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## Interview with Louis Lovelace

Louis Lovelace

Darleen Feldman

Abby Kennedy

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**Transcript of Interview with Louis Lovelace**  
**October 28, 1998 at Fiesta Mexicana Restaurant, Mount Vernon, OH**  
Interviewed by Darleen Feldman and Abby Kennedy

AK: Okay, we are interviewing Louis Lovelace, at Fiesta Mexicana, on October 22, 1998. My name is Abby Kennedy.

LL: Louis Lovelace.

DF: And I'm Darleen Feldman.

AK: Can you tell us about your background?

LL: I was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and I was partially born and raised there. And I came here, to the States in 1976 to go to college. And went back to Puerto Rico for 4 or 5 years and then I've been here since early 80's, until the present day. I lived in California for 5, 6 years. And then I've been here, in Ohio for 12, for the last 12 years actually. I live in Columbus, Ohio and I commute to work here [Fiesta Mexicana Restaurant], to Mount Vernon. What else do you want to know?

AK: Why Mount Vernon?

LL: Well, because we thought it was a good town to open a Mexican Restaurant. Having Kenyon College, a lot of students, and Nazarene College and it seems like Mount Vernon has a lot of people that like to eat out. And there were not enough restaurants, and also the location that we are right now, we have Cooper which is a industry that employs, I don't know, 2 or 3 thousand dollars so we feel it will be good for lunch. So basically, most of our lunch come from Coopers and then dinner from Kenyon students and people around town.

AK: Can you tell us about the local Spanish speaking community?

LL: Well, the local Spanish speaking community is basically us, I think. I've never met anybody in Mount Vernon other then the people we brought from Columbus. I'm the only one that lives in Columbus and travels, commutes everyday. All my employees live here in town. And we also have other employees that are from Mount Vernon, residents from Mount Vernon, and they're Americans.

AK: Anything else?

LL: What else do you want to know?

AK: So you don't know any others in Know County?

LL: Well there, as a matter of fact I just met Angel and his wife, Wendy. Angel is from Mexico, and his wife, Wendy is born an American, but she's from Mexican parents. And they live here in

Mount Vernon, and he goes and plays soccer with us, that's how I met him. And he's a mechanic here in town and we've taken our cars to him.

AK: In terms of where people are from, where is Angel from?

LL: Angel? He's from Mexico. Not being from Mexico, I'm not sure what region or state he's from. But I know he was born in Mexico.

AK: What about the other people you know around here? Are most from Mexico, or is it just kind of...?

LL: When you ask me about people I know around here, are you asking about people that work with me, or people from town?

AK: Yeah, people that work with you.

LL: People that work with me... we have about 5 employees that are from Mexico. They are from the area of Guadalajara, the state. We have 2 other employees that are from El Salvador. And of course I'm from Puerto Rico. And the rest of the people that are employed here are from Mount Vernon. And now there is also another fellow by the name of Jose, he works in a Chinese restaurant here in town, he's also from Mexico.

AK: So are there activities that bring the group together?

LL: Yes, we play soccer often-- Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sunday mornings. And other than working together, and sometime we throw, if one of the employees have a birthday party or one of their children, we throw a small get together either at the restaurant or at their homes.

AK: What do you think about the interaction between the Hispanic community and the rest of Knox County?

LL: Well, I haven't been exposed to much, to any interaction, because we work pretty much 6 days or 7 days a week and after hours we each go home. So I don't think there's much interaction. And not because we don't want to or other people don't want to, it's just because we're always at work and from work we go home. But so far everybody in town has been very good to us, has been very generous, we never had any problems with anybody. Everybody seems to interact very well with my employees and myself, so that's good. A lot of times I'm walking to the bank or somewhere else and people beep the horn and wave at me. So, most people know us in town and they're very nice to us and they acknowledge that we're here and the community has done a lot for us and we have done a lot for the community also. I say we interact pretty good.

AK: Seems like you have a lot of contact with Kenyon.

LL: Yes we do. We have a lot of contact with Kenyon. We have thrown several get togethers for

them. Different activities. We also support different activities they have done. And they have come over here and asked for donations. We have always supported them, as anybody else in town.

AK: Do you feel like the Hispanic community is in any way isolated?

LL: In Mount Vernon?

AK: Yeah.

LL: No. I don't think it's isolate because there aren't enough Hispanics to be isolated. I mean, I don't know any Hispanics, only 2, that were here before, that came over here. So, I have not seen that isolation. Like I don't see them being groupies and hanging together. When the people aren't at work or outside, they're usually by themselves. There's not enough Hispanics to say well, you can see they're being isolated because they're always together and they don't mingle with other people. Now, in Columbus I'd say in the last 5 years there is a big Hispanic community, coming into Columbus. And I see a little bit of isolation. When they come from their country, here, they tend to gather together because they feel more comfortable. That doesn't necessarily mean they've been isolated, but they isolate themselves. Because of the restaurant business, and construction, and different jobs the Hispanics tend to do well.

AK: In Columbus would you say you see more isolation?

LL: Yeah, I see more isolation. Again I say that because there is more of the Hispanics. They tend to be together because they feel more comfortable, because they're with their own, and a lot of them don't speak any English. So they isolate themselves. I, myself, have not been a groupie. I've always been with different types of people. So, I cannot say well I'm here and I'm being mistreated because I'm always with everybody. And I don't get an opportunity to spend enough time whether I'm here at work, or with people that can say well, we don't go here because we're not wanted or we feel this way. Yes, I have talked to people in Columbus and they feel a little bit isolated, but I think it's more because of the language barrier-- that people don't understand them, they don't understand the Americans. Also because of the custom, culture, things like that. They miss back home, so by being with people from back home, they feel like they're at home.

AK: How did you learn English?

LL: Well, Puerto Rico, as you know, is part of the United States. I knew English before I came here, to the United States.

AK: You did, you were bilingual?

LL: Yes, pretty much. But not everybody in Puerto Rico is bilingual but I was lucky enough to go to Catholic school and all the teachers there were nuns, so I knew English before I came here. It's not that good, but...

AK: It's quite good. It is my impression that in Mount Vernon there are also some people that don't speak English.

LL: Can you repeat that?

AK: It wasn't really a question. It seems like language seems to be kind of a barrier here. Like for Fernando, and...

LL: Yes.

AK: How do you think they deal with it? It's not really a question.

LL: Okay, well they deal with it, pretty much they try to find somebody like me or someone they know that can speak both Spanish and English. Like if they need to go to the bank, the first time I might go with them and teach them how to open an account, and things like that. And once they know the process, they can go and do it on their own. Like for example tomorrow one of my employees needs some eye surgery, he has problems with his eyes, and I'm going to go with him to the doctor. So I can help him. The doctor wants me there because he's going to do certain things, and he wants me there to make sure he understands. So, we try to help each other.

AK: You've sort of already answered this. Do you feel like you've experienced in prejudice?

LL: In Mount Vernon?

AK: Yeah.

LL: No. I don't feel that. But I'm kind of the wrong person to ask because I've been here for so long. And when I came here to college, I was like the only Hispanic in a small town. I mean, I was more of a something to look at, something different, so everybody treat me real nice. If I was born in a big city, or if I would have come here, to the States, it would have been a different story. Because I might have had problems. Sometimes I feel, but with my personality if somebody says something offensive, I kill them with kindness and it doesn't bother me. But I have felt sometimes that certain stereotypes of Americans, they don't only treat Hispanics like that, but they treat their own. Like old Americans, or people from the mainland, the states. Depends if you're from the South or the North. And you may see some of that in Mount Vernon. There's a lot of people, they might be from a big city, and they feel intimidated when other people come in to their town. Not necessarily Hispanics or foreigners, but people from other sides of the country. I've seen that when I go out, between themselves. But everybody has been very nice to me, here. I kind of hang out with anybody. Now, some of the other Hispanics, they might feel differently about that. Like the Americans are not patient with them, or they give them a certain look, they might feel that way, they might take it more personally than I would take it. I might say well, this guy don't like me for me being this way, not for me being from Puerto Rico.

AK: Sounds like you've been here since the beginning of the restaurant.

LL: Pretty much. Two months after the restaurant. We've been here for about a year and 6 months now.

AK: Did you feel the Mexican restaurant was well received in Mount Vernon?

LL: Oh yes. The first 2 months we couldn't even handle the crowds. It was like everybody came here at once. And now it kind of leveled off, business is good. We only get killed when Kenyon students bring their parents in-- which we like. Like last Saturday. I wasn't here I was in Iowa visiting some friends, but it was parents weekend and they were out the door, which is great!

AK: How did you keep the culture of Puerto Rico in your life?

LL: A lot of times when you go to a strange place and you meet somebody from the same place you're from, like you're in Pennsylvania or California and you meet someone from Pennsylvania, you're going to want to hang around that person because you have things in common. Maybe places you've both been to. So you have places to talk about. Or maybe a certain type of food or desert that you made that week... A lot of time people from Central America or South America they tend to group themselves, especially in big cities. I wouldn't say that about Mount Vernon. Well... anywhere. People try to group together because they feel more comfortable with their own. It's more of a culture thing than a social status. In Puerto Rico and the United States we tend to divide more socially, than maybe by the race or the color of the skin. I know there is a lot of racism here in the States here, but I think there is more now towards the social status. The people that are wealthy hang out together, the people that are poor hang out together, the people that are middle class hang out together. That's how I see it. In Puerto Rico you see a lot of that, more than this person is black, red haired or blonde. You see more that they are racist towards people that don't have enough money or education, regardless of color. They all hang together.

DF: As far as religious practices... I don't know if you're religious or if you are where you...

LL: I'm Catholic.

DF: You go to church probably in Columbus if you go to church.

LL: I don't go to church as often as I'd like because of work. Well... that shouldn't be an excuse. Being single again, I've been going more to work than to church lately. But, yeah, born and raised Catholic. But I do go to church once and a while.

AK: Do you go to church in Mount Vernon?

LL: I haven't been here in Mount Vernon yet, but I go to Westerville once in a while-- St. Paul's. That's where I live. No, but there is a Catholic church here in town, so I might check it out one day.

DF: This goes back a little bit. I was just wondering how large the Hispanic community is in

Mount Vernon.

LL: I have no idea. I cannot see it being more than 25, 30 people, if that. Because when I walk on the streets I don't see anybody other than the people I know. And I only know about 8 or 10.

AK: What are your impressions of Knox County in general?

LL: There's still a lot of farmers, that's my impression. Although in Mount Vernon there are a lot of industries. Knox County itself, there are still a lot of horses and cattle and things like that. I think it's a great place. It's a place where a lot of people have made their money somewhere else and have come here to retire. It's got good colleges. It's a place that's growing. I don't think that the people in Mount Vernon want it to grow as fast as it could, and they've been protective. And I like that. But eventually it's going to grow, and quick. Because Columbus is growing fast. That's the impression I had 12 years ago when I first came in, and the last 5 years it's just taking off. And nobody can stop it now. I think it's going to be like the next Atlanta. In the next 10 years. It's growing very, very fast. I think Mount Vernon is eventually going to be a server of Columbus in the next 10 years, if not before that.

AK: How do you think people will react to that in Mount Vernon?

LL: I think they're not going to like it. But growth is going to happen. You can't stop growth. The people that don't like it will probably move farther north or east. But with the colleges and the industries that they have there, it's going to continue to grow. I think. You can see already certain growth in Mount Vernon.

DF: I'd written this down before. You talked a little bit how in Puerto Rico the different groups, group together because of social status, instead of race or something like that. I was wondering if you could explain a bit more of how that's important there.

LL: Well, Puerto Rico like the United States, when Christopher Columbus came over and was part of the New World, there were only a few Indians that died quickly. And then you have the roots are people from Spain, French, English-- like my last name is Lovelace. Both my grandparents from my mother's side and my father's side are from England. Then you have Africans, of course, and they brought them as slaves, also to Puerto Rico. So, being a small island, only 30 miles wide and 100 long, people mingle together. In the last 200 years you have a lot of mix. You see a lot of black people and people that are half black and half white, and you see a lot of Irish people, and people that are completely white. And the people that have not mixed is because of more of a social status. This is the kind of family we have, and the other people are poor so you don't hang out with these people. But as years have gone by and education has gotten better, people have had opportunities. So people now that didn't have any money, regardless of color, have a good education, now they can start moving in a different social circle. They've been married between races. It's funny because in Puerto Rico, when you're born, in my birth certificate I'm white, they might put black or white. And there's one for if you're mixed. But here in the United States I'm Hispanic. So it's funny because a lot of people say you're Puerto Rican, you're not white. But that's like saying you're from New York,

you're not an American. You know? Back to what you asked me, I think a lot more people tend to gather in groups because of the amount of money they have in their pockets. It used to be education and the color of your skin, racial, but now if you have money you can enter any kind of circle. Things have changed, I think, everywhere.

DF: And would you say in Puerto Rico that skin color and race is not looked at as much as here?

LL: It is looked at, but not as much as here. Because it's so small that this street might be everybody poor and black and then the next street everybody is middle class, and then the next street everybody is wealthy. But they all go to the same school together. And they all play baseball together, and sports together. What decides if you're going to keep continuing to see this person, is financially if this person is going to be going to the same place you go. But not because you don't want to be with them because of the color of their skin, but it's because now he can't go out to the club, or out on your boat because his father might not have a boat. Everybody tends to get together when they're small and their children, and then they keep breaking up as they get older.

DF: So then what about when you came here and every test you took you had to fill in the little "Hispanic" bubble... did it surprise you the different ways that people look at race here?

LL: No it didn't surprise me, but I had a choice. I could put either white because of my last name, unless you talk to me you don't know I'm Hispanic. So I can put white, my birth certificate says white. But I'm proud of being born in Puerto Rico. So if Puerto Rico, you're Hispanic, I always put Hispanic. My mother and everybody in my family are very fair skinned. Except for my father because his mother was dark skinned. She was from India. With our last name, I'm the only one to have a strong accent at home, too. So, it never bothered me.

AK: What do you think about the term, Hispanic? Do you like it?

LL: Yeah. Because we're from Hispano-America. What I would like to see is maybe in the next 20 years, everybody being Americans. Because the world is getting too small and I think we should gather all together. The smart thing would be to get them all together. Like in Europe, they're moving them all together. I think we should join South America, Central and North America and everybody be Americans and help each other financially. This hemisphere-- we should work around that, instead of working with other people like from Europe. I'm talking business-wise. There's no reason we should be buying things from China when we can be buying things from South American and things like that.

AK: Do you see yourself living here longer?

LL: In the states? Or Mount Vernon.

AK: Yeah, or even in Columbus.

LL: It depends. Depends a lot of family business. I'm by myself here now, so I can pack and go



when ever I want. Before I had my children here with me, so that's what tied me here in Ohio. But I'm planning to be in Mount Vernon for the next 2, 3 years.

DF: Is there anything else you would like to add? About the restaurant or anything?

LL: We're here. Everybody is welcome to come and check us out. No, the community of Mount Vernon has accepted us very well, and everyone has been really nice to us. At least the people that come to the restaurant all the time, which is half the town. We feel welcome here, which is good. And I want people to feel like they come in here, when they walk in the door, they're in Mexico. They're not in Mount Vernon anymore. If you see a fly flying around, then that means you're in Mexico. One way of looking at it, is we save you the money to go all the way to Mexico. You come here and let us do our thing, and you have a good thing.

AK: Anything you want to ask?

LL: How do you feel about Mount Vernon? Being a student in a small town. Especially you from Chicago.

DF: I like the community of Mount Vernon. I think people from Mount Vernon tend to look at the students from Kenyon in a negative way. I don't find myself too many times in a store and having people from Mount Vernon picking up conversation with me or anything. I think they're kind of like, she's from Kenyon, there's got to be something wrong with her. But I really like the small town and I can see how well-connected it is. And being from a large place, I like that better. I don't like the craziness of a big city so much.

AK: I think a lot of time Kenyon students feel isolated and they isolate themselves. They just kind of let that happen. They'll sit up there on the hill, and talk to the people in the Bookstore, but they're not really getting out there. They don't really see anything in Knox County.

LL: Is that because they're comfortable because they're all of the same age group? Or because they have something in common, they're all students?

AK: Yeah, I think it's something in common. When we started this class, I think a lot of people thought that Knox County was kind of hickish.

LL: Yeah, well you said it, I didn't want to say it.

AK: But I definitely had that preconception. In some cases it's been supported, in other ways it hasn't. I think a lot of people are smarter and more wise then Kenyon students give them credit for being. Since I've been here, I think I've been more critical of Kenyon than Knox County, and I think I expected it to be the other way around.

AK: We'd love to interview you again. Thank you!