acrylic thing can be pulled out and then put some new one. But I thought it would last 1,000 years. Maybe the building will be gone, but the mural – the pieces will be here.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes. You really have taken a lot of care with learning about how your materials will stay, I take it. You've given a lot of thought to that.

MR. TREVIÑO: Hmm?

MS. CORDOVA: You've given a lot of thought to that.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, and I'm still thinking about them. And I'm still thinking, you know, we live in the community here that some of the homes, some of the things, that they deteriorate. They have a life of maybe 50 years and then they're gone and they're erased. I want to leave things here that will be around for a long time. And if they're done really nice, if they're built nice they'll be around forever. And yes, it takes more, but I mean, but you know, I guess the important thing is they're built right. I mean, again, you know, murals are expensive, but you know, how do you put a price on what a mural like that, *The Spirit of Healing* has done to the people?

You wouldn't believe the people that recognize me. I'm not that recognizable any more, but they recognize me and they thank me for that mural, for all the work that I've done and things like that. And you can tell that they don't even want to bother me but they do that. [END TAPE 2, SIDE A] It's so rewarding for me, to know that people feel that way. Because after I did this, there was an article somebody wrote, a nurse that used to work there at the Santa Rosa said – I think she didn't understand why they were spending all that money. It added up to about probably $800,000, or maybe a million for this. We were spending all that. And she said that after looking at it, she realized that maybe we would need less – fewer policemen, hire fewer policemen because of this image.

And what I did – the mural to me was to focus more on youth. This is my son. What I did – I did a painting of my son that – I did a portrait of him, and when I was working on that portrait, he was holding a hedgehog in his hands, and he was eight years old. And I can tell you that he still had that innocence about being a child. That's what's the difference. When you're still a child, there's still a certain innocence, that when he held that hedgehog, he had a cat, he holds it with such care. And it's something that he wants to protect and hold, that only a child can do. And yet you know, when I was a little boy, my sister, you know, directed me – I thought, isn't that what all children need? Isn't that what our youth – so that our message, my message, all of a sudden, when everybody was telling me, yeah, why don't you do this and why don't you do that, you know, what are you going to do on that wall? Everybody had their own ideas and everything. There was only one idea to me. It was our youth, our kids, the focus on them, that they need someone, especially now. We see all the tagging on the walls and they don't care about our environment. But if you see this, you know, that hey, what does that mean, you know? And it means our kids, we need to start thinking of them. Instead of seeing a mural on other things, historical, this is now. This is the time. And this is the times, and we needed to focus on our youth, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: We're stopping because this tape is about to run out. Let me just stop right here.

[Audio break.]

All right. We are recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Jesse Treviño on July 15, 2004. This is session one, disc three.

And with that, Jesse, I sort of cut you off. We were talking about the *Spirit of Healing* mural. I think you were going to describe how you assemble these images.

MR. TREVIÑO: You know, I was working on a portrait of my son holding a hedgehog. It's painted on canvas and I was working on it during the time, and at the same time I was taking some photographs of some tombstones in

the cemetery. And as I was looking at both of the images they sort of came together and it was just perfect because, you know, there, the park, the setting historically is a cemetery originally, and I thought that visually looking at this image in the big picture of the park and everything, that the image had to be part of the landscape. So I said it was a cemetery, this angel was taken from a tombstone from the cemetery. So you look at the greenery of the trees and the setting. From there rises the tombstone, the angel, and then of course the child, almost embedded into the landscape. So visually the mural, looking at everything around it and make sure the setting is perfect for that. So I really like that.

But again, it was – like all the other paintings that I do, there has to be something about that image that says something to people, that it's like something that's functional and that works, you know. Besides just looking nice, it has an effect on people. And this particular case, a positive effect on our youth, that we need to stop and think about them, you know.

Again, the idea of – during that time I'd seen the thing that I wanted to get across to people about let's think about our youth. How about make that part of this mural? And I stuck with that. And everything else, not just being – they love the whole idea. It works so great for them and everything, but me as an artist, it was – I feel like that's what I wanted to do. That was important.

MS. CORDOVA: I'm so glad that we've been able to give a lot of time to that particular mural, because my understanding is maybe that mural gave you this new profile in the community. I mean, for a mural of this size, but also the visibility, you can see it from the freeway even.

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, it has different dimensions. See, you think a mural – for example, like the one at the library, which is a – I love the Texas library. You have to go into a certain space where that mural is and all that. Unfortunately it's not as visible as I would have liked it to be, but it's allowed me to have a mural there with Ricardo Legoretta, his building and all that.

But you know, something like this, I tell you something – and that's what I'm real proud of, is that, you know, what I was telling you about the hospital, about then they weren't interested. If I had gone to them, they probably would just have laughed at, you know, when I went to city councilmen, talked to them. They said, we don't have any money. But it was very different when they met with me and we talked about it. And again, even then, I didn't have this image yet even to show them. So they entrusted me with a lot. It's expensive as a commission. The cost of it was just in putting it up. But it took a lot of guts on the part of the hospital's staff, and the time to spend that much – to make a decision. They were going to move to the north part of town, to where the medical center is, and close this hospital down.

MS. CORDOVA: Really?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. And I'm not saying that the mural did that. The mural is part of the different elements that needed to happen, the things that needed to happen. And the Smithsonian coming in with the – and helping us with the Alameda Theatre [Centro Alameda, San Antonio, Texas] and the museum and all that is very important. But still, the business of the hospital being there is also very important. And they decided to spend money – all that money again on doing something like this. And I think that says a lot for me too as an artist. I mean, I'd never done anything like this before. How's anybody going to say, okay, what – and I'll tell you something, the hospital paid for all of it. Originally, like – there's a lot of similar projects. I'm willing to do fundraising and do the necessary things. I have a lot of friends and people that know me, you know, I can get certain things done. And I'm saying this was one project where I thought, man, I'll have to – but they liked the idea and then they thought, well, we'll do it. We'll pay for it. Without knowing exactly how much it was going to cost. Because it was the cost of that mosaic back then. This was something else. But they really liked the idea. They wanted to do something, and again, the idea of bringing some students in and all that.

And they got so much publicity on it, you know. But I remember, when we were working on this mural, we had a warehouse we were working on it. We had the German press from Germany, you know, TV stations coming in there to look at what we were doing, you know. That was amazing. So it got a lot of exposure. A lot of things from that one mural.

MS. CORDOVA: And it's a pretty remarkable –

MR. TREVIÑO: So who could say that? Being an artist – again, I thought, well, – how many artists can say something like that, that can go, you know, again, to do a project as big as that. You know, you go in the library and something like that, the things that were, you know, La Veladora Mural (Virgin de Guadalupe), for example. To put that – that was very important for me, too. It's in a part of town, well, I already have murals here.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, you already have murals.

MR. TREVIÑO: I have other murals in this area, but, you know, there still seems to be – I mean, coming over the

bridge or coming over from the downtown, just like here, this part of town there's really not too much activity, things coming up. And actually, you know, I've done some murals like the Santa Rosa and at the library, but I need to do something over here. And then that's when this – I'd already had the painting for a couple of years. The original painting I had worked on. And then I was driving down the street, Guadalupe Street, and I felt bad because it was dark and yet it was a part of town where we have an art center and theater, and it's a very important part of town. A lot of prominent Latinos that come from this area have gone to be successful. And I'm an artist that have done things in different areas, different places. I thought, why – why couldn't – I mean, I was driving through there and I thought, this is the thoughts that I had. I'm driving through there and I realized that nobody was out. It wasn't really that late at night and it was – it was this corner. This is one of my famous corners. I call it almost like the central – Grand Central Station of the west side.

MS. CORDOVA: The Progresso.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. People on the corner. I mean, and it was dark. There's a theater there, there's a beautiful plaza that they built, and I thought, you know what the problem here is? There are no people. People basically are – the people that live here, they're afraid, I know I would, to walk outside and walk around that neighborhood at night. And they don't feel safe, you know.

Now what could I do, you know, as an artist? I'm not saying bring in police, bring in – do all those kinds of things. What could I do to get the people that live in those houses to come out of their houses? So what I did, I had this painting and everything, I had to sell the idea to the director of the center, Maria Elena Torvala, a good friend of mine, to do this project. First I had to sell the project itself, that it was a great project. And basically again it was that, that no matter how hard they try, they just couldn't get the people out there.

I had an idea and, you know, I've done murals and things, but that I had a painting that I envisioned in a certain part of that area, that I would like you to see. So I brought her over to the studio, came to see the painting and all that. I told her, you know, the people that live there, the whole area there, first of all is named Guadalupe, which is a name – everything, but there isn't an image or anything there. In Mexico they have plazas, and they're a very important part of the culture there because that's the place where people can come together and you get to know your neighbors or you get to know at. People seem to trust – because they get to know, socialize a little bit, get to know them, talk about, you know, about history, about this, about art, about anything. Right there, we don't have that. There are a lot of areas that's been – that doesn't exist any more. The one they have across from the murals – no people because it wasn't the kind of plaza, a place where people would come.

Anyway, I wanted to create a space, a small space, a space within that area so that people would feel safe, you know, without putting – and that they had a lot of respect for this image, and that no one had done an image like this like I was going to do it because I was going to do it like I had my painting three dimensional and I was going to do it in tile and I was – and again, it was that symbol, that symbolism that seems so important, that if I could touch people that were there behind their doors, that only come out in the daytime or something, if I could – if they would come out to see the Veladora –

[Audio break.]

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, we're back recording. Go ahead.

MR. TREVIÑO: And that that was – that idea of – if I could build this Veladora [religious candle] and create it – and create that green space where someone – you could come at any time, drive by there or anything, and it would be – again, it was – when I was in Washington, D.C. and I was so really impressed with the Vietnam wall and the significance. I like the idea of the eternal flame, something there that means something to – and that we needed that sense of – [inaudible] – was religious, so all the people in that area, they are. Back in their homes they have the little veladoras and all that. And if we had something – come on, we have – in fact, this mural downtown – everything, that seems to happen over there.

I thought, why couldn't – just because there's no money, or what, how could I do this. So I invited Maria Elena to see the project and everything, and I said, you know what? We'll raise the money. We could ask for $1,000 from a lot of people that grew up in that neighborhood, and they see this idea, they'll be willing to contribute $1,000. So you know what? We got 350 people – pay for this mural. People that were from that area.

But that's to me – there again the image was what I was wanting. I wanted to do something. Like again, at the Santa Rosa mural, that it's going to last and be there forever because all those little houses, you know, in a couple years are gone and deteriorate, and they bulldoze them down, and all that. And you know, I wanted something that could be a symbol of hope, you know. So that was what I was trying to put, something like this, that cost a lot of money to build and people will say, well, that's not – I felt that this is what we need as an artist, and the kinds of things that I could do, and if I leave it up to them, they probably would never do something this expensive. Probably be 100 years before something would ever be done like this.

But you know, I have certain experience, certain influence with different people, and people that have seen the kind of things that I've done, you know, and they believe in this idea, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: So did you go to the Guadalupe Center and say, I want to do this?

MR. TREVIÑO: I got them to do it. Exactly.

MS. CORDOVA: And you had already a very specific vision that you wanted to create.

MR. TREVIÑO: That's what – I had my vision, yes. But that's a painting. This is sculpture. Mural, what you want to call it.

MS. CORDOVA: And how did you plan it out in your head? Like what – what steps did you need – did you – you sort of sat down and you drew it out, or you – how did the plan evolve for you, to create it as a 3-D image?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, well, I like constructing things and I like different materials. I do with all the different – so it was like there are several ways that I could have built this, but I chose to build it with – the way I did. But I guess all I wanted was something that was going to be solid, you know, made out of concrete and materials that, you know, are going to be around forever.

MS. CORDOVA: And I know that you had some trouble with the lighting of it at first, right? I mean, I –

MR. TREVIÑO: On this?

MS. CORDOVA: Yes.

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, yes, they had some trouble with it. But I think eventually – it's like the Santa Rosa mural. They didn't have any lighting for a couple of years, you know, because they couldn't agree on who – well, the hospital was going to pay for it, but the park belonged to the city and the park – it took a while. It took a lot to get that squared away but they finally did. And it looks great. So this is going to be the same thing, that eventually they'll light it up.

MS. CORDOVA: So it's not lit yet?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, it is, but it's not lit up the way it should be.

But there's different things that, murals like this that I think have so much of an effect on the community, more than, you know, painting on the inside. As much as I love to do the paintings and the murals that go, like the one I have here in the hospital, the Riches [ph] Center, the other murals are, you know, they're so much of Mexico or Europe, and the material itself, as I see that it becomes aesthetically something very beautiful into the design and the scope of the building. So a way of translating these images into outdoor murals that are beautiful.

And I guess the idea of the pieces and the cost and all that, that handmade, hecho a mano effect is still there. I think people value that. When people realize all the pieces – like this is in a "Ripley's Believe It Or Not" article. You know, it came out twice, for the largest hand-cut tile mural in North America.

MS. CORDOVA: Because it's so large.

MR. TREVIÑO: Exactly. People – there's not murals on walls that are done like this because literally you have to get up there and put every little piece of it.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I was really intrigued, actually, to see your mural that's here in the library, just because in style it's not the thing I would have identified with you at all. Actually that style –

MR. TREVIÑO: I've done so many different things. I've got paintings that are so different, people don't even believe I did it. But, you know, as an artist I – you know, I always like to do so many different things. Like there's no time to do all the different paintings that I want to do and concepts I want to do. There are so many, you know. And actually I know I already have – the ones that I do have, they're going to be preserved forever. They're in safe places. That's what matters to me, you know. I always tell people I want to live forever, you know, and I am going to live forever, you know. I'm afraid of dying. I don't want to die, but you know, I think the way the things that I – it's going to be hard for people to forget about me. You know what I mean? And ever since I was a little kid I always thought, man, you know, nobody even cares about me, if I exist or I'm around or anything. And now people a lot – it's a great feeling, you know. Sometimes I don't want to be recognized.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, well, I actually think I'm going to maybe break our session right now because that's a good breaking point. And what I'd really like to do is come back to a lot of these paintings that we haven't discussed yet. So with that I'm going to stop right there.

MR. TREVIÑO: Okay.

[END TAPE 2, SIDE B]

CARY CORDOVA: All right. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, on July 16, 2004, interviewing Jesse Treviño. This is our second session, and disc one.

And I guess, actually, Jesse, I just realized what I'd like to ask you about. I think your first painting after you had sort of re-trained yourself with your hand, your arm, it was a painting on an image of a freeway exit sign, completed in 1969 – *Alamo*.

MR. TREVIÑO: Exit.

MS. CORDOVA: *Alamo Exit*. And I guess maybe just to start with that, just why that subject matter, how that painting evolved.

MR. TREVIÑO: It was – that's what I really enjoyed about San Antonio College is that I did different paintings based on the project for school. It was a project for school. And I remember that the basic objective was a landscape, but a more modern landscape, you know. [Inaudible.] So I did several things. One, first I chose what I – what my environment was – it's the highways, the expressways, those big signs, and then the hill country sort of in the back. If you see that, it's – the whole painting is really about that, with the – with the dark columns of the freeway.

But I also like to experiment a little bit with the canvases, and I did several canvases during that same period. And here I wanted to do two canvases, these two canvases to do the image, and also that it was – they were interchangeable. I chose to put them on what you call an outside corner, where you have one canvas going one way and one the other. It wraps around the outside corner. But you can also put them on an inside corner, or you could just – I had them for a while next to each other, side by side, flat on one frame. But – so there are many, many different possibilities of how you can put those – and that was – what I wanted to do was do two canvases that would be – you could change and create your own composition.

During that time I also made one that were clouds, and there were basically two sets of clouds. They were cut out of plywood and then stuffed. The plywood – cut out, form a cloud, and then put some foam rubber inside, and then wrapped with canvas and stapled around the back, so it created sort of a relief shape with the clouds, and painted the clouds. And what I did is hinge – hinge two sets of clouds that will – they would go on the ceiling and one that will go on the wall and – during the same time. So I experimented with that.

And there's one that's called *En Carro*, *El Pontiac*. It's called *The Pontiac*, and I did that also at the same time. That's a canvas and that's probably the most interesting one. It's a canvas that when you look at it, the whole illusion is to look at it like you're looking into a showroom and there's a car. So what I did is I did the front on a canvas. I did the front half of a GTO, yellow GTO stunt car and put the grill – put a grill embedded into a canvas, right. And then the canvas was also pushed up from the back to create a three-dimensional form of a bumper, so it would look like the car was coming out of the canvas, then created sort of a box-shaped frame around it with a piece of glass with the letters – the last letters of Pontiac, the A-C, and the frame was sort of an aluminum-colored frame. So when you looked at it, it looked like you were looking through a showroom, through a window of the dealer. But the yellow car and the sort of light lavender background, it was just – I still have it, and that's an incredible painting too I did back then. It was just – I had just got out of the hospital. But I like to create things using canvas and different objects and things like that.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, was that a found object, or did you still have that –

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, no. I got it in a junkyard, you know. I already knew that's what I wanted to create, and then part of it's painted, of the grille, and then the other – it's a real grille with the headlights. You know, and that section is cut out into the stretch canvas, it's put in there. But behind the canvas I've created some frames too that will push the canvas out to give it the three-dimensional form. And that's what – then the frame is also this wide. It's this wide. The actual glass is, and creates a nice space between it. So it takes a lot of reflections and it just looks really cool, contemporary.

When I did that, I think, a lot of the pop art was around, you know. That was influenced by all of that.

MS. CORDOVA: Were you? Because I mean –

MR. TREVIÑO: Oh, definitely. Like, you look at the time when I did that car also, that car was done, you know, actually '69, '70, something like that. There were – that was during that era pretty much when it was sort of popular.

MS. CORDOVA: So who were you looking at?

MR. TREVIÑO: You know, I was looking at everybody, you know. I was looking at Oldenburg, you know, and Andy Warhol, and you know, all the – and then, you know, the – [inaudible] – I was already doing a lot of the big realism paintings and I remember going to – we didn't have the Museum of Art. It was the Witte Museum, and they had a real – a real show with some of the [55 best artists in the nation] – and I was aware of the realists, like Richard Estes and others, Audrey Flack, you know, there's different – and then I found myself in that exhibit with them. The real, the really real, the super real that they put in the museum here in San Antonio, where I have *The Alameda* painting. And when the museum opened in 1981, the opening of the museum was an exhibit of 55 artists. There's a beautiful catalog, *The Real, The Really Real and Super Real* [*The Real, Really Real, Super Real: Directions in Contemporary American Realism. San Antonio*: The Association, 1981]. And being there at the right time when they were putting it together – and you know, my work – Alvin Martin was his name.

MS. CORDOVA: Were you a good fit with them, do you think?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. Definitely. And you know, I think that – I think it – it was important at that time. Since I had already been doing some of these paintings and all that, that I became part of that group, you know. And that exhibit, that was a great exhibit because you see the artists that were in that, there were – I mean, all the different, the real – because I was just categorized in those terms, the realist, the real. But you had everything in there that was really incredible, you know. Andrew Wyeth, Dennis Hopper, some really incredible, you know, and all those super-realists like Richard Estes, all of that. I had *The Alameda* painting there, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: What do you think of those titles or labels?

MR. TREVIÑO: I don't really care that much about them, you know, because I am a realist and whatever I want to do, I can fix it – considered a realist. I know – a mural man. And you know, people say, you know, murals – and they don't even know artists, muralists, dash muralists, whatever. I guess – you know, The Veladora is form of a sculpture. I mean, you know, it's not flat like, but the Veladora is, you know, three dimensional, I mean, all of this – I mean, it's like a sculpture, you know? And so a land sculptor? I do everything, you know? That's going to be hard to say I was just a muralist, that's all I am. I'm never too concerned with that, you know. These are the kind of things that I've been doing and they might be realistic in some sense, but you know, they're still very unreal as far as the way they're done, you know, because they're so monumental pieces that took a lot of work. Not like – just throw them on the wall, that's it, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. It's not an exact depiction.

MR. TREVIÑO: And that makes a lot of difference in the artwork itself, you know. The lasting value, images and structure, form, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, you were often described, I think, as a photorealist.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. And you know, I didn't like that because I wasn't, you know – you can use a photograph as a reference for a painting and all that, and it's all well, but a lot of these things that I've done are not in that. So I don't know, I guess it's easy for them to say that. If one person says it, especially writers and stuff, when they put it in, before you know it they run with it. There I was. And that's unfortunate because you can see, I mean, I do everything. I do all kinds of things, and you know, that will – what do these reals have to do with photorealism? And yet they're still – I guess there was a period when the realist paintings were kind of – [inaudible] – to different ones and there was, oh, this is realist, and they were, and that's what they want to be. But to be just known as that, it's probably – but I think as people know, they get more educated about who you are and the kind of artwork that you do.

MS. CORDOVA: Were you using the camera at all?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. Of course. That was a very important part of – you know, I went to the West Side to take paintings – like I remember when I took the photograph of this.

MS. CORDOVA: *The Progresso*.

MR. TREVIÑO: They were a bunch of other people, like that's like my mother and I put there on the painting a hand.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, really. In the white.

MR. TREVIÑO: The white, yes. You can see that she was wears white shoes, white purse. And anyway, you know, I sort of – [inaudible]. When I went across the street to take that picture, the guy said, hey, what are you doing, man? You know, he – one of the mean guys, you know, because even when I – back then, you know, he just, you

know, people that have cameras or things are like an outsider. So it was hard. Some people felt violated, I guess, in some way. Are you going to use the photograph against them or something like that. They wouldn't understand. I tried to explain to them I'm going to do a painting of that, you know. And I'd talk to them about that.

I mean, I'm talking about the areas where it was pretty rough to do that. And that's the only way I could go back to my studio and work with that, you know, to create that. Because if you see the actual place and then you see my painting, you know, you can see the difference in everything. And –

MS. CORDOVA: Like what's obviously different?

MR. TREVIÑO: I don't know. I guess the intensity of the colors and, you know – I don't know, I don't have any little trash or things distracting. It's very real.

MS. CORDOVA: It is. And why did you pick *The Progresso*?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, again, it was more of a – our landmarks within our neighborhood that were important. It's a neighborhood area but here comes the – Guadalupe Street is very commercial and there's no other four corners on Guadalupe there that are more active than any other places, for more activity. And people, again, like the plaza where people come together, whatever, and friends say hi, and this corner. I can't imagine. I mean, that corner, stories that are not – were lost and all that. So I think that there's – for us as humble as it was, this is a corner that – that's it, you know. And I wanted to do a painting of it, you now, to – like I said, even now it's changed. Now it has the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. It's right across from The Veladora, you know. The theaters there. Things are starting to look, you know, a little different. They're nice, but I'm saying this is the way it looked back then.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh my goodness. I didn't realize that now the Guadalupe, that building.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes.

MS. CORDOVA: Of course. It's across the street from the theater. Wow.

MR. TREVIÑO: And you see, what I do – what I do is, what I did this painting, it was a drugstore. And before that it was another business. But there was – after that, okay the drugstore, but after that there was some other business. It wasn't a drugstore any more. And actually it was almost like abandoned and where, again, the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center made that their center, their offices and stuff.

But the reason I painted it is much more than that. You know, again, it's the importance historically as a landmark and giving it a – as a painting because it's like – that must be an important building. When I did *The Alameda* Theater, I did *The Alameda* Theater when it was closed and it was already going down, but I still – when I painted it, it gave it such importance. I mean, I went to Chiapas with a friend of mine because he thought that if I went to Chiapas I would do a painting, or there would be something there that I could come back and do it, and at that people would see, oh, it must be important, you know, what's going on for Jesse Treviño to go there and do his painting on it. And I think that was the same thing that, you know, that I thought.

When I did that Alameda Theater, a guy from Houston that owned the building and he was thinking of – it was up for sale and there was a very good chance that somebody would buy it, and like everything else, knock it down and build another building there. Could have happened. And when I did that painting, you know, I wasn't – I said, hey, wake up. This is a place that's very important and you're going to see eventually. That was when I did the painting of the Alameda. People have seen it and said, oh, this is important and everything. So the organizations – [inaudible] – necessary to secure that building.

But I think the painting was also used during the time – I remember when working with the organization and using whatever way to promote the idea of the, you know, of – bring back the theater, preserving the theater as far as, you know, that goes.

MS. CORDOVA: About when did that start, the preservation of the Alameda?

MR. TREVIÑO: I would say about 1994. About 1994.

MS. CORDOVA: About the same time that you –

MR. TREVIÑO: Exactly the same time. It was the Alameda first, really. Get that and form an organization – Alameda over here, and then of course the museum was separate things. But the Alameda – so important to that whole area, you know. And I was working with George Cortez and we were thinking about it, everything, you know. We were thinking about the plaza, of course with the people at the bureau, the theater. And then we had that building called Centro de Artes, that building there at the Market Square that wasn't being utilized for

anything, and it just seemed that was what was going to be needed to form this whole cultural zone there, was going to be that theater and that museum and there was a university being built there downtown, the downtown UTSA, and all that was real important to them. And then the Market Square as also central location for the Hispanic business community. Historically that area, a lot of things happened there historically, and like I said, they changed that mural where the corners, the Nacional Theater, where that line used to – all that was wiped out. So you know, there was a time when we kind of lost everything that was there. And you know, there was a time when people didn't go to that area, so the hospital was ready to close and go. It's amazing how just – just barely made in time to be putting everything back together. And make it an important part of the whole city historically. It's not as developed as the river, the central river areas downtown, but I'll tell you one thing. Visitors, they love to come to that area, you know, because the Mexican-American community, the food, the music, you know, I'm sure the art. They go in that area and will see murals. That's what I want to do, is to have an area where a lot of the historic preserves are still there, you know. And then the museum of course would also help to bring like integrity.

MS. CORDOVA: When did you first begin working with the – or when did the Smithsonian first take an interest in the area?

MR. TREVIÑO: You know, when I had that one-man show at the Smithsonian ["Works by Jesse Treviño: New York, Vietnam, San Antonio." National Museum of American Art, 1993-94], I came back and I was already hanging around with George Cortez and we were real interested in developing that whole area. And I said, you know, George, we need to get a museum here. So he said, well, what do we do? And he was so impressed too because he had – the catalog of Chicano Art he just thought – he loves art. He couldn't believe what he was looking at. And I said, well, a lot of these artists live around here, you know. We have them here. And if we're going to do a museum, I'll have to get them all together. Let's organize and see what they want, too. If we're all in agreement, particularly from – because I know, as myself, that would be my dream is to have a museum, some – you know, Latino art here. Latino art.

So you know, we did the impossible, is to invite – get all these artists on the same night to come together. And George Cortez was meeting with – [inaudible]. Remember, we did this big square with tables and chairs, like a square table going around, all the way around. Must have been 50 artists, you know, total, something like that. We had newspaper people, people representing the museums, from the different art organizations, all were there.

MS. CORDOVA: Mostly from San Antonio, these people?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. But – so just a bunch of them, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Who were some of the artists who became really involved?

MR. TREVIÑO: Mel Casas, Joe Esquivel, you know, Cesar Martinez, Adán Hernandez, all of those people were there. There's a whole list of – Jose Luis Rivera, the sculptor, he was there. And there were – I remember about 50 people, artists together, had basically talked – we all – discussion about – about, you know, what we wanted as far as a museum. And yeah, we all agreed it's really appropriate, AMA, Amigos del Museo del Arte, you know. That was the name of that organization.

During that time the Smithsonian, Miguel Bretos, they had him going to a couple of places, I think. He went to Miami. He's Cuban himself. And like he went to Miami, and then he came to San Antonio. I think they were just kind of looking, too. There was another place where they could – I'm not too sure, just some kind of a museum or space that would be affiliated with the Smithsonian in another location other than Washington. Hadn't really been done before, but yet something like this, it would have to do with Latino altars and art. He fell in love with San Antonio, and again, he came and they had this huge thing for him when he came.

George Cortez, and, you know, I guess if you really care about something like that, you get all the people that you want there to be part of this, and to listen to this guy. And he was just so impressed with everything. You know, I myself met him. He knew I had had an exhibit at the Smithsonian and all of that. So that's what – [inaudible] – said. We knew that they wanted to – and the other thing is that over here politically I myself and George Cortez, with the mayor, Cisneros were real important at the time, was named. Got together with him. And I told George we have to get a building. And there were – we looked at – as a museum organization that we – we looked at a thousand different areas.

There was basically one that I really liked, and. but we couldn't get it. I sat down with the mayor and George Cortez and we – at that time the art council director here in San Antonio, Eduardo Diaz. And we sat together and said, okay, we're going to need a building. And I told him I wanted the old library on the river. And that was already taken by NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] – trade –

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, NAFTA?

MR. TREVIÑO: NAFTA. Supposedly that's where the center was going to be for NAFTA there here in San Antonio and all of that. And George of course had a lot of interest at the Market Square, his businesses and all that too. There was that Centro de Artes building. But I said it's not big enough. But okay, so what? Even though, you know, in Mexico they've got Palacio de Bellas Artes. What I'm saying is, sometimes you can start small, and if we could do that then we could get another building, and whatever. Isn't that the whole idea, that that Centro de Artes, which means center of the arts, has never really been a center of the arts. Let's make it a center of the arts.

Anyway, talked to – said to the mayor, and he said, well, you can have Centro de Artes. In other words, the city will – so that was it. We got the Centro de Artes.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, why hadn't the Centro de Artes been a better place?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, first of all, it belonged to the city, and the city—first it was a fish market, like a market in there. And then they had a space and used it for – for special occasions. It was just – it ended up to be an empty building all the time. It wasn't set up for anything else. So we had the building to – but also the connection with the Smithsonian, the Smithsonian with Miguel Bretos was getting closer and closer to, again, to make it official. There was Secretary Heyman. He was in charge of the Smithsonian. His name was Heyman. He was a real tall guy. He came to San Antonio to announce that the Smithsonian – I remember having this – Rosemary Kowalski is big caterer here in San Antonio. We had it right in front of the Alamo, set up beautiful tents and had a beautiful ceremony there with the Smithsonian people and all the arts leaders and everything in San Antonio, the artists, this great celebration now seeing that the Smithsonian was going to settle here in San Antonio, and that that building – so gradually, eventually then Henry Muñoz was a good friend of ours too, which was – I hear that he would be a good leader to lead this organization. So he's managed to raise money. Still a little short on finishing, but he's raised a lot of money, big corporations' contributions to finish this museum, to make it happen.

You know, I'm kind of – I feel like I had something to do with it. It took a lot of other people to get it done, but you know, I'm glad that we moved on it, that we acquired that building and our relationship with the Smithsonian was established. I feel like this is the place to be, you know, when it comes to Latino art, Chicano art, all the art that we're surrounded with to have a place like that. And not just to be seeing it like the theater, performing arts there, everything else that comes along with having that – and the university environment and the whole area that would be good for that – that area. It's going to be like awesome, you know, to have the university, just to have a lot of businesses thrive.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes. In some ways you had the good fortune of being in this city as it matured, with this rather impressive community of artists, that you – I mean, you've mentioned the Con Safo group, but there's also I think through the new generation and, you know, or various generations that are sort of working in this city. I mean, has that enabled you in your work too? I mean, there's this – this larger community of exhibiting and possibility of the museum is really important.

What about the communications with other people here that has informed your paintings, or your murals? Can you pinpoint that, or is that just too vague?

MR. TREVIÑO: It's too vague. Yes. It's too vague.

MS. CORDOVA: I'm sorry. Well, how about this. What I would like to – I mean, you have really been instrumental in that particular marketplace or Market Square area.

MR. TREVIÑO: Let me say this, because I think it might help answer. You know, I've been painting for a long time. When I came back from Vietnam I started working on all these paintings, and I knew that, you know, again, that it wasn't the art. That if I wanted to sell things, it had to do more with the traditional type paintings for landscape, deer, turkeys, you know, old Texas scenes, things like that. Because I know artists both – I know artists, Chicano artists, or even – Mexican American artists that did a lot of paintings like that. I myself as a young student before I was wounded, did a lot of paintings like that, that I was asked to do. People didn't say, paint me a Raspa man because that's what I want to put on my wall. I decided to do that. I didn't care what people thought so much to influence me to paint this. I knew that they were going to care about the things that I painted, things that were important to me, you know. It's just that nobody else – and I'd say, sure, I'm an artist, but as I have dedicated all my life – my second life, I call it because, you know, the first one, it was, that – I had a second chance, I have a second life, started all over again with my left hand. And you now, that's all that mattered to me, that I was doing the images. And doing them in a way where they were going to last on museum quality paintings. I mean, they were big paintings. And at the same time, you know, I care about learning more about art and to do – learn as much as I could, too. I went back to school to learn about art.

And you know what? There were many times I almost – it's not like I was trying to sell my paintings here or there, but I would, you know, as I say, I – I thought that if I worked hard and exhibited in museums, like you know, at the Centro, and someone would be interested in it. It was true. People were very interested in my work.

And that's the route that I wanted to do. Stay true to the subject matter that I, you know, that I have a second chance to work on and things that matter, no matter, you know, that people wouldn't hang them behind their couch or have this. That didn't matter to me. I was more interested in whether a museum would be interested in exhibiting my work. And they were.

So that's the – that's the point, the difference between myself and a lot of other artists that I know, that they would do it just to sell it. I never did that. I never – you know, when I – I would rather starve, really, than sell something, than to paint something that somebody's just going to not care, and I – like I say, I'd rather do something that is going to be valuable to someone. And otherwise I'm not going to do it.

I guess I was, the difference that everything I had to do had to do with art, you know. I had to do it right ethically. And I've always done that, you know. I guess my career as an artist and my credibility has always been so important because I've seen other artists mess it up in some way, you know, that people would never buy a painting for more than $500 for them, you know. And me, I, no telling what people would pay for my paintings. But I got there a certain way, you know, by, you know, being true to – being honest about my work and not trying to undermine anyone about, you know, that. And I think that that has been real important in that part of my work.

MS. CORDOVA: And maybe to sort of follow along that. One of the things I'm interested in is that before Vietnam, we talked a lot about your portraits of people and all those wonderful images of people you were drawing. And I don't know if you were doing a lot of landscapes too, or images of places, but when you came back you were – it seems like you had suddenly also switched to that. Like I think you were doing images of your family, or maybe those evolved later, but immediately you did the *Alamo Exit* sign, you did *Progresso*. What – what was that shift about? Or what did that mean?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, well, there were two different things. One, when I – like these paintings of *Los Niños*, there's several things. One of them is, within our culture there are certain – call them institutions, and you know the bakery. You had one here of *The Bakery*.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, I thought I had that one. Maybe I don't.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, it has a car in front of it. It's called *Panadería*. To me that's something within art. Panaderías, there were times, they were rampant, they were everywhere, you know. There are not as many now. And that's part of the story of the way it was then, the way it is now. But that – but the bakery itself is to me deserves a painting. And when I paint a building, for example, I'm not painting just a building. I'm painting a portrait, just like a portrait of a person, with a lot of faces. That painting – and then – I don't have to paint a lot of panaderías. I just paint one. I don't have to paint different raspa man's in different positions. Just one. Because I want people to look at that and that's what it is.

Kelly Field here, this place where employees, used to employ thousands of Hispanics. Okay now, when I did that painting many year – many, many years ago, again, you know, like first I was doing it as – 20 employees from Kelly, all different Hispanics. But I could do just one. What I'm saying is that when you do that one, you don't have to do all the rest. So that's what I did. I said, first, it's a huge group of Mexicanos that work there. I paint that one person and I paint him where, you know, he looks great and just really – that says everything about everyone. What I'm saying is, it's a reflection of that.

When I paint that theater, *Alameda Theater*, not only because of what that theater represents, historically what it is, you know, but the institution of the Mexican theater, Spanish theater, you know. La Bella Vida that's – I painted it for that reason too, to say that theater is Apollo for us, you know. That theater – that's why I painted it. Why would I have to paint it, or just take a picture of it or something. I painted it, and that says to me, it just gave it the time to do it and to say, you know. It's like if I did it, take a picture of you or I did a painting of you, there's a lot of difference. One of them, you know, take the time and to work – that's – that to me is something so different from a photograph, that actual painting.

So all these paintings, like when I did that, or, you know, different – like here, Guadalupe, this is important historically, you know. So I painted it there, and certain things that the – this painting of my mother, for example, you know, Tony goes, oh, that looks like our mother. Well, that looks like a lot of people in the West Side, seated in the back yard and stuff like that. And that's why I paint certain things that I paint, you know, with one painting. It's nice when you just do that one painting and that's it, you know. Sometimes people have to do 20 paintings so – trying to get the message through or something. To me it's – and what's amazing too is that it does – some paintings they're real and yet it does different – it has different effect on different people. I've noticed that too, you know, how it does, you know. That's nice too. That's not just one idea. It's different ideas that are there.

MS. CORDOVA: Have you ever felt like there was a terrible misreading of your work, or – I mean, if you feel like people take away something different than what you intended?

MR. TREVIÑO: No, I don't think so. And you know, I think that earlier on when I decided that it was important that I bring people with me in my – my adventure. My adventure of being an artist, and that I bring to my family. I felt, you know, I took the time to take them to exhibits, to come with me, you know, to make them part of my art, that they learned a lot, and they're much better now than they were. You know, I was so advanced, I feel, when I came back from Vietnam, and I could do, I know – as much as I couldn't do, I could do so much. And I had a choice, you know. I could do art that people wouldn't understand at all, you know, probably. And that would be cool because, you know, I'm doing something that – what does it matter? Or I could paint themselves, their whole place, but again, do it in a very professional way, where they would look at it and they would then start learning a little bit about that. And I think they have.

And with the murals that I have done and things that – you know, I don't know how many times I'll come out on the news, and that's where people have seen me. Me working on a project, or, you were doing this, and all of that is like educating them in a lot of ways, you know. So doing something on air, who cares whether they know how it's done and what I have to go through and all that. I do, and, you know, they – they've learned. I think that unfortunately that, you know – I'm not saying that I'm staying – I mean, I'm doing just what they want, but I'm saying I care about them learning something from it. Maybe the kids will learn from it.

I'm invited all the time to different high schools and places to talk. And basically I'll take some of my – for instance, something that I could take with me and show them the videotape of – of some of the things what happened, and then I'll answer questions and all of that. Been invited to Veterans Day. Anyway, I love to do it because the kids there – really seem to be interested in that, and all the things that I've done. So that's very rewarding, something for me to do with kids.

Again, to me I see it as, look, it's all about them learning about my art and all that. And you know what? This is where you start, with the younger kids, you know? And so they go and tell their parents, and Jesse Treviño is a household word. And that's true, because so many people, oh yeah, my kid mentioned you and you were there, and it was okay. Great. That's, you know, customers. Would that be fair to say?

MS. CORDOVA: Yes. In thinking about transitions in your work, and one of the things we had talked about yesterday was your dark period. And I'm curious about what made – why did you leave the black canvas behind? Especially when I look at the role of the paintings that you did in the later 70s, they all have these beautiful blue skies to them, and seem really light.

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, I guess you could say right at that point – I don't know, probably again at the bottom of somewhere in my life, or something like that. But – but I guess, you know what? And people ask me, how long did it take you to learn this, and to get back to paintings like that? And that's kind of impossible to answer. But, you know, when talk about the dark period, I still didn't have – because you know when I did this mural I was still painting the black, and I did not have – and I'm talking about more – I'm more confident now around people. Like I said, I've learned more. I used to be real shy, I didn't want to – you had to force me to talk. And now you can't shut me up. So you know, it's so different.

But a lot of it has to do – I mean, with painting I'm more confident. The confidence, I think when I was doing these paintings on the black canvas, when we – and you know, all that, which to me, when you paint on a black canvas, again, there's less – there's almost less canvas to paint. You start off black and you work with that as opposed to a white canvas, you know, working from a white background and trying to fill up the canvas. When you paint with black, it's already full. It's black, and so you start from there and you build it. And I remember – I remember that I was going to graduate school over here, and I thought, you know, after graduate school what am I going to do, you know? Well, I was having a great time painting. And I got the commission at the bank. That's what I wanted to show you. Finished 1981. Started some time in '80. It took me 14 months to finish that painting.

MS. CORDOVA: Is that the Wells Fargo Bank?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MR. TREVIÑO: And that's when the change – when you see the film, with Martin Sheen, and he's – and they're talking about that. That's – [inaudible] – about the film.

MS. CORDOVA: And this was a documentary on –

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, it's dark, it's a night sky, he says. And he showed this mural, he was talking about. And then from there it sort of – and then, like – to one in the bank. In other words, where the colors changed from – a lot whiter and wow, they show that whole mural at the bank. What a difference between that – that mural and this mural, you know? And also, when I was at UTSA, that's when I started doing these paintings, in graduate school.

A lot of these, you know, big canvases, portraits, buildings, you know, all these paintings.

MS. CORDOVA: The late 70's.

MR. TREVIÑO: Right. So that, and that. In other words, these came before, right before, and then the bank. And the bank had like all these colors. So it changed from – from a – this dark, to that.

MS. CORDOVA: To the picture of –

MR. TREVIÑO: This, and the real – even the murals were different from that to that. But then, you know, I was feeling more confident. I've had – for myself, and sure – yes, I had already achieved this mural, you know, and I had gone through all my, you know, black, dark era, and I felt, you know, I had enough of that in a way. I guess to the point where I could see, you know what? I could do a lot of these things, you know? Just because I had lost my hand. And so it took me a while just to kind of – I guess, even – I could do some things. Just the fact that of the loss of my hand. And I felt bad. I was always worried about it, you know. [END TAPE 3, SIDE A] You know, after than before Vietnam. I had a certain amount of work that I – that I accomplished. But there is no comparison to the kind of things that in my second chance, in my second life, the things that I've achieved, of paintings, on canvas, murals, things like that. All – all those things I think is what means a lot to me, I find incredible that I'm still doing that, you know. I hope I can live a long time so I can do so much more because that's what it, you know, takes some of that.

And grateful. Every day I'm grateful just because I can see that, you know, the chance to do these kind of things, you know. And I don't think that – if I'd have stayed in New York and stuff, I think I could have done some great things, but you know, I don't think anything like I've done here, you know. And at the same time feel like I'm still working on the community, still trying to do things that sometimes take hundreds of years to do. You know, I know that it will be like when not only I could see it, but I think I'd like to start moving in that direction.

I've got a place that I just bought just recently, I don't even have a place, I live with my friend over here. So I found a place here on Guadalupe. So it's the worst place that you wouldn't want to live because, you know, there's a lot of drugs, prostitution in that little area. It's a real – that part of –

MS. CORDOVA: Close to the public housing project?

MR. TREVIÑO: I guess around there because that gets – down Guadalupe, and there's a creek there – to the creek. But there's this place that has three stories. It's made out of bricks and rock and concrete. Like some construction – used construction worker. Little by little he worked on that. It's just like, you know, a little rustic, crude. But I bought that and I want to develop it as a studio and – and a gallery, like a place where people come, and a beautiful place, buy the land next to it, and just make it into this beautiful studio right on the West Side. And you know, I grew up real close to here and I have this mural, I have the mural at the bank. They're all on this side of town, this part. And then at the hospital right here, and now La Veladora too. So I'm saying, you know, I could live anywhere I want, you know. I could. But if I'm going to do something just like – like taking time to convince them that we should do another one after that, I myself have to do, you know, have my money where my mouth is. In other words, I should live there. And that's what I'm going to do.

So I'm in the process of fixing the place, but it's a very beautiful unique place. It's got spiral – outside, columns that twirl like that with bricks that go up three stories high, like. It's beautiful. I mean, it's like an old ruin. But I think that, you know, taking the time and putting a lot of myself into the building will be a great place for me to settle. As many things as I've done, if I can settle there, be in the same neighborhood with my murals and, you know, with where I grew up. Like going back to where you came from. This is my neighborhood, you know. The places I named, you know, all these different places, and that I could create something and maybe a bunch of people will go there, you know. Come there and take a little tour there.

MS. CORDOVA: How did the Wells Fargo Bank commission come about?

MR. TREVIÑO: Again, when I was doing these paintings –

MS. CORDOVA: The place paintings.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, at UTSA. There was articles in the newspapers, stuff that came out with some of the – you know, I was Jesse Treviño. I guess if I would have one of them that I was talking, it was an art review of a graduate exhibit that I – and there was an article in, and the article that – so the president of the bank read it, and – and they were remodeling their bank, and told the board, what about remodeling, why don't we get this guy, Jesse Treviño, he's from the West Side, he does – [inaudible] – paintings. Do us a mural.

So I got to meet the architect that was remodeling the whole place, and just on some huge wall. So if I could do a mural. Anyway, met with the president and the president drove around, went by this building, drove around

here and everything. And he said, yes. And you know what was really interesting about this? He said, there's very few artists who, where they could be commissioned based on – without a, you know, a concept or something to look at.

MS. CORDOVA: So you didn't give them a concept.

MR. TREVIÑO: No. They drew up a contract. No, I didn't give them a concept. And again, I insisted on that because it wasn't the way that – not that I can't come up with a concept. I could do that, but to me, I wanted to work the other route and create my own image because the only thing is, he said, San Antonio, do something on San Antonio. And I'm like, okay, I'll do it my way. How I work. But I think that that was still very, you know – to trust me on a big commission like that. I don't know, they trusted me to come up with some idea. But you know, again, I – you know, coming from UTSA, doing this mural here, this was much bigger, this one over here. And –

MS. CORDOVA: How big is it?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, it's 54 feet long and 12 feet high. It's one piece of canvas – of linen, Belgian linen. That was in linen, yeah. It's inside the lobby. And you know, I painted it during nighttime hours, on weekends when nobody was there. At night I could go not to the mall but to the bank. And that was hard to paint because, you know, people try to be nice and not distracting, but they're always saying, hey, want to say hi. It was pretty hard. They built a deck –

MS. CORDOVA: A scaffold?

MR. TREVIÑO: Like a scaffold. Made out of wood, and underneath people would still bank, but on top I was – it was a scaffold, on top of the scaffold, on the wooden deck. And for 14 months – I thought it was going to be six, you know, and I told them, look, I don't know when it's going to be finished. All I know is, you know, this – I'm going to do something with this. It's just going to take a long time. I wouldn't be happy, you know, to, after six months, say, well, it's done, because it's six months. It was something that I had no control over how it was going to be finished.

MS. CORDOVA: How did you decide what you were going to include in the mural?

MR. TREVIÑO: I knew several things. One of the things, that I wanted to see San Antonio as – the romantic aspects of San Antonio. And that meant – I didn't want – I didn't want automobiles and I didn't want signs and things that would – are not – aesthetically wouldn't look nice. I wanted of course people, the historical, like old – old place, old missions, you know. Just buildings and people, cowboys, North America and Mexico, you know, coming to together. That's basically what it is, you know, the Mexican influence, and, you know, Texas, Mexico coming together to form San Antonio, and to do it beautiful. I mean, this is – beautiful things, and eliminate everything else. That was – able to keep it that way. So without all the other things that are not – are not necessary really to have, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: I guess – maybe switching topics a little bit, but I'm sure it's – I know you grew up loving art. Did you also grow up with a camera? Did you use a camera?

MR. TREVIÑO: No. No.

MS. CORDOVA: When did you turn to the camera?

MR. TREVIÑO: It was – probably late, when I was in graduate school.

MS. CORDOVA: At UTSA then?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. And basically I was interested in taking this kind of scenes, these shots, to go back to the studio. And some of them I took a couple of months to paint, you know, just one canvas because it was all the detail. When I was in graduate school I'd go to school and paint. I'd come home and paint sometimes because the VA was paying for that. And that's what I enjoyed. That really was the only way in graduate school. You have to have other time to do that, you know. There wasn't any time for anything else as far as doing something else. So that's what I did.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you ever become interested in photography?

MR. TREVIÑO: No. Not really. And you know, the thing is that, you know, I guess my technical skills as an artist, all the art that I've learned and I've loved to do, like, a portrait of people, you know, I like the way that that William Draper, you know, my teacher, used to paint, from life, in then several sittings. Maybe three, not more than five, but three – let's say three sittings. Three or four sittings. When he used to paint portraits there in class, I remember he used to give us about a week with that model to do a portrait or whoever, but, you know, because – it only needed a few days to come back and see things maybe that you didn't see the first time and

stuff. Especially on the – if you don't know the person, the features of a person and the light, so you're going to capture certain characteristics of that face. Sometimes takes a couple of sittings and you can recognize a twitch or something in the mouth, or something about that that's very important to make it – create that portrait. He worked that way, sometimes in three days or like that. But he could do one in one session, you know, real fast. But for a beautiful portrait, several days.

And I liked that, and, you know, I've done many paintings. I had one that I think Anheuser-Busch has it. It's just a couple of cans with brushes. It's called *Los Botes*, that's cans with brushes. And that's done from an actual – from a still life, you know. And portraits again that were done from life, you know, that – I learned how to do that through him, you know, how to – how to visualize different color. He was very good in color, how to almost dissect color, to look at an image and transfer those colors over here. He had such an eye to do that within the face, you know, almost like a sculpture, painted sculpture, that he knew exactly the shapes and color that he would see.

But he said he – he said he feels – he teaches at the Rhode Island – I think it was Rhode Island School of Art, and one of the things that he always taught us too is painting with the sun behind you, and you pretty much save the dark, but that it freed all these colors, if you could perceive a color within – with the bright light behind it, where you have just an outline bright and this would be dark. But it's the sharpness. It's almost like in a shadow that, to be able to identify people's colors is incredible. I mean, that's – learn from that, of how to see that color, you know, to be able to take that color. It's not easy to do but you could, you know, working and working on it.

MS. CORDOVA: So a lot of his lessons have stayed with you.

MR. TREVIÑO: Oh, yes. Yes. They're still part – you know, that was one of the best courses that I had as for loving to do portraits, you know. And you know, one of biggest portraits of Henry – I did a portrait of Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez, that I was talking to you about him, and that was such a neat story because as a young artist, that eventually his official portrait that hangs there in Washington. You know, I did that. He wanted me to do it. And I went up to Washington, I took pictures, I had things –

MS. CORDOVA: Draper recommended that you do that?

MR. TREVIÑO: No. No, no. Henry Gonzalez did.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, Henry B. Gonzalez did. Sorry.

MR. TREVIÑO: He – and I guess, like the president, you get to choose the artist that you want, you know, to – to paint you. And –

MS. CORDOVA: Though in speaking of Draper and this portrait of Henry B. Gonzalez, I did think, as you mentioned, that Draper had done the portrait of Kennedy, and Henry B. Gonzalez' portrait, I think, is there – Kennedy's book is featured in there? Was that *Profiles in Courage*?

MR. TREVIÑO: That's an award. That's an award that very few people have received. And that – it's a little lantern thing, he has it on his desk. I put it there for a reason, and I understand from his family too that that award meant a lot to him, to Henry B. Gonzalez, because he was friends with Robert Kennedy, the Kennedy's, you know? And they had a lot of – again, that's why he got that award. And *Profiles in Courage*, right, that's – right? That's the name of that – yeah. And very few people would get that.

And so I guess that's – yes, that was that, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: That's right. The award.

MR. TREVIÑO: But William F. Draper, it's hard to come close to him, of people that he has painted, you know. Very, very famous people, you know?

MS. CORDOVA: Yes. Well, maybe just to go back in time because there were still several paintings that I think are important that we haven't talked about, and one of them is the one of *Los Hermanos*, your brothers.

MR. TREVIÑO: Oh, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And maybe you could just tell me how that painting evolved, like what – was it – did you just happen to one day take a photo of your brothers, or was it like a planned gathering?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, that was during the time that I had my camera, and I was shoot – taking pictures, and this was a place out in the country that my older brother had, that we'd go over there on weekends with the family. I remember it's like a picnic. We were having a picnic at his place there, just north of San Antonio. And we would all get together as brothers, of course my mother was there, the whole family. And it was just one of those

moments, you know, of them, and they all posed. Like it was just – it seemed to perfect.

Again, it was – like I didn't know – I just liked to capture – again, it was a time when I was capturing people that I was doing these other paintings, so that's just one of them, which – and again, it was all about subject matter. I wanted to paint them, you know, but I didn't – I can't tell you that right – I did set them, up. Yeah, I was looking at them as paintings. Everything I would see. I didn't paint everything I shot but I would say that when I did look through that camera and I was looking in there, I would see it as some form of a painting, yes. Composed it, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: And this is—these are all of your brothers, right?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, but two of my brothers are not in the painting, we are nine brothers.

MS. CORDOVA: Where were your sisters?

MR. TREVIÑO: They were there, sitting together. And you know, their complaint has always been like, what about painting of us? So I don't know. I haven't done it yet, but I don't know. I don't know if I'll ever do it. I painted my mother late in life. I didn't paint her when she was young or anything. I mean, I could have painted her many years ago. When I did this painting, she said, well, you know, let me – she always liked to do her hair, her eyes and everything. I said, no, no, no. This isn't what I want. What I want is you to go grab that basket with the clothes and go outside and – and sit very close to the thing – to where you hang the clothes and all that.

And, you know, so it wasn't the way she wanted it to look. I didn't – when she looked – when she looked younger, this is some person – I mean, at this age when she was here, her strength and all, she was – this is the way I wanted to capture her, you know what I'm saying? I thought about that, you know. Actually I could have – I could do a painting of her when she was younger, whatever, but the thing was to do her at this age. I think certain people have – just more – presented more, just looking the way she did.

And then she thought I was going to give her the painting. It's a huge painting like that. She said, well, where am I going to put it? I said, well, I'm not going to put it anywhere because I want to put it in a museum. I told her, I'm going to show it and everything, and eventually you're going to be famous and people will – and sure enough, she's more famous than me.

MS. CORDOVA: What did she think of it? I'm sorry. Go ahead.

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, again – she also told her friends, "*Ah, pos, no me dejo que me peinara*." In other words, I didn't give her a chance to comb my hair – she was always making excuses for her. But you know, it was – it was beautiful and everybody loved that painting. People, oh, that's one of the best paintings, and all that. You know, I had – when I had – this was an exhibit – an exhibit there at the museum before it became famous, with another – with other artists, I think it was. Others, yes. And what – there was – I think *Texas Monthly* did a review on that show, and the review said, not since Whistler's mother. Treviño's mother. That was the thing. And it just said great things, great things about my art, my paintings. Just like they did in Houston Art. And I think it was this painting here.

MS. CORDOVA: Just like they did in –

MR. TREVIÑO: At the Contemporary Arts Museum, where they said that my paintings were the heart of the show, the paintings, and all. I'm saying over here this painting – I didn't realize that to the people when they looked at the show and everything, this painting stood out more than anything else. And that was – that was really nice. You know, the whole article called Treviño – it's about the whole show and it said Treviño's mother, not since Whistler's mother.

MS. CORDOVA: And so this was set right by your house.

MR. TREVIÑO: This was the back yard.

MS. CORDOVA: That is your back yard.

MR. TREVIÑO: The back yard. Just grassy back yard. That's where she hangs her clothes. It's where we grew up.

MS. CORDOVA: It looks almost surreal. It's –

MR. TREVIÑO: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: It's crystal clear, clean, something.

MR. TREVIÑO: It was – that's the way it looked, pretty much. There wasn't really anything else, paper, trash, or

things, or balls. It was just clear like that. We just used it as – as a field, like play ball, something there. And this was later in life. The earlier years there were more of us. This was later so it's just space, a plain lawn without anything on it. She made her own aprons, and really cool.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, she made that apron?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. I was little.

MS. CORDOVA: So this is like – is a little –

MR. TREVIÑO: Little cat. It's a cat. Stitched on the apron. And all those little things. She put all that together.

MS. CORDOVA: That's great. And so – oh, maybe could you just tell me who each brother is here in *The Brothers* [*Los Hermanos*].

MR. TREVIÑO: Okay. George, with the black t-shirt, he passed away –

MS. CORDOVA: From left to right, maybe.

MR. TREVIÑO: Here, Robert.

MS. CORDOVA: Uh huh, in the striped shirt. And he's got his sunglasses.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. He's younger than I am. He's an aerospace engineer, scientist for NASA. That's what he does. He's an incredible person. This is George, which is – he passed away. He died of diabetes. And in that mural that I have for the diabetes center, there there's a little portrait of him in there. And that's me.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, so that's you in the back there? Yes, of course.

MR. TREVIÑO: And my hair, I had a permanent, so –

MS. CORDOVA: You did? [Laughter.]

MR. TREVIÑO: And that's my brother Armando.

MS. CORDOVA: Armando, is wearing the flowery shirt?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. My brother. And that's my younger brother Ernest.

MS. CORDOVA: Ernest, and does he – what – is he holding –

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, we're all having some kind of drink or something. Yes. And then my brother Mario.

MS. CORDOVA: Mario. And he's got quite the sunglasses look to him.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes.

MS. CORDOVA: He looks Mr. Cool.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yeah, Mr. Cool. And that's my brother Ramiro. And you know, we're all different shades, you know, that's the way.

MS. CORDOVA: So Ramiro, on the last. Okay. Good. Just nice to know. It's a very – sort of like, 70's portrait, I'm just looking at the clothes. It's sort of reminiscent of that moment in time, all the fashions.

MR. TREVIÑO: Exactly. [Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: And then we have *The Friends* or the *Camaraderie*, right? *Las Camaradas*.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. This is a – this house here – this is the house.

MS. CORDOVA: This is the house that – with your mother.

MR. TREVIÑO: This is the house. The front of this house, this street – this house is across the street. So this is looking, you know, you're sitting on the front porch looking out across the street.

MS. CORDOVA: So all of these portraits are right by that same house?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. And all these kids – okay, first, this is one of my brothers. My actual brothers. And so these

two – right here.

MS. CORDOVA: So from left right, and the friends, the *comaradas*. Your brother – which brother is that?

MR. TREVIÑO: George. That's this brother. George, here. That one there is that one. And this was later in life, over here. Okay.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MR. TREVIÑO: And then Ernest – this is from the front.

MS. CORDOVA: Ernest is the third one over.

MR. TREVIÑO: Right. And these are all friends. And these are neighbors right next to our house, and anyway – all these people within these two blocks, they live in that two blocks. And that – they play football in the street. The whole – they're out there all day playing, you know, just – most of them have white t-shirts, whatever. Those are kind of the good old days because that's when you had all the people in our neighborhood play around and everything, and there weren't really any problems, you know. That's when, you know, the screen doors used to be open, and you know, people trusted each other. So they played out in the street like that. It was really nice.

MS. CORDOVA: So you're actually – you did – you did both of these paintings about the same year, right?

MR. TREVIÑO: This would be earlier, a little earlier. First this one and then this one.

[Cross talk.]

MR. TREVIÑO: Excuse me. This one, *Las Comaradas* is a smaller painting. You know why?

MS. CORDOVA: Why?

MR. TREVIÑO: Because this is the first painting that I did in this style.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, really.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. I think so. Yes. Because I did that at UTSA. I don't think – because at SAC [San Antonio College] and the ones I did here, they're very different. They don't look like this. *The Comaradas*. So I did a smaller, and then I realized right there and then – I mean, after that, when it came out so – I thought, bigger. It has to be a certain size in order that it feels good. You know, like *The Raspa Man*, the size of it. You know, it looks – it's not life-size, but it's still a – it's 66 by 48. It's pretty good size. *The Window*, too, that's like – it looks almost like the actual window, you know. So it was that size – [inaudible] – huge, but some size that I really enjoyed all these paintings. This one but this one, this one, this one. You know, all these are pretty much that same size. And great for viewing. It has the impact that I want it to have.

This one, you know, I sold all those paintings, but I'm saying this – this one is a little smaller, but it still works. If it would have been this size it would have been even nicer. But that was the beginning, you know. I was learning how to work with that. Like I got better and better with it.

MS. CORDOVA: Let me just stop here because I see this tape is running out. So let me just stop it here.

[END TAPE 3, SIDE B]

MS. CORDOVA: All right. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Jesse Treviño on July 16th, 2004. This is session two, and disc two.

And Jesse, you were just talking about *Las Comaradas* portrait, and how you had changed in size. I guess I was again wondering, like how did – maybe for both *The Comaradas* and for *The Brothers* portrait, how – how did your subjects respond to your paintings? What did they think? Or did you have any response?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, I think they liked the idea. They – they liked the idea that I was, you know, I was painting subject matter that I was interested in. I had my camera, so I was taking picture – taking pictures of places that – again, I wanted – I wanted to – only the things I wanted to paint. I ended up, there were people right there in the neighborhood, so the subject matter was right there, the places. So I tried to identify all those, and start taking pictures of that. For a while I did some still life's of pan dulce, the sweet bread, so I'd go to different places where they have sweet bread and take pictures of them and try to do different still lives and things. So I went through a period when I wanted to take pictures of things that – you know, besides the place itself, I was also attracted to the background of the painting. The challenge for me to take that and translate it into a painting, what I could do, you know. I seem to edit in some way some of the pictures that I'm – take the picture of – things

that, like we were saying, was it like this? Well, sometimes I will take certain things out, eliminate them, they're not necessary, just to have what I want in there. So I like doing that too, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Have you ever had someone respond negatively to your portraits?

MR. TREVIÑO: Oh, yes. Well, I think people that are – like the non-representational things, or something like that might not be too impressive, but it's always – I've always – I guess for an artist it's been very few, you know. I can't even remember, you know, that someone would say something just to be rude or something.

And a lot of times, you know, I think what's nice is people that maybe didn't think that, you know, something was going to be that important or this – you know.

MS. CORDOVA: When did you feel like you were really establishing yourself as an artist? Was it with that documentary film, with that Wells Fargo bank commission, or is there a moment that –

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, I think it would be there, after that, the Wells Fargo mural because it was such a challenge. I took on something that I wasn't – and I have to be honest, there were doubts. Maybe I'll die before I finish this, or it's just – this is bigger than I ever thought. I was so consumed by it, I couldn't sleep at night unless I, all my thoughts were on the mural all the time. And I've never been on one thing. I like to think about different projects. But that was almost impossible. That mural was so big and so important to me. And that's what it is, that I myself, you know, I guess more critical than anybody about my work. I worry about it, but you know, that's what it takes, to really think about what I want to do. So not knowing how long it was going to take me, that was kind of scary too. And when I was going to finish. Because it's like – it's true. You don't know it's finished until it's finished. You say, okay, it's finished. But I didn't feel that way. Like it wasn't just a matter of covering up the space with this. It was the whole painting. It was representative of my work, and I thought – I thought, that's the way it has to be. You know, if I don't feel good about it, you know, those times where I feel I knew so much about art and this that it didn't matter what anybody thought. But it did, it was something that I myself almost ended up setting up the standards of how – you know, when it was ready, when this mural was ready. And that mural there was 14 months. You know, I thought it was going to take six and it went on and on. But you don't – all along people could see that – what it was taking to create it. So they weren't really worried about – even though they would want to set a deadline and, you know, that – they could see how involved, and what they were getting for $12,000, that huge mural now worth about half a million dollars. You know, they could see that.

So if someone is doing a mural for me and they're doing a great job and, you know, I think it was important so that artist finished the mural, and it's going to take him a few months for something that's going to be there for many years, you know. And they were. So I think that's the way it is with every – they can set a deadline, but you know, again, you know, this is the way I like to work. I just like to get something, you know – rush through, I don't like working like that.

MS. CORDOVA: Who does?

MR. TREVIÑO: None of my partners ever met deadlines. Not real deadlines. Maybe the third deadline.

MS. CORDOVA: Now how did the *La Feria* mural come about that's right there on the Marketplace?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, good friends of mine I met through *The Raspa Man*, at the Blanco Café, where *The Raspa Man*, original *Raspa Man* used to hang – because I took it, the original painting, and hung it in a restaurant behind the counter where everybody – a lot of the people that sat in front of the counter look like that. And they sat there and they looked at this big painting of *The Raspa Man*. You know how much that did. People came, who came in there, and Rick and Elaine Bela, who owned the Dagenbela Gallery at the Market Square – well, he – she owned the gallery. Of course they both owned the gallery, but he had a building across the street where the Nacional Theatre used to be. They built a building there. And he wanted to commission me to do a little girl. He had met me and everything. Anyway, it was a project that he wanted to pay for. It was – it didn't cost very much, but anyway, this – this mural used to be inside that building that was on the corner. The building still – the building's still there.

MS. CORDOVA: It used to be inside?

MR. TREVIÑO: Inside.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, I didn't realize.

MR. TREVIÑO: But not the same – not where it's now, but where this building used to be. Where the Nacional Theatre used to be, there's another modern building there now, okay, that was built in the 70's. And Rick Bela, the husband of the girl with the gallery, he had the building, or had it built and all that. He lost that building, went bankrupt, but he owned that – he owned the mural. So they took down the mural and they took it off the

wall and they took it and built this wall outside the gallery, which in a way is a lot better – a better location, but it is more visible. It's outside and it's real colorful. It should be outside. Inside – unless you go in that building, you'd never see it.

MS. CORDOVA: But I guess it's lost its locational anchor as a result of being moved, right?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, yes. Yes. But of course this – it's still an outside mural, you know, and when I built it this way, the plan to have it inside as opposed to something – made out of – just out of canvas. And you know, like Rick said, he lost that thing that some – he had, and he managed to save it and put it on there. But I think – what I was interested in, okay, was that I remember myself, that's how old I am, and right here, you know, I remember – I remember this whole area. I recreated it. Like I said, now there's actually a street that goes across this way, right where these buildings used to be because they made the street real wide. Like I said, they took them out. And I remember seeing this lion mural, big lion mural like that of this lion, on this drugstore, okay. And then I remember this theater too. So I got to see all this before. And it was lost completely. You would never know nothing of that. So I told Rick, why don't I recreate the way it used to look like. Oh, great.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you use photographs of the area to do that?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. Let me tell you, I had black and white photographs. First I needed these pictures of these two buildings, so I went to the conservation society here and they have pictures, black and white pictures. They didn't have color pictures but black and white pictures of this building. And I took those pictures and recreated the corners. And then all these are things that are recorded. This whole area was – people had built these buildings and they were aristocrats from Mexico – lawyers, doctors, so this whole area there were doctors, lawyers. Everything was in Spanish, just like going to Chinatown or wherever, so there – and it was like a 24-hour thing at night and stuff. I remember my father taking me to see the doctor, one of the doctors that had offices up there. *La Prensa*, the newspaper the guy is reading, that's the newspaper that was there, called *La Prensa*. Music, the guy with ice cream, you know, the – [inaudible], the things from the market.

MS. CORDOVA: *Cantinflas*, I think was showing at the theater.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. Anyway, to recreate that scene, sort of a scene that – it never looked like that, but yes, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: It never looked like that but it had everything that was there.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. I romanticize. I mean, it could look a certain way but those were the kind of things that – and you know, now we're at the whole Market Square, right around there. There – more people take their picture in front of this than anything else. The gallery had one photograph. Said, no, those photographs of people that, you know, are just visitors, go there, stand in front, like they were there, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: It's true. While I was there I saw some people getting their photograph taken in front of it.

MR. TREVIÑO: You saw that? Yeah. Okay. It's not exactly right, but I'm saying, you know, the photo shots – I mean, they're not like the big mural now on the *The Spirit of Healing*. It's supposed to be a little area where you stand there and take pictures. That's it. The Kodak shots.

MS. CORDOVA: I didn't know that. [Laughter.]

MR. TREVIÑO: No, they were supposed to have some area, you know. It's like, stand here and have your picture taken.

MS. CORDOVA: Very funny.

MR. TREVIÑO: Stand like little ponies.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes. In some way I guess you could imagine that as like – your mural as like that carnival space or something, right, where people would go.

MR. TREVIÑO: Or you know, what they do is they create a prop and they just stand in front of the prop and, like that's it, that's where you're at. That's what – I never thought how it was going to become that, but you know, like I was there. You have to be in front of that thing, right?

MS. CORDOVA: Yes.

MR. TREVIÑO: Colorful. You know, it's like, you know. [Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: And in some ways they're sort of living with this, you know, San Antonio cross, intersection of

being both Mexico but in the United States.

MR. TREVIÑO: I mean, car dealers, okay. There's a bunch of car dealers and stuff. I don't know how many commercials I've seen with this in it.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, with that mural? Really?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, because they're showing San Antonio, the culture, this, and boom, they show that. And *The Spirit of Healing* also, but especially this one, they show it a lot on different commercials having to do with, you know, fiesta. It has that kind of feeling, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: A lot of your work is very affirming, very – this one is very festive, I think. I guess that the criticism of romanticism is that you're leaving out some of the darker side of life. And I mean, especially I think in a city like San Antonio that feels such hierarchies of power, especially when it comes to Latinos. Do you have any response to that kind of criticism, or do you – how do you – is that a problem at all, or not?

MR. TREVIÑO: No, that's not a problem. I don't think so. I think people are smarter than that, I think, you know. I mean, this is what it is as far as, you know, just interpretation of an artist, you know. Like this is history. That's what I'm doing, you know, recreating that. Otherwise I think you can go there and see any pictures of what it used to look like. I mean, in the museum or somewhere, a place where you could see something like that. And today, you know, I think it's very valuable and you could take something like that and actually make it into something that aesthetically looks really nice within, you know, everything else. It works.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I guess maybe I'm asking this, like when you feature all that, all the positive sometimes, is there also – but we don't bring up some of the more tragic history.

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, this is not the – this is not a mural like that. Yes, it's like the mural at the bank. And I think that's about – you know, there's a lot of ways that you can work it. You know, you could – I guess I do – I work on the positive, you know. I don't think that you'll see a mural showing someone perhaps injecting heroin or something like that. I see paintings or, you know, young artists who sort of, wow, they're really moving and stuff. But if I could do something, a painting and some way get that message across without showing the negative, that's what I want to do. You know, that's – I've done that with just everything, I think.

MS. CORDOVA: I mean, it just suddenly puts me in mind of your *Los Piscadores* portrait, which is – I mean, in some ways it's one of these paintings of incredibly hard work. It's just one of these incredibly difficult jobs out in the field, but at the same time you have given a lot of dignity to your represented characters here.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. Okay, in this particular painting, like everything has a story. This painting was a commission. One of my friends that I had met and turned out we both went to the same high school. His name is Juan Vasquez and he became a federal tax judge and lives there. A good friend of mine. Well, you know, he was so interested in my art and he bought a painting from me named *Guadalupe and Calaveras*. Maybe you've seen that. It's a really nice painting. It's of a drive-in with cars, a purple charger, another car. It's like that. And that painting was a painting that I did – it was like the old Ice House, Stop and Go. I did it for a lot of reasons because those places don't exist any more, and they were very important, again, because people got together there, they went there, and it was like a drive-through. Anyway, it's got the cars and it's got the place. It was an actual place. Again, it's already gone. There on Guadalupe Street. It was called Guadalupe and Calaveras. That's the name of the intersection of the streets, and that's the name of it. But it's a drive-in. And he bought – he liked that painting a lot and he bought that painting from me.

And then he was interested in maybe a commission. He was telling me that he – that he used to help his grandfather, who raised him because his father died at a young age and all that, so he had to live with his grandfather. And so he told me everything about the scene and whatever. I created the scene, but as far as what these things were, the clothes that he wore, back then – in other words, what was really hard was that there was no photographs of them picking cotton, but he had a photograph of what his grandfather looked like. He was a lot – guero [blond]. He was light and reddish and, you know, a whole different kind of color than he was. And he had a picture at that age, which was – I don't know how old he was, but he had a little picture of him, of his face, of the way he looked when he was a little boy. And he told me the hats, the bandanas, the jacket, the things on their knees. Described this thing where they weighed the cotton, the truck. And then I went out to the actual cotton field to look at what it looked like, the bales. And I wanted to do a portrait of them. So I put it like that. So these are real people. These are real.

But again, I created it. It would have been hard for me to say, oh, I want to do a painting of them and not have what I usually use. Here it's an example where just to get the likeness and then create the scene. So this was become – right now it's – it belongs to him, but it's in the Cheech Marin ["Chicano"] show that's traveling around the country.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, I think I've seen it reproduced multiple times.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. But they're real people. I mean, they're – I mean, again, it's somebody that I know, and again, it was a scene that was created when he was a little boy. And his grandfather like, raised him and was like his father. So he had this, the other painting behind his desk when he was the tax attorney here, and people would – he was just – people were just amazed with those paintings. He said, when – clients said, when I saw those paintings, I knew that I was with the right person, and all that.

You know, it's just amazing how these paintings, like *Mis Hermanos*, it used to belong to the museum. Big advertising guy here, Lionel Sosa is his name, and he's an artist. He paints now. He's retired. But he had the biggest Hispanic advertising marketing company in the country. I mean, all this stuff. And he I guess had the vision to buy some of my work early on, and he bought this painting.

MS. CORDOVA: He bought *Mis Hermanos*.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. And you know what he took? That other people told me from some of his clients that I got to meet later on, is that when they went over there to his offices, in his lobby he had these beautiful couches and he had this painting and he had a couple of other things, and they saw this *Mis Hermanos* painting. Wow. They were just so impressed with this painting because, like I said, it's about Hispanics in the market and advertising, and then his art was just that. So, you know, that was a compliment from so many people. And then how that works for him as a business, how people are really attracted to these paintings that were not the kind of things you see just anywhere for an agency like that. So he's – he's pretty good about that, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: And I guess the Smithsonian has acquired that one, right?

MR. TREVIÑO: Right.

MS. CORDOVA: And they acquired it from Lionel Sosa?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, from – yes, this corporation that – they gave it to the Smithsonian. But it's really true the Smithsonian was really interested in that painting. They said, well, we're interested in this one and this one, that belonged to the museum here. But still – I mean, the important thing is these paintings would end up somewhere like that. I think that was – and eventually, I mean, there's many paintings could eventually be there. I was telling you the last one I did with my right hand, of the Vietnam lady and all that, that's a very special painting that one day one of the museums should own, should have here, because of that.

MS. CORDOVA: And I think the Smithsonian – I don't have an image of it – has also acquired your *Tienda de Elizondo*.

MR. TREVIÑO: Oh, Elizondo, yes. That's another painting that I did of – it's – his family had a – it was a mom and pop grocery store. It's the inside. It almost looked immigrants, you know, the European immigrants with, you know, from that. But he's a little boy in the painting, that painting too.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, Elizondo, the little boy.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. It's amazing.

MS. CORDOVA: And that one you did in like the early '90's? Is that right?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes.

MS. CORDOVA: And what inspired that painting?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, the inside of the store, I'd never done that and I wanted to do that painting, and I realized that he had been in that business. We were friends and he had been in that grocery business. And I remembered going to some of those little grocery stores that had the wooden floors and they were really nice. Mom and Pop grocery stores, the whole family helped inside the store. Pretty nice. I hadn't captured that, the tienda. There are certain things that I want to make sure that I painted, you know, like the Panadería, or the theaters, the raspa man. I did one of an ice cream man but it's just a drawing. A guy used to sell ice cream around the neighborhood.

MS. CORDOVA: And then I guess – I mean, one of the bigger exhibits of the 90's, you were in the CARA exhibit and I was wondering if that had any impact for you, if that was relevant in terms of your career. I know it was just a big exhibit.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, well, I don't know. You know, it was important because, you know, the Mira!, CARA ["Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1989"], those are shows that went to different – different cities, you know.

That was important to me. I've been in other exhibits, but that one was pretty – pretty good, too. The Mira! and CARA, those shows because of the exposure, you know. I don't know how –

MS. CORDOVA: Maybe no more so than any other exhibit.

MR. TREVIÑO: No.

MS. CORDOVA: But I mean, it was quite an accomplishment, I think, to finally have your one-man show at the San Antonio Museum of Art.

MR. TREVIÑO: That was the greatest accomplishment, and I'll tell you why. Because again, for so many years, you know, there's something that happened to me that I didn't like, but I guess that's – and I think I was – it hurt me so much. I kept on going, but you know, after that really real show, in 1981, and after the exhibit– one of the directors there at the museum the famous Kevin Consey, was real interested in acquiring especially *The Alameda*, which was part of the exhibit, as permanent piece for the museum. And it meant a lot to me because after being in that show and, you know, me being from San Antonio and – and I knew that the museum was acquiring a couple of paintings. One of them was a Richard Estes painting, that's for the permanent collection. And everything sounded pretty good. I was pretty much made a deal but hadn't signed any kind of an agreement or anything. And that *Alameda* painting, I think at the time I wanted something like $20,000, like that, $20,000 work. But that I would give the painting for like $10,000 to the museum, you know. So everything was fine.

And well, after a couple of months or whatever, the director was let go. He was fired or let go or, you know, replaced, or whatever. And it ended right there. It was very difficult after that to get a deal. And I thought that that would have been the best thing for me, you know. Anyway, I still had – I was – I was wondering what are you going to do. And at the same time Lionel Sosa, the one, you know, that bought *Mis Hermanos* and everything, he asked me if I still had the *Alameda* painting. And well, the Museum of Art, you know, is going to – is supposed to buy it. He said, well, if they don't buy it, I'll buy it. You know, he just – anyway, I wanted it in a museum, you know. And nothing. I waited and waited, and eventually Lionel Sosa bought it from me. I had to sell it. The museum, there was no go over there, nothing. I probably would have gave it to them, they probably would have taken it.

But what I'm saying is that I was disappointed, and it had a lot to do with the museum itself, how it was being run and what the priorities were. I don't know if they had financial problems, or anything. And that happened. And so that hurt me for many years. I thought, well, you know, if that could have – if that would have – that would have been really nice, you know. So you know, I have to be – I had to go the Smithsonian first in order to get recognized that way.

But – so when it came time to, people were interested in having the museum exhibit and me having a one-man show, you know, I thought about that, but again, it didn't matter. The fact that I was having a one-man show was incredible. And the – the turnout of that exhibit supposedly was better than the turnout of the – what is it, the – that show from Mexico, the show that – "Centuries of Mexico ["Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries." San Antonio Museum of Art, 1991]" –

MS. CORDOVA: I'm sorry. Yes, this broke all the museum's attendance records.

MR. TREVIÑO: Right. And then the next day it was – it was a Sunday, that they had what they call a family day, and parents brought their kids and it was – and they came. And I was there in the museum in the back area there where – they were lined up with their kids. And I was signing posters, and basically just they want to meet me. And the parents were, oh, I brought my son, I want him to meet you. It was like all day there, just meeting – the next day, meeting people. And the museum couldn't believe how the community and everything came out. There had never been an exhibit where so many different people from so many different places had came. I did the same thing in Corpus Christi, which they're very, very divided, and I brought them together. Like the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center over there, they're doing their own thing and the museum's over here.

So I'd have a one-man show there and I'd take busloads of people, they charter buses – the mayor, arts people, everybody – to go for the opening in Corpus. The mayor from here and the mayor from over there at the exhibit. And do a great opening – food, beautiful paintings. Never been done before in that museum. They've had exhibits and things like – but for a one-man show like that. And we invited these people from over there, that they never get together with these, and from then on the rest is history. Now they have – they're close, they're doing things together with the museum and everything. And people told me that never happened before. If you hadn't come here, had an exhibit like this, spent money to put it together. Different corporations helping to do a poster, they did a beautiful poster. I had that Selena, that portrait of her. Beautiful poster. And they were just so happy that they had the kinds of turnout of people.

And I know how to do that. I know how to – I mean, you have to invite people and make them feel part, you want

them there and stuff. And sure enough, we got the – [inaudible] – together, and like those small cities, sometimes they're just so divided, and got them together, and the rest is great.

MS. CORDOVA: But I imagine it was like the first exhibit where the West Side was actually part of the exhibit, right?

MR. TREVIÑO: Exactly. Yes.

MS. CORDOVA: What a remarkable moment, 1995.

MR. TREVIÑO: Right. Exactly. And before there, they were so proud. See, what was on the walls, and that there were people other than Mexican Americans there to enjoy all this, and how it could be, you know. They had a great time. This food from here over there. It's nice to have friends like that, you know? Right? Help you celebrate and do something beautiful like that, have something to offer to them.

MS. CORDOVA: And now when did you do your Selena portrait?

MR. TREVIÑO: That was right after she died, and that was – when was it? '96, '97? '96, I think [She died March 31, 1995 in Corpus Christi, Texas].

MS. CORDOVA: And where is that?

MR. TREVIÑO: The portrait was here at the museum, at South Texas Museum, something like that. It's in Corpus. Beautiful museum.

MS. CORDOVA: Was that a commission or was that –

MR. TREVIÑO: No, that's a painting that I did, but then some attorneys there in Corpus, yeah. But it was during the same time, so – and during that Selena thing at the museum here of art, had an unveiling of that painting and had a lot of cameras and TV stations, and it was really nice having it at the museum, just for that one painting. Big painting.

MS. CORDOVA: Why did you decide to do a portrait of her?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, it's just like that if you like a person that I would want to do a painting of, and also remember the person that I painted, like all of these people, was important enough, I felt. Too bad she had to die, but that's the way it worked. But I also am interested in people that are deserving, you know, of that, I think. I don't know why. I want to enjoy doing that painting. The reason should be because of the subject, you know. That should be the main reason to motivate me.

MS. CORDOVA: Were you a fan of her music?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. Of course. Yes. And it's more like the person, what she represented to people and all that. My way of saying, well, I lived during those times and decided to – you know, it was at that moment of passion you paint it, I'm going to do it, you know. My way.

MS. CORDOVA: So do you think that the San Antonio Museum of Art took away any lessons from your West Side exhibit? Did that change the museum in any way?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, you know, I don't know if it changed it, but it sort of opened their eyes to see that how important it is to be able to do exhibits that include Latinos, you know, to look around. Just like the Smithsonian is recognizing people, artists that are from this area, yet they're not doing the kind of things that you all are doing, like building archives, all that information. Those are the kind of – the important things that an artist would want so people will learn about that artist, whatever. You know, I guess museums should see the wealth of artists that are around here. I think that they should take advantage of that.

MS. CORDOVA: I noticed that that very same year the Smithsonian had its exhibit of you at the National Museum of American Art.

MR. TREVIÑO: Right.

MS. CORDOVA: How would you compare those two exhibits? Did they mean different things to you?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, because of here in San Antonio wanting the whole community to see my exhibits in a place like the Museum of Art, and that meant to me, it was important in that sense. But the one in Washington, I think also because of what the Smithsonian represents as a museum and all of that, I think that has always been in the back of my mind, wanting to have an exhibit there. So that – that was a – that was probably one of the best

accomplishments I've ever had, you know. The right time, I guess.

MS. CORDOVA: Now in terms of selling your paintings, do you have like a dealer, or do you work with dealers generally, or is it –

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. I work with different dealers, different people, yes. Pretty much represent myself. I have different people representing me. It's hard to represent me because I have so much – so many different aspects to my life, or to my art, my life itself, you know. Some people are just interested in me the person, and then my art and everything, but that part of my life, very interesting to them, you know. But you know, I'm more interested in my art, you know, I mean my paintings and stuff. I try not to think too much about what happened to me and why and all that, and more about the work, the direction, the kind of things that I want to explore and – and – and keep doing that.

I think, you know, I must have learned something along the way as an artist, and it's that, you know, I have to, again, keep painting the things that I really believe in, you know, that I think – with my art I want to see it develop and I want to see it grow with – in so many ways. I went to school for a long time, and you know, try to be around other artists, try to learn all – everything that I've learned, and it – to keep creating, and keep involved within the community and things that are going on, that my art has some impact on their lives. I guess that's kind of the reason for the outdoor murals and all that. It's like, hey, here I am. Look at this.

And I'm finding different ways on how to do that. There's not just one way. There's different ways. Some things look better, some things are nice around canvas in here and more dramatic. Some things are beautiful outside. Inside a museum, or an outside space or in a special place where everybody can see that art form.

MS. CORDOVA: Have you found galleries to be helpful or not helpful to you?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, they can be helpful. Yes. Some galleries it's just more of a business aspect, but to me I'm more interested in people learning about my work, you know. Then of course if they want to buy it, that's fine. I don't think – I guess when I'm broke or something, when I start thinking, how am I going to do this. I want to do it – I still want to keep creating things that I want to create. But what am I going to do? So, you know, I might have to adjust to what I'm painting.

But still, it's always the way I want to do it because I get a lot of offers and things, but I'm really not interested in things that perhaps have – that I can put myself into that artwork and be representative of something that I would create, you know, and not something, well, I just did it for so and so. Even as – I did projects in school, you know, and those had to be my projects. There had to be something about it that, you know, sure, I was influenced by the different artists and stuff, but again, I want it to be original in that sense, you know, something. Even if it's subject matter kind of things. I guess artists have painted things that, again, are not popular, or people see, but they make it popular. A great scene that you want, you know, it's still something that somebody wants to have on their wall, they enjoy, make a great painting, you know. Make you feel a certain way.

MS. CORDOVA: Now how did your Diabetes Institute [University of Texas Diabetes Center, San Antonio] mural come about? Did they seek you out?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. Well, I had done – I had already done the Santa Rosa mural. And these things take a long time. Even before they had built the building, you know, when they were breaking ground there the director announced, you know, just that, you know, the director had already told me that – I don't know where – I was unveiling something else and she talked to me and she said, won't you do a mural at our place. Well, that's – I hear that sometimes and don't believe it. But okay, and you know, that was part of the plan. It was planned for me to do a mural in the building before it was built and was commissioned.

But it wasn't just me. There were other artists who were solo art pieces that were going to be commissioned, but this was the main piece of the display that was going to be there for the hospital.

MS. CORDOVA: Why did you choose to focus on a botánica?

MR. TREVIÑO: It's very simple for me. Different ideas I've had. But you know, again, it was this place that was going to be especially for the research of diabetes, something that within this area is very high, diabetes. So they built that hospital there for a reason. They figured, let's build it right in the middle where the problem exists. And that's why it's there. And you know, my brother had diabetes, my younger brother.

MS. CORDOVA: That's George.

MR. TREVIÑO: George. He was an incredible little guy. He was a teacher and loved by the whole community. Just volunteered, helped everybody. Anyway, and I put – he's in the mural too, all that. But you know, the Mexicanos,

– [inaudible] – we have – they're called different things. What they call the botánica, the yerbería, but the main thing that what I thought, this building basically medicine, medical hospital, research in diabetes. In our culture we had these botánicas that have all the different types of remedies and herbal, herbs that are used, all the medicinal herbs and candles. It's incredible the kind of things that are in those places. Yet all the – there's a remedy for – there's different remedies for anything that ails you. They go back for centuries and they're still part of, you know, all the medications that we have today.

But to me, that's pretty much lost, you know. And there close to the Market Square there's still a place called Mireles. It's a small little place. It's not that big. It's a small place.

MS. CORDOVA: What's it called?

MR. TREVIÑO: It's called Mireles, Casa Mireles, and it's a botánica. And there's a lady there, and her daughter, but the lady is close to 100 years old and she loved me. Anyway, I was in there taking pictures, I was real interested in [inaudible] Cortez, and I also wanted to paint, you know, I had all these pictures, I had already done a lot of the research. That was one thing because I wanted to do a painting of her. And I had this commission over here. I'd never put it together but eventually – I mean, it was the fact that really in our barrio here, as much as it's changing, this modern building, you can see it right now, that modern building right in the middle of the barrio. If you were to go there and go inside the building, you wouldn't know where you were. You wouldn't think you were on the West Side, for one. Even though you're a Mexican American or what, where am I, you know.

And yet, you know, to me I thought the institution, the botánica, yerberia, all that, that I'm going to the shops and that they have, there really are very few now. I thought, to me that's our – that's what we used to cure people. These are things that – that when people come in here to this hospital, I wouldn't want them to ever forget that this is where we come from, this is part of our culture, all that.

So looking at – just thinking about the photographs and looking at the place, I thought, that's it. What I'm going to do is I'm going to create inside that place this botánica in the lobby, so when people think, where am I? The things that were in there. And some of them are kind of religious. They're statuettes, and so on. It didn't matter. I put all those things in there and created, composed my own. And some are panoramic shape. Long mural of this one lady, bigger than life. And what the place – all the things that are in that place, she's like facing, and that's all that place and this lady, all those different things that you have to see yourself and to see what it is.

And I felt that that part of preserving that past, and you know, which is going to be lost, and yet that it's still very, very important, to combine, even though it's going to be a modern building and all that, but that part of it was still going to be like the West Side and all of that. And although this building – over here in downtown, but still it just – it was just so much like part of it.

MS. CORDOVA: I mean, would it be wrong to even suggest that that might have been a voice of social protest on your part? Saying, look, here's all this history of medicine right here?

MR. TREVIÑO: Exactly. Yes. You know, I mean, this is it.

MS. CORDOVA: That's not reaching, then, to say that?

MR. TREVIÑO: Exactly. I mean, you know, it's the whole thing, you know, that, you know – you know, nowadays I mean the *Veladoras*, the images and stuff that – [END OF TAPE 4, SIDE A] – there used to be a time where people had problems having that in their building, you know. Because you don't know what – might offend somebody else. And you know what? It doesn't. You know, the sort of – especially having put it in the right context right there in the hospital. It makes you think about, you know, where you are now and where we come from, where we used – at least for the people around that neighborhood.

MS. CORDOVA: I mean, we talked a little bit about religion, but have you stayed spiritual –

MR. TREVIÑO: I mean, you could see – yeah. You could see that even after Vietnam, from the dark paintings and things like that, but little by little, I think that – and you know, I mean, even in a painting like this, for example. I'm attracted to that, the images of the santos, because I know that that represented, for those people that put it there, that may in fact have put it there, you know, keeping evil spirits away. Whatever keeps those – you know, people in their houses, outside on the front lawns they have these little niches, and inside they have the big hand and little eyes inside and put it on front of the lawns. That's to protect the – keep all the bad things. And it's just spiritual, besides the guy, the thief or something like that. And it works. It works. And that's why I incorporated it. And so, and I don't know, maybe one day it will be lost or completely, but you know, I wanted people to see, hey, this is part of what I've grown up with, scenery and the things that, how people incorporated religion. I don't do it too much because I wasn't spiritual, but as I – as I worked on and on, I mean, what I'm saying is that something like this, for example. It's called *The Spirit of Healing*. I didn't even name it. The –

[inaudible] – named it. It's a great title for it. You know, they've written weird things of how that – how art is so therapeutical, how the sick kids and people that go across to the parking lot to look at the mural, so maybe that's real critical. And how healing – how all this heals inside.

Again, in some – like in the mural that I did at that – of the botánica, for example, it's full of religious figurines and things. That's part – you can't keep them out because that's part of the botánica. If I'm going to do that, I'm going to do that no matter how superstitious or ridiculous or whatever, you know, they have, you know. That could be part of it, and I found that so intriguing and so much a part of it that I thought, people have to know that. That's something about these people.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes. I guess the reason they come back to that topic even is just because with your – I mean, *The Spirit of Healing*, *La Veladora*, the diabetes mural – I mean, these are all invoking this very strong religious iconography, right?

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, yes, because, you know, the *Veladora*, again it's the power of that image. That's the power of the art itself, just – don't have to say too much about that, but the image itself that is so powerful. And you know, I want to make certain differences, changes. I'm just an artist, but I think I'm trying to get into the mindset of these people that live in that barrio. And you know what? You can't drag them out of there, you can't make them – I'm saying they're afraid, you know. And I'm saying, what can I show them? Yes, once they start looking at it, and this is not just something that's done by, overnight, just like thrown back on the wall. They can see that it's going to be there for a long, long time. And they start respecting it. I mean, they already do, but I'm saying is that as an artist that I do that and it's going to make a difference, you know. What I'm saying that's – that that's the power of an image. And these are people that – refuse to go out – it but it's already happening. You know, I could – and people could see this activity. I mean, there's people – the people that from different parts of the country come here, I heard about this. It's already working. I mean it's going to work, it's going to take time. But it's doing what I want it to do.

And it wasn't just the matter of any image. It was that image, right? And done that – would have to be done that – it would have to be done, wouldn't be just a regular flat mural, it has to be something that said, wow, this is important, you know? There's nothing like it in the world like that, I've never seen anything like that. And that's what I wanted to put in their back yard, put it right there. Not over here downtown, where everybody could see it, because I could have done that anywhere. But there, it starts glowing, it starts lighting up the community there to bring people together. Literally.

The image, yes, I think it's powerful, and I think that these images are very powerful in that sense, you know?

MS. CORDOVA: And what is your Texas diabetes mural called? Actually what's the official title? Is there one?

MR. TREVIÑO: What's it called? Because I didn't give it the name.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, yes? They did?

MR. TREVIÑO: They named that one, yes.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, the title that I had originally was *La Curandera*, but –

MR. TREVIÑO: I don't know. We could find out if they have a title for it.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. I was curious because you said that she herself is not a curandera, in your opinion.

MR. TREVIÑO: No. Well, curanderas are like healers, someone that does rituals and stuff. She's just owns the business and I think, you know, someone that owns a place like that that's been – can you imagine what she knows? I mean, the things that work, people that have taken these herbs and see how this works, and that she's the one that has all the records, you know, in her mind, of all that. Her wisdom, her knowledge of all that's good. She knows everything. There's nothing that she doesn't – she knows exactly what to give, puts it in a little brown bag and, you know, and you make a tea and you drink it. They have it for everything. I don't care what it is.

MS. CORDOVA: So is she the woman at Casa Mireles?

MR. TREVIO: Yes.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MR. TREVIÑO: It's not there all the time, not open. That would be a great place for you to visit, too. To see the mural, but to see that one.

MS. CORDOVA: And maybe just the sort of – I mean, we've sort of talked around the central library mural but we haven't actually talked about –

MR. TREVIÑO: That's a very special mural. I'll tell you why. You know, my sister Eva, the one that bought me pencils and stuff, you know, I went with her a couple of times downtown. Downtown, Houston Street, was like New York, you know. Lots of people on the sidewalks, all the stores, beautiful stores that we had. All the theaters. You wouldn't believe how many theaters we had downtown. During World War II San Antonio had their role in the war, had trained all the GI's. Most of the GI's were trained here at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio. And then they were shipped off to Europe. In San Antonio it was all the GI's. They were trained, and downtown was an important part for them, you know, the GI's. The river.

I remember walking in the downtown with my sister, and all the – they used to hang, at Christmas the ornaments across the street going like that. Beautiful. And you know, the displays, there were artists that would actually design the displays, just like in New York. Just incredible. I still remember a lot of those things myself.

And then telling you the story about the library, they didn't want Chicano artists. And then, you know, being Jesse Treviño, they approached me to do this mural and said, we want a mural about World War II, San Antonio, but not the war only but San Antonio. I thought, wow, that's perfect for me, you know, because I remember. And this time his name was Gilbert Denman, person here, head of the foundation – the library foundation. Very – patron of the arts. Anyway, he's the one that approached me and said that USAA was going to pay for this mural but that they wanted me to do this mural. And Gilbert Denman started telling me a little bit about, you know, being older than me and everything, what he saw in World War II downtown. It was real interesting. He would describe all the things that I was telling. He said, yeah, the GI's used to go down there and the river and the girlfriends and, you know, make out, kissing, and this, and anyway, all the different things that were important.

And then I thought, what was important about those times, there were several things, okay. And of course the theaters and the river, the downtown, all that. But what I was thinking is, what about all the people that lost their lives in World War II, that were important too? And I was thinking about Ricardo Legoretta, the architect that he is and all that, about the Mexican connection of the architecture of the mural. And then what I was thinking about the veterans and people – and I think, what about an altar in this – in this museum, and I'm just looking at it without thinking about this. I'm thinking about, I had already gotten the wall, it was on the lower level. Within this beautiful architectural sculpture there has to be – there's a mural, and that that mural pays homage to the veterans. How am I going to do it? I'm going to do it like an altar. So that whole wall was an altar for me.

And then what I did is to first create the background, which was basically on a sky, where you can't see the edges. There's an airplane here, an actual plane that was used during World War II that they had here in San Antonio, and then over here, which was the air force, and then over here there was the army and it has a jeep of that time over here. So both that and that. And to create –

MS. CORDOVA: On the left and right side.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. And then to create on top, which was very important, is the river. It's the symbol of the river was this bridge. And then right in the center of – of the river here is the St. Anthony, San Antonio, who the city is named after.

MS. CORDOVA: So that's the sort of standing pillar?

MR. TREVIÑO: Right in the center. And then this building is like the candle, the main candle that lights up the city is the Tower Life building right here. Beautiful. And then this is the river, I mean the water of the river. And then I wanted to represent people, like women during that time, and one woman is Emma Tenayuca, that fought for the rights of workers here, so she's very famous in San Antonio, Emma Tenayuca. And then this one is General McDermott himself and head of USAA. He went to West Point. A picture of him. And then I have a black soldier here that I got to meet –

MS. CORDOVA: In the center there.

MR. TREVIÑO: In the center. I got to meet him because he brought me his photograph that he was – it was a great photograph of him that – not real famous, but still, I thought this would represent. And so their photographs, that's an altar where they would put that. And then over here, that's Cleto Rodriguez, Congressional – one of the Congressional Medal of Honor winners during that time, too. That's a picture of a photograph. So they're actually like – they look like photographs, frames that are sitting there, right.

And this is Houston Street, this the Hertzberg Clock. It's a landmark right there on Houston and St. Mary's. That's – these are – and then these different theaters, the marquees from the theaters in the sky. Then on this ground level, again, all these different candles and plastic flowers, flowers, dried flowers on just a tin can, and all the different things among – of – like to make it look like an altar. So it was an altar, like an altar. Pretty powerful

because it – this goes all the way to the floor. Takes up the whole wall. So standing in front of that, it's kind of nice place to take a picture, too.

But you know, these are all – and people – people that – because I've done a couple of times with different groups over there and they want to talk about this mural, and they love it, and the reason they love it is because they remember this stuff, know what I'm saying? They remember it, they say, oh, this. You know, somebody else like, well, what's this, you know? But they're all – all the things in here, I mean, pretty much mean something. Again, I was, as a kid I reverse – I would try and capture something and the way – it kind of reminds me a little bit of this, too, and you know, it has drama there too. A combination. And again, it was an altar, something somber, you know, that would go with a real colorful building that they have, you know.

And Ricardo Legoretta, I got to meet him there, told me that he loved it. He loved it. He loved that mural.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, it does – I mean, just in thinking about it –

MR. TREVIÑO: He wanted to have a bunch of murals in his building. He wants his buildings – yeah. I see some with murals that some famous artist has done, and he loved that mural. He told me he really liked it. But you know – I guess what I'm saying, he had a lot to do too with the way this was going to look, and the building, the setting of the whole building, you know. And that's what I like.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I think I'm sort of beginning to wrap this up here actually. One thing that just struck me, and maybe it's – I could sort of – you had mentioned that you had gone to Chiapas with your friend and that your friend had asked you, or was sort of thinking maybe you would do some documentary painting of the situation of Chiapas. I was curious if anything came of that.

MR. TREVIÑO: No, I haven't done anything. I guess I'm consumed with so many things.

MS. CORDOVA: And I think you just established what a San Antonio painter you really are.

MR. TREVIÑO: Well, yeah. But it's not that I'm not interested in that. It's just that I'm so – again, I'm so consumed. It doesn't mean that a certain point – it's not like I'm going to do it right away. I could do it next year or whatever. I've had ideas, thoughts about – it's not just that I just don't want to paint anything. I want to paint – I just want to do one painting and that's just it because I did go to Chiapas and I was very moved by everything. People wanted me to do a little mural there in the place where the families died, at the rock hill by the Zapatistas, the government killed them. And they were buried on that, and I was standing on the floor where they were making this little chapel, church around there, and in there they wanted something maybe with their names and something that – that I could do here and send it to them or something like that.

But let me tell you something that's also very – I think is very important, is that in – was it 1998, Hillary Clinton was – was going to go to a conference in Santiago, Chile, and it was really important because at the time. Being in the right place at the right time, but I remember being notified of that, if I would be interested in representing the United States really, because it was interesting, it was all the wives of the presidents of the Americas, which, you know, North America, South America, Canada, all those countries, their wives were going to meet in Santiago, Chile, have a big conference. But in Chile they have a program – they have there for kids, you know, the "Pintando con los niños." And what they did was pretty cool. I think it's pretty smart of whoever put it together, is that when – on this conference they wanted each country to invite an artist. And those artists were going to paint with groups of kids, school kids. And I'm talking about little kids. I'm talking about, you know, 4-, 5-year-old kids, even preschool. Introduce them to, and just experience.

You know, when I was a little kid I think one of the greatest treats for me was to see a visitor to my class, someone there to learn something about them. Anyway, to have a – a professional artist, you know, from that country come and paint, create a painting along with the kids, that that experience is probably one of the most valuable things that you could do. I mean, as I look and I see that, and myself as a kid – when I was there, saw these little kids, and they were so incredible. They knew so much about everything, you know. So intelligent. And they were going to get to paint with professional artists. So I thought that was great, you know. I mean, when – I guess Hillary Clinton was really impressed. When I got back to San Antonio, I got – she was – from the painting I had given her, I have sort of a grey brochure, it says Treviño on it. I don't know if you've ever seen it. And I gave it to her security people, her staff had given her that, gave it to her, looked at on the plane. She called me, she said she wanted me to be a guest speaker. There's a program called "Coming Up Tall."

MS. CORDOVA: Taller?

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes. It's an art thing that they have from all over the country, and they were going to have these art directors from all the different, you know, art centers of the country and all that come together and without – I mean, I didn't have any planning or anything. I didn't even know – I mean, they wanted me at the White House right away. So I went over there, you know, and told them the story of my life and everything. And I had just got

invited to go there with her. She was impressed. She was so happy. She gave me beautiful books. She said that, you know, that they're very proud for all the things that I've done, appreciate all the things that I've done for our country, our people and everything. She was real – real happy, you know, I went to that.

MS. CORDOVA: That's pretty remarkable. You became the American artist to meet.

MR. TREVIÑO: Yes, and then she didn't – without really knowing my real story, at the last moment something as important as – as a function like, you know, all these people in the arts that they have together, that I would be valuable to talk to the group, you know. After that I felt really good, you know. It was incredible. I just – she couldn't thank me enough. She gave me a very special book on the White House, she autographed it and said these wonderful things about that trip to Santiago, you know. I had never been to Santiago before that.

And yet for me, to me all these artists from all these countries, you know, like myself – I mean, just like myself, maybe not representing the biggest country, right, but all the little, you know, all the – the Central American countries and South America and all that, Canada, from all over. And then I was the one for the US. That was great. And when we got to the actual thing to do the painting with the kids and the kids enjoyed, and came out in San Francisco newspaper and different places in the country because I went over there, and people here were reading about me in San Antonio, and I'm at the White House and telling the whole story about, you know, her calling me, you know. Just all that. Come and help me.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I guess you've made it.

MR. TREVIÑO: You know, I just – I feel good about that.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you – I mean, were you having long talks with these other artists, or you were –

MR. TREVIÑO: I mean, that's what we did. I mean, we went to different conferences together. We were supposed to – but on our – on our time we had a lot of time to do other things as artists. And we talked and did together. So what a great treat. I mean, to go somewhere and be surrounded by all of these artists from different countries, even one from each country, and get to talk with them, you know. It was incredible, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, Jesse, we have like four minutes on this recording.

MR. TREVIÑO: Okay, let's use it.

MS. CORDOVA: Why don't I just give them to you, and if we need to we can add another disc or not. Why don't I just say, is there anything that you would like to include on this recording?

MR. TREVIÑO: Oh – [inaudible]. [Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: Because I've basically been asking you the questions, and if you'd like to –

MR. TREVIÑO: No, I don't think so. There are probably a lot of things.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, of course. I mean, there's no way we could get everything.

MR. TREVIÑO: No, I think – you know, I think the nice thing about all of this is the images that – these big murals and things like that I've worked on, but it's important that people also realize all the other artwork that I've created, you know, because I think to see it all together, to understand what a career I've had with the arts. And again, I just – I don't really think too much about before I was wounded, you know. I mean, really because that was – I was more like just a student, I was learning and all of that, you know. And I guess the amazing thing is that after that terrible experience that I would become more the artist that I am now and having all these – accomplished all these different things. But yet I still feel like I'm just beginning because there's so much more.

I would love to surpass a Diego Rivera and people like that, but I know that I would have to work so much harder, do so many more things in order to one day say, hey, look, he did all these things. And things that are left after this – everything freezes over, that they're still there, you know. The day after the Statue of Liberty, up in there, that those things are still there. I think in terms of that, you know, that we're going to go through a lot of periods in this, droughts and things we're going to go through. But that that art will survive in some way, and in the art museum. And that it said something about the people, those people that lived there in that area – that era. Where they came from, where they're at, and perhaps where they're going, and to go in that direction. To understand more themselves, to see themselves. [Inaudible] – painting, and then people stop and then they notice it, you know, that before that they just, you know, weren't noticing anything, and that all of a sudden they're noticing a form of an art form, something that they can look at and see themselves in it and enjoy that. We're part of the community and city, instead of feeling isolated, separated of that.

And I think my artwork has done that. I think, like I said before with the library affair, that brought people

together. And I think I've done that. Again, the museum at Corpus and you know, wherever. Even in the Smithsonian where I did a lecture, the art talks, it was jam-packed, people standing. It was not a huge place, but still it was like very rare to have that many people, you know, to listen to a speech, you know, something like that. I didn't know – but that says something to me. People are interested. The Museum of Art, you know, maybe some people go, everybody wanted to be there.

Everybody wanted just, you know – people like Charles Butt, who never really goes anyplace. He was there. He wanted to meet my mother. You know, like, I want to meet your mother. A lot of people were interested in meeting my mother, you know. And I could see that, you know. I could see why. And she thinks she was the star of the show or something, the artist or something. [Laughter.] I'm the mother of the artist. What do you want to know? I think that she was – that's what I enjoyed the most, was seeing her being part of the exhibit and talk to people, and how proud she was of, you know, of me and being there, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, how about that? Leaving it there. That was really nice. I like it.

MR. TREVIÑO: That's the truth. I remember that one-man show at the Museum of Art and there was all these dignitaries and everything and they were – had her and she was in the middle and everybody wanted to greet her, just as they would me, but her, I just thought that was such a great compliment to her. About her.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. Well, Jesse, I'm just going to say thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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