



In the October 20, 1971, an article in the *Shakopee Valley News* called “Spanish Students Teach Basic English: Language Exchange Program at SHS,” three high school Spanish students tutor three Mexican youngsters in basic English while polishing their newly acquired language skill. Gina Morales, 14, with Mary Glynn (on right), Craig Belcourt with Carlos Morales, 11 (on left) and Joe Greenwood with Burt Morales, 13.

Today, with more people from other countries moving to the area, the Shakopee Public Schools has a program of instruction designed for students who are not native speakers of English. Language is learned in a content based instructional programs. Services are also intended to familiarize students with American culture and the expectations for students in an American public school. Ultimately, the goal of the program is to transition students successfully into English-only instruction.

Besides speaking English, the students at home in Shakopee speak Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, Chinese (Mandarin), Taiwanese, Cantonese, Lao, Cambodian, Thai, Bengali, Khmar, Tamil, Telugu, Bangla, Gujar, Malayalam, Arabic, Swahili, Somali, Tigrinya, Afrikaans, and Camaroonian Pidgin English!

Like most family, and like those who spoke German or other languages at first, by the second generation, the children speak both languages, and by the third generation, they almost all speak English.

Learning English is influenced by many factors, but studies show that it takes a minimum of 5-7 years of high quality instruction for students to become proficient in reading, writing, speaking and understanding English. I am sure that Gina and her brothers were up to the challenge. According to the *Shakopee Valley News* on October 20, 1971, the three Mexican Americans showed remarkable improvement in comprehension. “They are all very bright and catch on quickly once they are able to understand what is being said,” said Ron Kolb.

Gina’s mother, Paula Morales Johnson, died on November 28, 2016 in Shakopee. Gina’s father-in-law, Duane Alan Johnson, died on April 22, 2020. But Gina, along with her family, including grandchildren, continue to be a proud Mexican American who learned English in Shakopee.



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# Gina Morales

In Shakopee 1971

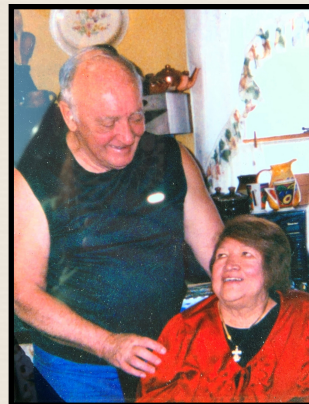


Gina Morales was born in Mexico City, Mexico. Her mother was Paula Morales, born in Coyoacán, Mexico on June 29, 1940. Her parents, and Gina's grandparents, were Luis and Emilia (Munguía) Morales. Paula married Duane Alan Johnson, son Lawrence and Myrtle (Hansen) Johnson, on February 12, 1969, in Mexico City.

Paula Morales Johnson had three children, Gina, Norberto, and Carlos. Duane, who proudly served in the United States Army and was a Vietnam War veteran, adored Paula and was a proud father-in-law to the three children.

Gina, along with her two brothers, Burt and Carlos, along with their mother and stepfather, moved from Mexico City, Mexico to Shakopee in the early Fall of 1971. The three Mexican Americans were one of the first group of people from south of the boarder to move and stay in Shakopee.

More than half of Minnesota's 125,000 immigrants from Latin America are Mexican. Over 90 percent of Mexican immigrants are employed, frequently with two jobs, and a strong emphasis is placed on family, church and community. Employment opportunities and family connections are increasingly drawing newcomers to Minnesota.



On left is Paula Morales Johnson and her husband, Duane Alan Johnson. Paula and her children were born near Mexico City, Mexico.

Since the early 1900s, Latinos have been a productive and essential part of Minnesota. Most of the earliest were migrant farm workers from Mexico who faced obstacles to first-class citizenship that are still being addressed. Latinos faced, and still face, discrimination—both racial and the kinds common to all immigrants and migrants.

The sugar beet industry drove the initial Latino migration to Minnesota. During the early twentieth century, beet growers recruited Mexican to migrate north. Once in the United States, they helped with cultivation and harvest. With little paid work in the winter and facing considerable discrimination, most of them returned south every year. It was hard work in the beet fields. It required working on one's hands and knees when thinning the plants; bending over with a short-handled hoe when weeding; and stooping to harvest beets by hand. All of this labor took place in the unpredictable Minnesota weather and in the company of mosquitoes.

Older people in Shakopee and Scott County would once in awhile hire families for harvest. The whole family would be out of school, working, and staying in sheds until the harvest was over, and then they moved south during the winter. The Mexican Americans also worked picking pickles and working plants such as the Gedney Pickle Factory in Chaska, which started in 1881.

Soon, colonies of Mexican migrants established themselves in St. Paul and Minneapolis. There, they found substandard housing, limited work, and unfriendly locals. Some men found work at meat-packing plants in South St. Paul or on the railroad lines in Inver Grove Heights and Minneapolis. Most women could only find jobs as domestic help. In the 2010s, Minnesota features large clusters of Latino families near meat- and poultry-packing facilities. More recent migrants are entrepreneurial and have started businesses all over the state, including in Shakopee.

In the fall of 1971, when Gina, Burt, and Carlos Morales were having a challenging time learning English, an after-school program connected three Spanish high school students with the three Morales children to help them learn English.



The Northern Pine Pickling Company Plant in West Shakopee was the busiest place in Shakopee in the fall of 1931. Thirty-one people were busy time of weighing, sorting, salting, and barreling thousands of pounds of pickles. Gedney in Chaska also was a place that Mexican Americans would work.