

# *Arnoldo Curiel*, by Julie M. Luker

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**Arnoldo Curiel**

**Narrator**

**Cole Steinberg**

**Concordia University, Saint Paul**

**Interviewer**

**Thanh Huynh**

**Concordia University, Saint Paul**

**Transcriber**

**May 16th, 2023**

**Minnesota**

**CS: Cole Steinberg**

**AC: Arnoldo Curiel**

**CS:** This is an interview conducted as part of a larger faculty and student research project initiated by Dr. Julie Luker of Concordia University, Saint Paul. Today is May 16th, 2023, and I'm here with Arnoldo Curiel. My name is Cole Steinberg, and I'm an undergraduate student at Concordia University, Saint Paul. Today I'll be talking to Arnoldo about what life was like growing up in the Twin Cities. During this interview, I'm going to ask you to reflect on your childhood life experiences as they relate to a variety of social topics from that time period. For the purposes of this interview, we have defined childhood as birth through 17 years of age. To begin, please date and spell your full name, including a maiden name if applicable.

**AC:** Arnoldo, A-R-N-O-L-D-O. Curiel, C-U-R-I-E-L.

**CS:** Please identify your race and gender.

**AC:** I identify as Mexican.

**CS:** Please state your date of birth.

**AC:** June 22nd, 1972.

**CS:** Finally, please share where you grew up, such as the name of the neighborhood or a nearby street intersection. Include any major moves you made during this time period.

**AC:** I grew up in the Frogtown neighborhood of Saint Paul, which really encompasses Lexington to Rice Street, and University Avenue to the railroad tracks on the North Side. I grew up primarily closer to Thomas and Milton, which is on the west end of Frogtown. But my grandma and a lot of my family lived on the east end of Frogtown, on Charles and Western.

**CS:** Thank you. I would like to learn more about your family life. Let's begin with the memories you have for immediate and extended family. Please share some memories that you have about these relationships.

**AC:** So, I was originally born in Texas; we moved up here in 1974. My grandma lived in the same house that she lives in right now that she moved up to from Texas in 1972 on the corner of Charles and Western. So, when we came here, our family moved into that house, and we immediately moved out within a couple of years, right around the corner. We just happened to live like in a

green fourplex where all my family lived. So, it was like our own little family compound. We had my aunt and uncle above us, another aunt and uncle on the left side of the fourplex, and then some random family in the bottom part of the fourplex. I have no idea who it was. We also had my aunt's in-laws live right around the corner from us too. So, there are like two houses around the corner. So, our family was really kind of tight knit because we all lived within like a three or four block area of each other. And you know, as they got older, we eventually moved. Some to the west side, some north. When you think about the memories of my immediate family, they were always around. They were there no matter what we did, there was always family around. We always took care of one another. I mean, if it wasn't a cousin watching us or my sister watching a whole bunch of us, there was an aunt watching us. Even like when it came to godparents, there are the spouses of like people that had married into the family. So, it wasn't just friends, it was people who were married and just very tight knit. We did a lot of stuff for each other. We had our issues like every family, but we were always there for one another. I mean, that's really what I remember the most about it. Still connected to this day. We are a heartbeat away from one another if we need something. Whether it's a family member fighting cancer or somebody needing to go to the hospital. No matter how much the fighting happened, or infighting happened within the family, when something happened, we're still there for one another. And I know we can rely on that. It's just always been there. It just kind of goes unsaid, which is also another problem in the family, because we never talk about the issues, but we'll jump to defend one another no matter what. Those are some of the memories that I have really about my family. They were just always presidents, always have been. It was just understood if you were throwing an event, you'd just expect every member of the family to be there. I mean, I remember when I got married, I got a response back from a family member I didn't even know I sent it to, seven of us are coming from Michigan. Oh, okay. You know, 20 of us are coming up from Texas. I'm like, oh, you know, until literally we were tight knit and close.

**CS:** Which family members did you engage with the most growing up?

**AC:** Honestly, it was my mom. I know this is going to sound weird, but my uncle, because my uncle was only older than us. [Laughter] Two years older than me, but the same age as my brother. When I talk about the family, it was really my mom's family, because I really wasn't in contact a lot with my dad's family. My dad's family all stayed in Texas, and we saw sporadically. I engaged with my uncle because we are similar ages. I had cousins that were a couple of years younger than me, and I engaged with them a lot now today. But there's really a core of like, a couple uncles, a couple aunts, that family that we stood with. I really didn't engage with a lot of the in-laws or some of the other family just because I didn't. My dad's family, like I said, was all predominantly in Texas. I only started reconnecting with them because of social media and Facebook and everything else that we started communicating once again.

**CS:** Did you have any family pets? If so, please describe them.

**AC:** Yeah, Roscoe. We had tons of family pets, but Roscoe was the first dog I remember. I want to say he was like a golden retriever. We had a teacup poodle, Rocky. I had guinea pigs growing up and stuff like that. Roscoe really was the one dog I remember having. Eventually down the line, my family after I moved out. Everybody in the family for some reason thought they had to have a Chihuahua. And I don't know if it's because they thought it was a Mexican thing. But I'm like, I don't want a Chihuahua dog. But they all had a little dog. And I wasn't a fan of that. Roscoe was the one dog. And he, unfortunately, you know, got out of the yard one time and we never found him again. And then we had a teacup poodle that eventually passed away. So, they like little animals, and I didn't get it then. Never understood it.

**CS:** How were household chores divided between members of your family.

**AC:** It fell to the youngest. At least in my household. My parents worked the evening shift, from three to midnight. So, it's just expected that when we came home, we cooked for ourselves, we

cleaned for ourselves, we cleaned the house, we just took turns. We didn't touch laundry. Mom would never let us touch laundry. But we were responsible for making sure all the house was in the same order when she came in. And typically, my sister, who was six years older than me, kind of raised us growing up. When she turned 18, she was out. I had a brother who was three years older than me. So, he would run around doing everything else. So, I got left raising my younger brother. But I was responsible for cleaning the house. I was responsible for making dinner. Originally my sister did it, and I'll be honest, my older brother never really had to do any of that stuff. He kind of got off scot-free. It was just expected. There was never like there wasn't a poster board... My parents didn't give us an allowance. My sister gave us money to help her clean the house and stuff like that when she started working. But it wasn't... It was just an expectation. This is what you do. We left the house clean. When we come home tonight from work it better be clean.

**CS:** Can you share a memory to help describe what mealtime is like in your family?

**AC:** We didn't have mealtime. We just didn't. Typically, if there was a mealtime, it was typically on Sunday. Either my mom would cook dinner, or my father would grill out. But we didn't have a designated mealtime, unless it was a holiday. We didn't have it. I mean, like I said, my parents worked from three to midnight. So, we were kind of fending on our own. I always made the joke, I thought Little Debbie was a member of our family, that's all we had. That and Totino's frozen pizza. I'm not kidding you. I was in kindergarten when I started to learn how to cook steak and eggs on my own and stuff like that. Pushing myself up to the stove and cooking my meals because we just had to fend for ourselves. So, there was never a sit-down dinner time. Even when my mom made meals, it was, came home, grabbed a plate, and went down to my room. Unless it was a holiday, we never sat around a table and a dinner together.

**CS:** Thank you. Next, please describe the ways in which your family's economic status influenced your childhood.

**AC:** My parents tried to give me everything that they could. I knew we didn't have a ton of money, but it was okay because nobody in our neighborhood had a ton of money. We were all kind of in that same status. We bought a lot of stuff out of the van or back trunks of cars for folks. My mom, we would go to, like, some of the discount stores for our school clothes shopping. I started to recognize as I got into like middle school and high school, like how much money we didn't have when everybody else were getting like-I'm going to date myself-your 501 Levi Button Fly jeans. I'm getting the Wrangler jeans. And so, I knew I was never going to get the top end of that stuff. Unless we came across it in the trunk of a car. But we always had food in the house. So that was never a question. I never was worried that we were ever going to be evicted or anything else like that. As I got older, in elementary school, we qualify for free and reduced lunch. So, we always had meals there, but once I got into middle school and high school, we didn't qualify anymore. That's when I realized we didn't always have money all the time because, you know, occasionally I'd have to get a buck or two from my dad so I could get something to eat at lunch or I'd borrow from a friend and pay it back later. My parents tried to give us everything that they had. We had one car in the house and things like that.

**CS:** In what ways have your family's financial circumstances shaped your spending habits today?

**AC:** Well, I'll tell you. I used to overspend, you know, because not having a lot of luck growing up, I tried to give my kids everything. I tried making sure that they played in every sport, that they didn't have to worry about their own car, that they weren't... I paid for everything. On their end my parents didn't pay for anything, and it is just because they couldn't afford to. So, I went the opposite measure, extreme of that. And I tried to pay for everything. Never told them no on anything. Never told them we couldn't afford anything. And I've gotten older, you know, I've learned how to kind of... As I was getting older, and the kids were getting older. I'm like alright can I afford to do this? Yes. Do I need to do this? No. As I've gotten better about that, but initially when I first had kids it

was like, I'm going to give them everything and I don't care but run me into debt. I had to learn how to adjust that.

**CS:** Now I'd like to know about your experiences with religion, such as Catholicism, Lutheranism, etc... Describe what you can recall about your family's religious practices when you were growing up.

**AC:** So, we used to go to Our Lady of Guadalupe on the West Side. It wasn't a regular Sunday thing. We went for the major holidays again. We did have to go through Sunday school and stuff like that. But I want to say by the time I was in second and third grade, it was done. You know what I mean? I think we didn't go to church on a regular basis, you know, it was Catholicism. With some of my family is still very evident, especially my southern family in Texas. You go down there; they have pictures of the pope; they have shrines of religious stuff. You go to my grandma's house, there's a rosary. There's the Our Lady of Guadalupe Candle, the Virgin Mary Candle. My mom still has that. A lot of the older generation, our family is still very religious. Like when I went through some transition about five or six years ago, you know, through a separation and through a job change, you know, my aunt, she first thing she did when she came up here was she went and took me to a religious store, got me Our Lady of Guadalupe Candle, a Saint Joseph Candle, you know, and all these religious things to bless the house and bring good fortune onto my house. It's very prevalent still, but nothing that was ever forced on us after second grade. Like I had cousins that lived by my aunt, and when I would spend the night at their house, they would go to church on Sunday and out of respect I would go with them. But it was nothing that was ever forced. I mean, we did get married when I did get married within the Catholic Church, all the family, you know, still got married in a Catholic church. They followed a lot of the Mexican traditions. When somebody passed away, they did the rosary, you know, the very superstitious stuff that they would do with like the whole evil eye if they felt like they were giving them religious practice. A little bit of Voodooism in there. But it was kind of a hodgepodge. But overall, you know, Catholicism was a huge one that practiced and while not attended to on a regular basis, they still fall out of practices. Like I said, with the you know... We unfortunately had my aunt take her life some time ago, but they still get together and pray the rosary for her every year. Whenever I tell my aunt in Texas that I'm going through a tough time, oh, I'm going to pray for you. So, you know, a lot of that's still there, but it was never forced upon us.

**CS:** How important or relevant is religion to you now as an adult?

**AC:** Not at all. What I tell folks is I believe in everybody should have their own belief system. I'll be the first to say that I don't necessarily believe in all one mighty God, you know, deity. I wouldn't say I'm an atheist, but I do believe everything happens for a reason and some of that's out of our control. Whether people want to attribute that to, you know, Jesus Christ, Buddha, or whoever they may choose to worship, that's fine. That's just not my thing. I believe in fate and destiny and stuff like that. But what I tell folks is I'm spiritual more than I am religious. I know this will probably get edited out later, but I actually believe in something that Jesse Ventura said, was that organized religion, is the crutch for the weak minded individual. What I mean by that is I'm not mocking anybody's religious beliefs, but I do DNI work, and I get very frustrated when folks use religion to minimize someone else's life and life experiences and use it to fuel hatred. Cause I don't believe anybody's religion does that and it's an interpretation and folks will hide behind their religious beliefs on why they don't support gay marriage or why we do something this way, as opposed to just saying, you know what? No, I don't support gay marriage because maybe I'm a little homophobic. So, I struggle when people use religion to defend their beliefs. You have your beliefs and your religious or spirituality actually will be enhanced by it. I just don't believe any religion you look at is really meant to spew hate.

**CS:** Now I would like to learn more about the neighborhood in which you grew up. If you moved during childhood, you may wish to reflect on more than one neighborhood. This is fine to do, but

please indicate as you do it. Please describe what comes to mind when thinking about the neighborhood in which you grew up.

**AC:** So, when I think about the Frogtown neighborhood, when I grew up, really what came to mind to me is in the true essence, it was a neighborhood. You knew people. Like I said, I lived on the west end of Frogtown, and my grandma lived on the east end of Frogtown. We were about a mile away from each other. But I could walk any path to my grandma's house or any one of my cousin's houses, and I knew somebody on every block. Sometimes I knew multiple people. You knew each other in the neighborhood, no matter what side of the neighborhood you lived on. And so, to me that really [is] what I remember about Frogtown and growing up is you knew one another. And it was surprising to me because actually, Dr. Luker, you know, she said her grandmother lived in the neighborhood. I was like, this is really weird because I knew exactly what house she was in. But we never crossed paths growing up. It's just one of those things... Plus, I delivered the paper in the neighborhood, so I knew folks. It really felt like a neighborhood where folks knew one another. When something happened... I mentioned earlier that unfortunately, my aunt took her life back in 2017. But when that happened, I remember going over to my aunt, my grandma's house, and like I said, she lived on the corner of Charles and Western. I showed up there. There are four squad cars out there. You know, the coroner. People from the neighborhood that were walking by were coming up. And then they're messaging me on Facebook and social media going, hey, is everything okay with your grandmother or something? What's going on? You know, and everything else. Finally, I explained what had happened. I haven't lived in the neighborhood for a long time. People are stopping by my grandma's house and my mom's just checking in on them to make sure she's okay. And that, to me, is what that neighborhood symbolizes. We looked out for one another, and we knew each other in the neighborhood and all that was going on in that house. I know that person. I want to see what that is. They go over to it; you know what I mean? And checked up on one another. That's what we did. You know what I mean? That's what it meant to me.

**CS:** Describe what you can recall about your home, such as the layout and other features that come to mind.

**AC:** Oh, I remember my home. You walk right in there in the kitchen, and depending on what month it was, either the room to the right with you, the dining room, or the living room. Did my mind constantly shift those rooms or two rooms around. But you come in through the back door of the kitchen to the living room, to the right side in the dining room, depending on the month. Go upstairs, three-bedroom, one bath. The basement was downstairs, had the washing machine. But eventually, you know, my mom put up some walls to make another bedroom down there because there were three bedrooms upstairs. My mom and dad had a room. My older brother and I shared a room, and then my sister had a room. When she moved out, my dad and I took that room. Back then, I thought it was because of sleeping. They were just going through a separation. My older sister moved out. My older brother took the basement, and I shared a room with my younger brother. So, it kind of bounced around back and forth. Had a nice backyard, fence obviously. And then a driveway, and we had a little basketball hoop in the alley. Retaining wall porch. We used to sit out on the front steps on the walls, and friends would ride their bikes by and everything else. And that where we'd hang out and talk is on the walls and stuff like that. So, I distinctly remember the neighborhood. I have the cabinets that were in that house, in my house now.

**CS:** How safe was your neighborhood when you lived there and what factors made it that way?

**AC:** I don't know if it was actually safe, but I didn't think about that because I think part of the problem was we're involved with some of the people that weren't making a safe for other people. I just didn't think about it growing up. I didn't think nothing of walking home at 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. I didn't think about any of that. It didn't start happening until later in the eighties when you started to see, like the crack epidemic come through. Even at that point, while it wasn't safe, I never felt unsafe to an extent. I got jumped a couple of times in neighborhood by folks and stuff like that.

But I think part of that was just because as much as I think we all knew each other in the neighborhood... Without going into great detail, my sister and my uncle and all them guys also are known for things in the neighborhood, too. So, I never really had a lot of things that people are dealing with. But I was a part of that family in that friend circle right there. I could see where it was unsafe for folks. We had parties in the neighborhood. I remember going outside, and watching my brother get jumped in a fight and having to do that. It wasn't till I started to get older that I realized, yeah, people don't view Frogtown as a safe neighborhood. But for us it was common place. It wasn't unusual for me to walk around them like, oh, there's a gun in the front yard. Oh, cops come pick it up. It is what it is. It became our norm. So, we just accepted it. We live with it every day. So, we didn't look at it as unsafe where I could see somebody outside the neighborhood. I joked with my brother when we first moved into our house to Maplewood after moving out of the Frogtown neighborhood. I couldn't sleep at night because it was too quiet and I didn't hear anything, where I'm used to hearing people yell. I'm used to hearing cars with occasional gunshots. That was late eighties, early nineties when we were living there. I never looked at it as being unsafe because when something happened, you typically knew what was happening or why it happened. It was just part of the life you expected there.

**CS:** If you had to describe the best part about growing up in your neighborhood, what comes to mind?

**AC:** It was some of the friends that I made. I just shared this story. Next door to us with my friend Tony, and he was the first person that we met in the neighborhood, an African American man. Every day we would get together and do stuff. And then we met other people. It wasn't hard for us to get a group of people together, to get bikes, ride on the bikes, go play football, go play basketball, and stuff like that. We always had somebody to do something with. It wasn't like, you know, this like, oh, I'm struggling to find friends to hang out with. We didn't have that worry at all. It was interesting now just mentioning someone. So Tony was our best friend growing up. When he was 12 years old, his mom and them moved out to Minneapolis. His grandma and grandpa still live in the same house. I lost contact with Tony. I hadn't seen him since we were 12. So, it's been about 38 years. Got season tickets to the Timberwolves game this year. We're sitting in our seat, and I look over and he happens to have the season ticket next to us. I looked at him and I'm like, "Tony!," and he's like, "Arnie!" We hadn't seen each other in 38 years. It was just insane. That was the nice thing. You had people in the neighborhood they do stuff with all the time. Like his dad gave me art lesson. My friends down the road, when I would go with them, they would take me camping up north. So, there's always people to hang around and do stuff with and always places to go. So, I wasn't I hate to say it like today where people are bored like, oh, what are we going to do? What are we going to do? That was never an issue. We had friends, always willing to go do stuff. Even when we all got our cars-well I didn't have a car-but one friend got a car and started driving. There was always still something to do cause we'd all do it together.

**CS:** Next, I would like to learn about the values shared by your family and your neighbors. Values. Our principles are standards that help guide behavior. What memories come to mind that demonstrate what these values were for your family and your neighbors?

**AC:** I mentioned earlier, it's one of the big values that we have, we look out for one another. We took care of one another. You helped. No matter what it was. I mentioned it with my family. I needed something. Even if the fighting was occurring or whatever. You did stuff for your neighbor. I would mow my neighbor's lawn. I'd run to the store for them. We took care of one another. I think that was the important thing, is we're living in this neighborhood. It's a struggle to be in this neighborhood. But we're struggling together, so let's take care of each other. That is what we did. I'd watch my younger brother growing up. When I got to high school and wanted to play sport. My neighbor would say, okay, your mom and dad are working. I'll watch your younger brother until you get home. That's just what we did. So, the value really is about taking care of one another. It was being good to one another. I'm sure at some point they talk, but we all talk behind each other's

back. But you know what? When we needed it, we took care of each other. And that was the most important thing. It led a lot to my leadership style, being very collaborative in nature. You do things together because that will make things work. We're building a building a pad or taking down a tree. Neighbors would come over and help. If we're grilling out, you know, here's some food over the fence. That's what we did. But I think that the value that I would come out the most with is.

**CS:** Today how closely do you feel your current values reflect those of the residents currently living in your childhood neighborhood?

**AC:** I think with my generation, the values are still there. I think some of this younger generation and this is no knock on the younger generation, I want to be clear on that. It's not there because it's more about what they have to take care of themselves. It's a mindset that, I got to get mine before I can help anybody else, and I get it. That just kind of what's happened over time and over generations, I got to get mine. There's also what I see, and I see this even with family that's younger than me, is the lack of respect for the older generation. As much as I joke about my uncle only being two years older than me, he was my uncle. It's just that the thing I don't see with... Going on in the neighborhood now. I see it coming back to an extent with like neighborhood groups on Facebook, social media and stuff like that. But it's not like, okay, we're going to take care of one another. It's just like, okay, I'm putting it out there. Oh, I'm going to charge you for this now. When I was growing up, it's like, no, I'm not charging my neighbor to mow the lawn. My mom and dad are telling me I'm going to go help them and they decided to give me money. Then they'd give me money. But I'm not asking for it. We're taking care of one another. And I get it. It's a much different society that has to happen. People need to make a living, make it, make money, and make ends meet. But that is the biggest difference I see in that change.

**CS:** Okay. Now I'm going to ask you all about leisure time. Describe some of the ways in which you, your family and your neighbors engage in leisure time when you're growing up.

**AC:** So unfortunately, in Frogtown, there wasn't always a ton of green space. So, we either had to go to either Minnehaha Rec or Scheffer Recreation, which is now Frogtown community. Interestingly enough, though, my family would do a softball game and they would play softball on a regular basis. However, we would typically go to the neighborhood house on the West side, or we would go to Harriet Island used to have ballfields. And every Sunday we would play softball and sometimes we would do it at my mom's side of the family versus one of my aunt-in-law's side of the family. We would just play. We would play softball. We would also play football occasionally with the guys. Grills cook out, always cook out, always cook out food everywhere all the time. State Fair came around. You know, my mom, before it became the International Village, it used to be called the Mexican Village, and they would have a mariachi band and they would stay at our house. My mom and the guys would have folks over with the mariachi band after the fair closed at 12:00 at night. They used to go dancing. We did a high school recording artist right there on University Avenue. It used to be what they called the Prom Center. And so there would be mariachi music or Mexican music out there. My mom and my dad would go dancing. That would really be the majority. We did a lot of stuff with the family. We're not typically, we did things with the neighbors just cookout that were out. Occasionally we'd go up to the hill sledding or something, like there'd be a hill, we would go sliding. The adults kind of did their own thing. My family was always just sticking with one another. But the cookout were the things like, hey, come out. When we're grilling, share food, stuff like that. But never like, you know, some of the things that you see happening, like I've seen recently happen, like we will do a neighborhood picnic for a long table and food would be served, that wasn't happening back then.

**CS:** New recall if your family ever took vacations and if so, to where?

**AC:** The only vacation we ever took would go back down to Texas to visit family. That was it. We never went anywhere else. If I got out of town, I went with my friends down to who lived a couple



houses down from me, and they took me up to our Pathfinder Village by Hinckley. Otherwise, there was no vacation happening.

**CS:** Describe some of the activities engaged in when you were with your friends.

**AC:** We rode bikes. It seemed to be making a comeback. We played Dungeons and Dragons growing up. So, we would do like Dungeons Dragons in this forest area near us. We would play ditch, tag, Ding-Dong Ditch. We would play football. We would do basketball, that kind of stuff. If I'm being real, a couple of times we stole some car stereo, then hubcaps look like that. Maybe a little graffiti here and there. And then as they got older, they became more parties. I wanted to do what most kids did. Something went beyond what most kids would do. We would ride the neighborhood on our bike, wherever. Then we'd get together and play football, basketball, you know, those kinds of things. Then at night, it was, there'd be cruising the neighborhood playing, you know, ditch happening at night. Ding-Dong Ditch and those kinds of things.

**CS:** Was there a local hangout spot in your neighborhood where you could be with your friends? If yes, please describe it.

**AC:** It's shifted a couple of times or used to be a couple arcade plazas. One was what was the Minnehaha Center there used to be a little arcade in there. There used to be "Rockefellers" on Lexington University. But predominantly, there wasn't one centralized location. We just bounced from house to house. You know, Minnehaha Rec Center was a park where we'd go and play basketball because that was central. Even though my cousin was close to the Scheffer, Minnehaha Recreation Center was more centralized. So, we'd go and play basketball, but we never really hung out at one place. It just wasn't our thing.

**CS:** What television shows did you watch growing up?

**AC:** We watched Dukes of Hazzard and Battlestar Galactica. The soaps were always on when I came home. My mom was watching them right before she went to work. I don't know if we ever regularly watched any television shows on a regular basis. I knew every Sunday we got together and watched football. That was it. It's always been there and there was always the competition of the Vikings versus the Cowboys for our Texas and Minnesota family. I think we watched it like Battlestar Galactica. There was like I said, Dukes of Hazzard. Different Strokes. Some of those situational comedies was one of them. Facts of Life, Electric Company and Sesame Street, when you're younger. We're engaged in sports and out. So, most of the time we didn't watch any of those shows. I think we did do the movies a lot. We would bike up to HarMar Mall or Roseville 4, which is a little closer. We'd go to the movies. I can honestly remember telling friends that I think I saw the original Star Wars like 27 or more times in the theater. That was more of like the kind of stuff that we would watch. But primarily football was the main one. A couple of the other shows late at night with my uncle, but even then, we'd play games or something like that. We did a lot more board games and stuff like that and fantasy roleplaying games.

**CS:** Next, let's discuss your experience with schooling. Please describe what it was like going to school as a child.

**AC:** It was fine. I did enough to get by. I never really did homework. That's why when folks find out I have a doctorate degree, they really laugh. I went to school and to me it was just a task to get done, you know what I mean? Yeah, I played some sport in high school and middle school and stuff like that. But it was just kind of a thing to pass time because unfortunately for me, when I went to elementary school, I went to Jackson Elementary, which was closer to my grandma's house. And so, like all my friends from there went to Washington. So I went to Washington, too. And then I went to Como. But in my neighborhood, a lot of the kids didn't go to, you know, Como, Washington and Jackson. So, like, I had school friends, but I really didn't hang out with them because all the people

in my neighborhood really didn't necessarily go to those schools. And like I said, I did enough to get by. I never. I was on the A honor roll up until like seventh grade, until a teacher made a comment about like, I missed that question on one test, and he told me I shouldn't have missed it. I said, fine, I see how you praise the people that get a C, and then when they do better than a C, they get a B, and you praise the hell out of them. I'm like, I'm just going to do enough to get by. And that's really what I did. I mean, I did enough to get C's and pass and graduate high school. For my mom, I was like, be happy with that. At least I didn't get kicked out of one high school and have to go to another one like my sister. My younger and my older brother dropped out. I'm like, be happy I'm graduating. So, that's why people kind of chuckle back now that I went to high school with me in at all. So let me understand this, somebody who barely passed high school who's got a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and a doctorate. I'm like, yeah, I know that's kind of crazy.

**CS:** In your opinion, how diverse was the student body of the schools you attended?

**AC:** Well, Jackson was very diverse because it's right there in the heart of Frogtown. As I got older, basically it was... When you describe diverse, do you mean more than one to two races that what you have to ask yourself because when I went to Washington it was predominately white and African-American. The Asian population wasn't as huge, and Latino population more than likely I was related to them. And that was the same at Como. But as the dimensions of diversity shifted, or the racial composition of the neighborhoods and so did the schools. I mean, racially and ethnically, they got more diverse. We weren't very diverse socially [and] economically. We didn't take that into consideration. Growing up in the eighties when race separation was huge, you know, better to be a poor white person than a part black person or a poorer minority. Plain and simple. And so that what I would say, you know, as we got older, it was really about, and I've always said that being Latino in Minnesota... I know I said I consider myself Mexican, but I just used the generalized term Latino. Being Latino in Minnesota is not the same as being white or black or even Asian now to the extent because folks forget about us just in general. I always refer to Mexican folk as the hidden minority. Nobody ever looked at them as anything. And especially someone like myself who is very light skinned. "Oh, you can pass as white, so we're just going to throw you into that category." So, it's just always an interesting take for me in that capacity.

**CS:** Which teacher stands out to most in your memory and why?

**AC:** Mr. Lein. I had a lot of great teachers. I could tell you one from each thing, but Mr. Lein was my... I had them for one semester my senior year at Como. I had him for one year. My senior year at Como high school. The reason I remember it is he wrote in my yearbook, never lose your sense of humor because it's going to take you far. He always just told me to be who I was. You know what I mean? And he was also real with me. I remember that just like, you know what? I'm always going to try to stay true to who I am no matter where I am in my life. Because even if somebody doesn't like me, at least they don't like the real me and not a fake version of me. I don't try to pretend my life is better on social media than it really is. I don't try to pretend I'm anything more than I am. I don't think I'm better than the next person. And that was always my personality. And he made me realize you need to stay true to that. I think that's what allowed me to do the work that I do so successfully is because you know who you're getting at their core.

**CS:** For a final topic, I'm going to ask you to reflect on local and global issues such as war, poverty, discrimination, social unrest, etc... In your opinion, what were some of the biggest local or global issues affecting the people in your neighborhood when you were growing up?

**AC:** So, I'll tell you, we didn't think globally. Locally it was the crack epidemic. It was a drug war. It was the racial divide. I remember folks asking me what I felt about interracial dating. I'm like, dude I'm Mexican, I'm not white. I'm dating your sister. But it was a racial separation. I remember every so often, oh, there's going to be a race war at Como or the Hell's Angels are going to come and fight with the Crips in the blood. There's always that. And the crack epidemic. I mean, I

witnessed it firsthand. I remember coming home and watching my sister sitting there in the kitchen cooking crack. I saw it firsthand. I saw the drugs coming in the neighborhood, whether it was crack cocaine, whether it was weed. That was the biggest thing I saw. It shaped a little bit of what I did in my twenties. I saw the damage that drugs were doing to folks. But it's like I mentioned earlier, when you talked about the crime, it was like, "Eh, whatever. It happens." You know. It's what I experienced and what I saw. You couldn't come to our house to find the little sink screen on any part of any one of the sinks there, because they had taken them out and made some sort of... I mean, I could tell you folks that weren't the brightest people in the world, but somehow could make a big ass bong out of all kinds of contraption with a pipe and soda cans and toilet paper and tin foil. Drug were a thing I experienced when I saw them firsthand. I saw guns and all that stuff as a young kid. Now, I'm not saying that everybody in the neighborhood saw. I could see the crack epidemic and how it was impacting folks in our community. Which always blew my mind by going there, dealing with the users and not the dealers. They're punishing the users and they're even punishing the small-time dealer. And I'm like, you know, what about the drugs coming into this neighborhood? Why are you not stopping them? It just blew my mind. I remember watching my uncle get arrested on the news for dealing a kilo of coke. I remember that happening distinctly. I'm like that's just part of the life, you know, that I saw happening. I knew about bigger global issues, like I knew about the hostage situation and everything else. But that made me an anomaly in my family because, you know, I paid attention to those things. But around us, it's like, oh, no, this is what you deal with. You're dealing with the local stuff. And it was the drugs, it was the interracial dating. It was, you know, all sudden, you know, people are calling race wars happening. And then it all started under, let's be real, the Reagan administration and the war on drugs. All of a sudden there wasn't a war on drugs. There's a war on poor folks. And poor folk were represented by the majority of minorities in the community.

**CS:** Did your family or your neighborhood have a bomb or fallout shelter in place in case of nuclear war? If yes, where was it and what was in it?

**AC:** No, they didn't have any of that stuff. That's why I always laugh when they watch the video. There's going to be a nuclear war. Hide under the desk. Really? That's going to save them? No, no. There was none of that in there. We didn't have any of that. We go to the basement during a tornado drill.

**CS:** So, I know you mentioned the crack epidemic, but I do want to ask what sticks out to you as some of the most serious health threats to people in your community, such as a specific disease or illness?

**AC:** I remember when the AIDS epidemic kind of came through the 80s, but it didn't really seem at the time, I didn't think it was impacting anybody in our community because while there were folks that identify LGBTQ+, they weren't making it known back then. I don't think of any diseases outside of the back of being poor. Poor nutritional values and stuff like that. When I think back, like, you know, I mentioned crack epidemic. I can't think of anything like AIDS or sickle cell disease or any of those other things running ravished through the neighborhood.

**CS:** In your opinion, what are some of the biggest local or global issues affecting the people in your childhood neighborhood today?

**AC:** Ironically enough, the same thing, crime. Drugs, whether it's meth now and maybe still to an extent now, coke and stuff like that. But it's still drugs and crime. I worked as a community organizer for a period of time we were able to reclaim that neighborhood. But you can just see that and then just disinvestment. Just general disinvestment and gentrification of the neighborhood. They think the best way to cure the issue of an inner-city neighborhood that's socially and economically disadvantaged is by putting in more expensive stuff and forcing poor folks out of their home and moving. That's what they do with the Rondo neighborhood and stuff like that. That

doesn't solve the problem. So then, you see crime on the rise. You see strained community relationship with the police department. You know, that was one of the reasons I did the shop with COP program and tried to build a relationship. Saint Paul is better than most. But you still have that struggle. I see juvenile crime, I'm sorry, and growing up in my neighborhood and my time, not only was it okay for my mom to hit me, but she also gave permission to anybody in the neighborhood who saw me acting a fool to hit me. I'm not saying that's right. Young folks, there's no consequences that you see. I mean, you look at what just happened in the Saint Anthony neighborhood, you know, a 17-year-old kid who is out on community services shoot and kill somebody. My brother retired as a Saint Paul police officer and he'd arrest somebody that stole a car, a 15 year old. Three weeks later, he's arresting them again. Yes, there is a different approach that needs to happen. I'm not saying you beat your children because I never laid a hand on mine. My parents never beat me either. I got hit a couple times. We knew not to act a fool. What I'm getting at here is, you know, we're coddling. You know what I mean? We think, oh, no, there's got to be a bigger social issue, that they're going out and stealing cars and doing all that stuff. And there's no accountability for actions. I stole something from Target. I got arrested for shoplifting and had to do some community service. My mom was like, Yeah, and you know what? You ain't hanging out with your friend for a couple of weeks. None of this, like, excuses made for it. I see that happening again. We're afraid to call out behavior cause we're afraid of how it might look. I do a lot of the DEI work and but I'm not afraid to call out both sides of it. I'm not afraid to call out when my own people are acting a fool and stuff. We feel like we have to be on one side or the other, and it's okay to say I know these are my values, who I am, What you did is idiotic and wrong, and I'm not supporting that. But at the same time, I expect other people to call out themselves too and they don't do that. We've gotten more divided more than ever.

**CS:** Is there anything else you want to comment on as far as local or global issues relating to your neighborhood?

**AC:** What I always tell folks. I always tell people there's three things that you're going to know. That I identify as being Latino. You know, And I know I said Mexican, but Latinos is more common a term. I identify as growing up in a Frogtown neighborhood because to me it was an important part of my identity and shaped my values and beliefs. And I identified through my family background. My parents were Mexican migrant worker and they taught me the value of hard work and doing good for others. And that's what all three of those parts of my identity represent in that community, represent that identity to me and that community represents that identity to me. I always emphasize with me what you're going to get, and these values come from, you know, my family, my racial ethnicity and the neighborhood I grew up in.

**CS:** This is the end of our interview. Your responses are invaluable, and we really appreciate that you took the time to do this today. Thank you so much for participating.