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## **Interview no. 1489**

Don Shapiro

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University of Texas at El Paso

Institute of Oral History

Interviewee: Don Shapiro

Interviewer: Kristine Navarro

Project: Paso del Norte Entrepreneurship Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: 20 July

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**Biographical Synopsis of Interviewee:** Don Shapiro was born August 18 1927. He is the son of Sylvia Ann Lebost and Isadore Shapiro. His brother is George L. Shapiro. Don attended school in New York and college at New York University. Don is a veteran of the United States Naval Reserve. Don is the owner of Coronado Consulting and Coronado Roofing in El Paso, Texas. Don currently resides in El Paso and he is married to Bobbie and they have three children, Steve, Randy and Lori.

**Summary of Interview:** Don Shapiro was born and raised in the New York Metropolitan Area. In the 1930's Don's father Isadore worked in the fur district in New York City. When Don graduated from high school, he joined the United States Naval Reserve during World War II. After WWII, Done attended NYU and got a degree in accounting. After graduating NYU, he became a door to door salesman in New York City. After a time in New York, Don and his friend Harry Katz decided to drive cross country to California and work to earn money along the way. They started by driving a limousine for a car dealership to Fort Worth. In Fort Worth they got jobs working in freight and after a period of time, Don and Harry decided to purchase a used car to continue to California. They drove to El Paso, Texas and got jobs at Franklin Department Store. Don worked for a short time with this company and decided to work selling surgical supplies instead. Harry was stayed with Franklin and became a very successful retailer. While Don was selling surgical supplies, he met Florence Cullham who owned Western Manufacturers Representatives and wanted Don to sell her clothes. Don considered the option while he briefly went back to New York. In 1952 When Don returned to El Paso, he worked for Florence for one year, he took over some of the lines and then obtained some lines of his own and began selling on the road. It was while selling on the road that Don met his wife Bobbie while she worked at Majestic Knitting Mill. Every six months Don would return to for one week to New York to work at Majestic Knitting Mill in order to keep in touch with his manufacturers. Don and Bobbie kept up a relationship for a few weeks and decided to marry. For their first eight months together, Don and Bobbie traveled selling garments and enjoying an extended honeymoon. Don

was in the selling business for approximately 12 years before he went into business for himself with American Stretch. Don went into a partnership with Leon Majors and opened their business, Don Leon, in the 1960's. Don Leon was the production end of American Stretch. During the 1960's Don met a man named Douglas Rose who was manufacturing hosiery and persuaded Don to sell hosiery. Don sold some garment lines and went into hosiery as well. In 1974, Don got into jean manufacturing and purchased a company called Action West. Don's garment manufacturing grew and eventually due to union activity and cheaper production, Don moved his business to México. In the 1980's the manufacturer and retailer relationship shifted, businesses started going to China, Don decided to leave the garment business and he sold Action West to Fred Sternburg. This sell allowed Don to move into another field of business. Don started up Coronado Consulting. Coronado Consulting owns seven buildings and they are all operating. In 2003 Don started Coronado Contractors which is a roofing company. Don's advice for entrepreneurs is to do right by your client, love what you do and the money will follow.

Length of interview: 131:00

Length of Transcript: 50 pages

Name of Interviewee: Don Shapiro  
Date of Interview: July 20<sup>th</sup>  
Name of Interviewer: Kristine Navarro

KN: Today is July 20. My name is Kristine Navarro. I am interviewing Mr. Don Shapiro, the owner of Coronado Consulting. Good morning.

DS: Good morning. How are you today?

KN: I'm good, how are you?

DS: Good.

KN: Excellent. I'll just ask you a couple of questions about your background and everything.

DS: That would be great.

KN: Can you tell me just a little bit, where and when you were born?

DS: I was born on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August, 1927. And I'd like to start right from the beginning of my earliest recollections, and I remember things that happened before I was able to walk. One incident goes back to when I was in the crib. And I was hungry, I wanted some milk. So instead of crying, I learned how to use my feet to move the bottle up to meet my hands and to drink from a bottle. I did that many times. My grandmother wanted to call the newspapers in New York because she was so proud of what I was able to do at that time. I actually recall that right now. That was before I could walk.

I was either in a carriage or a crib all the time. And another incident that I remember, maybe a couple of years later, when I was walking down the streets of the Bronx with my Aunt Estelle who was 13 when I was born, later became an entertainer and married Carl Reiner. And their whole family was into entertainment. And my Aunt Estelle was walking with my mother down a business area where there were retail stores. And they stopped to look in a liquor store, and the bottles were bright and beautiful. And I was able to talk. I was talking, but not much.

And I said, "I like that. Please get me that." And they said, "No, Donny, you can't have it." And I said, "Why not?" And my aunt said, "Because that's poison." So I started crying, and I said, "I want poison." I didn't know all the words, but whatever it was, the

word didn't matter, but I saw something I liked, and I wanted it. And at that age, I asserted myself to try get something I wanted. It didn't work because it was hard liquor in a beautiful bottle. Another thing I remembered, which before I could walk, one toy. I had a camel that I loved. It was the perfect replica of a camel. And I remember listening to words, and I couldn't talk then, from people, families telling me that it's a camel.

But it's interesting that I could remember back that far. And those are the main things from my infancy that I recall. And I do remember I loved the places we lived when I was very young. In fact, almost always, where I went. But I went to public school in Queens right at [inaudible], New York, right on the beach. And we stayed there for a year and a half. We rented a home on the beach on 66<sup>th</sup> Street in Rockaway, Rockaway Beach. I remember how wonderful it was and the things that were dangerous to other people like a small hurricane where the waves are going over the boardwalk. I loved watching that. And we had a big storm.

We were snow bound for a couple of days, and I loved that, too. Things that were out of the ordinary were things that I loved the most.

KN: Why do you think that was?

DS: It was the interest that I had in what was going on that was not day in/day out stuff. And I think it reflected with my life later on where I became a risk taker in many ways, including physical risks and money risks. And anything that was stimulating or unusual, I liked. And we stayed in Rockaway Beach for about a year and a half. I went to school there for one year. And I loved it. It was small, the classes were small. It was the first time in my life that I met a black person, and there was a young lady. And were about 5 ½ in kindergarten. And after that, and she seemed very nice. But a lot of the children were not that friendly to her, and it bothered me quite a bit.

And I loved that school, and I loved the kids. And then we moved to the Bronx. It was more city like, and I got used to that and went to a school right near the Reservoir Oval, which was suburbs. And that was okay. And then we were there for only one year, so I had to adjust all the time to moving. And then I went to PS 80 and that was – my brother went there, and I went there. It was just exciting, but different. And we lived in an upscale neighborhood in the Bronx that had everything nice. It had parks, it had lakes, it had paths, it had places to play football and baseball. And I got very

involved in sports, as everyone in my family did one way or another.

My uncle, Sydney Lebst, was an exceptional athlete and was called on by Connie Mack, at that time, the Philadelphia A's, and wanted to sign him up right off the bat to a major league contract. And his father wouldn't let him because he felt it was for bums. They didn't earn millions in those years like they did later, but he was good at a lot of things. He became an architect and contracting work in Manhattan and helped build the Hotel New York, which at that time was one of the better hotels in the East. And those are the things that I remembered with school and with grade school.

And then I went to D. Wood Clinton, which was right in our neighborhood and very convenient. Nobody had to drive us. There were no carpools. We'd walk everywhere in every kind of weather. And it was very simple. The weather never bothered any of us. And the winter sports were great. And at D. Wood Clinton, I was too small for football, but I played club football and played baseball with the kids. The one thing I regretted looking back with D. Wood Clinton, they didn't have a wrestling team because the one varsity sport that I got involved with was not until I went to NYU, and I was on the wrestling team there. And I kept saying to myself even now that I could have been so much better if I started as a 13-year-old in high school.

And sports were a very big part of my life, and grades that I had in grade school and high school were passing but very, very average. And, amazingly, I was accepted by two schools, and I wanted to study business and accounting. One was NYU, and the other was Orton School of Business, which were two of the best in the world and still are. And I chose NYU, and as the way things worked out, I'm very happy I did because my mother was ill. She had heart disease from rheumatic fever when she was a little girl. And the way things would happen, she died within a couple of years after I started college.

KN: Let's talk about your mom. Can you tell me her name?

DS: She was one of the most extraordinary people, male or female, that I've ever met in my entire life. And my brother felt the same way. And she died at 43. And every year, we talk or get together and remember her. And the family gets together when I'm in L.A. with her other family who knew her so well, and we reflect on how amazing she was because she always thought of one thing, there

were many things, but she always put other people in front of herself. She was very altruistic about helping people, and she had an unbelievable effect on our lives, everyone in the family. And I think especially my brother and I, and especially myself, when the year she told me never grieve, life is for the living.

I don't want anyone to cry. I don't want anyone to feel bad. Life is for the living. And then later on in life, I found that a lot of people celebrated their life, not their death. And my mother's viewpoint was way ahead of her time, more so than anyone I ever met. She was into women's lib in the '20s and into helping union people, which affected my life later as a manufacturer because I was nice to them. I had a rapport with them, with every one of them. And later on, which I'll get to later, when there were union problems, the things that she spoke to me about had effect of our getting things the way we wanted to.

And a lot of it was communicating in the right manner and talking to everybody on the same level. Didn't matter what their color or their language or their nationality was. And I think one of the big things that helped me in selling, which was my first real career business wise, was being able to communicate with anybody on any level. Nobody was higher than me. Nobody was lower than me. We were talking on the same plain and the same language. And it's amazing how many problems you can solve by doing that.

KN: What other fond memories do you have of your mom?

DS: You don't mind jumping back and forth like I am?

KN: No, no, no.

DS: Getting back to Sylvia, my mother –

KN: What's her full name, please?

DS: Sylvia Ann Lebest, was her maiden name, Shapiro. And Lebest was a shortening of Schlebowski, which amazingly Schlebowski were Germans, but they had a Polish name. But Poland and Prussia were right next door to each other, and a lot of the war heroes in Prussia were Germans but with Polish names. And I'll get to this later too, but my great grandfather, Jewish German, was a big war hero out of Bismarck and Prussia, and won the Iron Cross twice.

KN: What was his name? Do you want to talk about him now?

DS: His name was Herman Schlebowski. I never met him. I wish I did. In fact, I wish I could look into more about him. But the ironic thing was I met his sister, I'm sorry his niece, the sister of my grandfather, Henry, who was in the Cuban war. It was in 1898. And she told me how kind he was. I mean, he was a Jewish guy who won the Iron Cross twice. I don't know how many there had been. And she said he was so kind that he met a man who didn't have shoes, and he gave him his shoes. That's one thing I remember from it's a contradictory thing, but amazing. And possibly something that mattered in our family.

But getting back to Sylvia, when I was a senior in college and about to go out on careers, and she said to me, and she still called me Donny, "I want you to know this. That when you go out in the business world or any world, picture that you're driving an 18 wheeler down the freeway and nothing in the world can stop you because you have the looks, the intelligence, the drive to do anything in the world that you want to do." And I'll never forget that. When I talk to my grandchildren and my children, I let them know to go out for whatever you want to go out for because if you do it right, nothing will ever stop you.

And Bobby felt the same way. We both were very into having our kids and our grandkids go for what they loved. Forget about money. Money will be there, go for what you love.

KN: Tell me a little bit about your –

DS: So there's a lot of overlapping in the family ideas, but a lot of them are very similar.

KN: Tell me about your father.

DS: My father was an amazing guy.

KN: His name?

DS: His given name was Isadore Shapiro. He didn't like the name, he used Ira. Everyone knew him as Ira. And he got along very well with people. Everyone loved him. He came over when he was seven years old, went to grade school only, never to high school. His family, I don't know how they did it, but they owned a farm in Connecticut near New London and New Milford, Connecticut. I remember going there when I was a child, and my grandmother,



my father's mother, would make jams and things like that on her own.

And everything was great, unusual, unlike today. And he was brought up on the farm and was very strong. And there was no money to be made on the farm, so one of his relatives said come into New York. I'll get you a job in the fur business. And he got a job like packing and shipping. And he was able to, in a matter of months, he got a selling job. He had a great personality. People loved him, and he was really nice to people and treated them well. He was an immediate success as a salesman. In the fur district in New York, which is the '30s, right off 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Broadway in the '30s, and I wound up in the garment center in New York for a little while.

And we had a showroom at 38<sup>th</sup> and Broadway after I got into selling garments. But my father was kind and nice and nice looking, and people loved him, and they never forgot him.

KN: Did he share some of his secrets about selling with you?

DS: I'm sorry?

KN: Did he share some of his secrets about business and things like that with you and your brother?

DS: No.

KN: No. Okay.

DS: He didn't want us to go into the business. He was in the fur business, and that was not a good business. I mean, it was okay then. He made a lot of money during the depression. And then after that, it wasn't that good anymore because people didn't have that much money, and there was an anti fur thing going around, which I agree with because I love animals so much. And his business was very successful during the worst of times. We always lived in an upscale neighborhood like on Marslow Parkway in New York near Van Carlton Park. And we'd go to Long Island during the summers, and my dad would play softball, and we went swimming a lot.

And his whole life had an effect on us. And one of the reasons I went into the industry I did, it seemed like he and his friends in the fur business, manufacturers, they all had an upscale lifestyle, and they had a lot of fun together. They'd play cards, play games, play

sports. They were always up no matter what. It seemed like they had more personalities than most people that professional or teachers or doctors. So that idea turned me on. It's one of the reasons I got into the garment industry. It fascinated me.

KN: Can you tell me a little bit – did your dad remain with the fur business, or did he transition to something else after?

DS: No, he got out of it. And he wound up with not a lot of money, but he was working for someone in the industry. And then he came down to El Paso and lived with us for a while. And we were living in a very nice – I made money immediately when I started selling. Like the first year, and the earnings in my '60s, I started in the '50s, and the earnings in the '60s were equivalent to a couple a million a year on straight commission. But we had a beautiful home at 4209 Hampshire Lane. We were there for many years, and he stayed with us until he died of heart problems.

KN: Your mom passed away at a very young age.

DS: Forty-three.

KN: Did that effect you? I mean, you were just out of college. Do you think that effected you in any way?

DS: She effected me in a very positive way because what came to my mind – that's a very good question. You're good at asking questions. What came to my mind were the things she told me like live and don't grieve, which I couldn't help. I did grieve. But the way I felt, stronger because I felt that what happened, nothing worse could happen in my life, my feeling at the time, because I loved her so much. And she had such an impact in my life and everybody's life. And I felt that the loss was so great, nothing could be greater. And I built strength out of that instead of a lot of weakness. It seems like people go one way or the other when bad things happen.

KN: What was her view about education? You went to college –

DS: Both my father and her were 100 percent. All the education we could get, they were 100 percent for it. They wanted it to happen. And I told you about like going through – I didn't like school that much. I loved getting out. Like when I was studying at a desk in grade school in New York, if it was a beautiful day like this, I'd look outside and visualize myself riding my bike. And I found school somewhat boring, more so in grade school, somewhat in

high school. But in college, I liked it. NYU was a great place to go because most of the people were finance guys from Wall Street, legal guys from big law firms, marketing guys from the marketing end.

And I found that fascinating, and I loved college. But I was more into sports and girls in college than I was into school. And I made the wrestling team, and that took time and effort and energy. And I figured I wanted to test myself, and I did. But let me start in the beginning. When I went to NYU, I took aptitude tests. And even though I was a very average student in grade school and high school, my aptitude tests, I was in the upper 1 or 2 percent learning ability. And I found that interesting. But they also said 1) you can be anything you wanted to based on your abilities and aptitude. You could be a professor or more or a lawyer or a CPA or anything you wanted, but you're not leaning in that direction.

It's not what you want. It was very astute that they came up with all that. I said what do I want? You want to be in sales, social work, politics. Anything but being an accountant, which I majored in at college. And I was getting like a B average student at NYU. And I figured I'm doing this with classes I don't like that much. I didn't like management at all. It was very boring. Later on it became interesting when I got into it in a different manner. But the textbook management didn't turn me on. And I figured I'm going to give myself a test. What was the most difficult course in business school at NYU, and it was cost accounting. So I decided to do my own test.

I don't care what my average is. And I did it. I got a straight A and I got a straight A in regents. Straight A in every course, every test I took. So I didn't feel that grades in school meant that much. It's a matter of what you do with it.

KN:

Tell me what you enjoyed about going to college.

DS:

I enjoyed everything and the friends I made. I enjoyed being in sports. I enjoyed dealing with people that were tremendously good at what they did like mainly marketing, not so much in the stock market or management. Banking and finance was boring, stock market was boring, insurance was boring. Sales and marketing were tremendously exciting. But they had very high quality people in every position, and they really dressed nice. All of them dressed – like the students would remark about one guy, an economics professor, who wore a different suit every day. And he had a nice shirt and a nice tie and well pressed clothes. But all of them dressed well in those days.

KN: So you noticed that right away, the attire.

DS: All the kids did.

KN: Okay. Can you tell me when you were about to graduate, you had just lost your mom before you graduated or after?

DS: I'm sorry?

KN: You lost your mom before you graduated?

DS: Before I graduated. About a year and a half before graduation.

KN: So was going back to NYU, was that difficult for you?

DS: Sorry?

KN: Was it difficult to go back to school and start that routine?

DS: Yeah. Because I graduated at 17 and joined the Navy. World War II was going full blast, and I joined the Navy at 17 when my mother was still alive. And the war was on. There was a purpose in everybody's mind and helping the war effort. My help was joining up. My mother and father signed for me. My father loved the Navy. He was brought up right near New England submarine base, New London, Connecticut. And my mother was involved in the war effort serving medals and doing everything that could help. They were very into that. But I graduated, so I didn't go back to school immediately.

I was in the Navy for a year and a half. And that's when I got out. I was in the Naval Reserve, and the war with Japan was on. And the way people reacted was very interesting because before I went in, I spoke to friends of mine who had been there, and they warned me that it was going to be very tough, very difficult physically, mentally, every way you could think of. And I went to boot camp, and some of the guys would go crazy because they were about to go into Japan with bombs and everything else. And they cracked up, some of them did. And I was amazed because before I went in, I had a good-looking lady cousin.

She said how are you going to handle this? I said I'm just going to handle it, and I'll do one step at a time. And I did. And I loved the Navy. I didn't mind the discipline. I knew it was part of my survival and everyone else's. And physical activity was not hard at

all. I just excelled at it, and I liked it, the marching, the weights, the conditioning. It was marine conditioning. They had a marine base side by side, and the conditioning and everything was the same. But I was surprised that I liked it that much.

KN: Were you shipped overseas?

DS: Well, after that, I went to service school at Great Lakes, and I remember rowing the big practice boats and all that, and I liked it. And I was anxious to go into battle – well, not battle, but get on ship. But then the bomb was dropped while I was – Harry Truman dropped the bomb when I was in boot camp, so it was a different world after we immediately – after Japan surrendered. I still wanted to go overseas, but I couldn't because I was going to be getting out of the Navy.

KN: What did you learn from working in the Navy?

DS: I'm sorry?

KN: What did you learn from working in the Navy?

DS: What did I learn about? If you adapt yourself to something that seems difficult, it's not difficult anymore. I took a liking to it. I made a lot of good friends. And I went to service school in Great Lakes, and my eyes were not good enough. In fact, I had a very high IQ on the Navy thing. It said you could do anything, go for officers, you can signal men. Whatever rate you want, you could have. But you can't do those rates because my eyes were not good enough. I was nearsighted. Now, I'm not nearsighted anymore. But everything about it, I liked, and I was glad to contribute anything I could to helping the United States and win the war.

KN: Okay. I'm going to pause it for just a minute. Okay. Go ahead.

DS: Bobby remembers this story very well. Even though she didn't know me when I was a kid growing up, and I was very shy, and I was not into communicating with adults a lot. And I was that way while I was growing up. And even later on, I was not that talkative when I went to college. Before I went to college, my father recommended that I become an accountant because you're not hurt by any negative happenings with people and all that. And I knew within myself that I didn't want to be an accountant. And I knew from the background of what my father did and how much fun they had that I wanted to be in any kind of thing like that where you could have a lot of fun and enjoy it a lot.

And selling is what I chose. After I graduated NYU as an accounting major, I had no idea – well, I didn't even try out accounting. I knew it was not for me. But while I didn't have a job, I worked in a bookkeeping area of a manufacturing company, and I did that for a while. And then I quit and got a selling job. I knew I wanted to sell. It didn't matter what or where. I got a selling job in New York City selling door to door.

KN: What were you selling and for who?

DS: Insecticide in Harlem where there was a great need for that.

KN: Do you remember the company you worked for?

DS: Just a small company just selling products. And I'd go from door to door. And it seemed like I was a natural because I didn't care what the house looked like, I was able to get through to people by not being over talkative, just by where I mentioned later, on their own level. Didn't matter I was a graduate accountant with honors in some fields. I didn't feel I was any better than anybody or any worse than anybody. So I could talk to the head of NYU. And my father told me that in the beginning. He came over at seven and couldn't speak the language. And it was amazing to me how he could talk to anybody and feel very comfortable. And I wound up being that way myself.

KN: Is your brother like that as well?

DS: Even more so possibly. He's on the west coast, and he worked for William Morris in New York for \$40.00 a week in the mail department. And he wound up getting a little better job in L.A., and he went to the mail department in L.A., and then became an agent for William Morris later on. And then he set up his own little company. And his best friend was Howard West and is still his partner now. And we were laughing at Howard. We were at a party in New York before I went west – I was selling and making money. My brother was going to do better. And Howard was at the party at their apartment in New York. And Howie had a job working at a dye house for a fabric company.

And he came to the party, and he couldn't get the ink off. It was either a red or a blue, his hands were full of ink. I said, "Howie, why don't you get a better job." He was a very bright guy, good gambler, and very bright. And he said, "Well, I'm going to look around." So after I was traveling on the road, I met with George.

And George said he got another job. I said, "What kind of job." He said he's working for a buy that makes outfits for dead people.

KN: Interesting choice.

DS: For a funeral home. And he had that job for a while. And then after George got his business started, he called up Howie. He said, "Howie, would you be willing to come out here and work for me, and I'll give you part of the business." Howie was on the next plane out. Quite a fondness with George, and they had one of the most successful companies ever in show business.

KN: Can you tell me your brother's name, please?

DS: George L. Shapiro.

KN: Okay.

DS: And the company is Shapiro West. And they manage and produced for Jerry Seinfeld. And he has had different show business people over the years. In fact, I was with George when he discovered Neighbors, Jim Neighbors.

KN: Oh, okay.

DS: At the Horn in Santa Monica when I was out there.

KN: Let's go back to what did you learn from selling insecticide? What did that job teach you?

DS: It taught me how much I love selling. And I was not doing any harm to these people, I was doing good. And at the same time, I proved to myself that I could sell anything anywhere anytime. The confidence quotient made the job very doable. Any selling job.

KN: After that job, what did you do next?

DS: After that job, I got a selling job selling surgical supplies in Long Island and Manhattan. And I did well in that as I did in every selling job I had. And after I worked there for a while, I had decided with a friend of my by the name of Harry Katz, after I get out of school, we're going to travel across the country. So we earned a few dollars, and I said we were going to do it on \$100.00 each, work where we had to work, go into any challenge we need. But do it without sending home for money, and just travel. So I

quit my job, and he quit – he owned a luncheonette in Long Island, and he quit his job. And we each had \$100.00.

And by some manner, I got in touch with a car dealer out of Manhattan, and he wanted a car delivered – actually it was more than a car, it was a limousine, brand new limousine. He wanted it delivered to Fort Worth to a company by the name of Baum in Fort Worth. And we started traveling. Instead of hitchhiking, we were in a limousine. A big, black limousine. And we had stopped on the way, and some people were nice to us in Missouri. We stayed at their house for a couple of days and gave them a few dollars, which we didn't have much.

And then went on to travel to California. And my intention was to travel to California, but work our way across the country.

KN: Why did you want to travel? What was the excitement about traveling?

DS: Because I was in New York most of my life. I didn't do a lot of traveling, and New York is – a lot of them that love New York, they never get out of New York. They're very provincial. And I could see it at that time, I wanted to see the country and broaden my horizons, which I later on did.

KN: Okay.

DS: And traveling was important to me, and selling was important to me, which I already established.

KN: So you went to Mississippi.

DS: I didn't get here yet, but we had this limousine. We went to Fort Worth. I had a job unloading freight cars, which I could do. I was very strong after the things I went through in the Navy and college. And I was – another guy was a Golden Gloves champ and myself, the two of us were unloading freight trains.

KN: In Fort Worth?

DS: Yes.

KN: Okay. How did you get the job?

DS: It was a big factory, an aircraft factory, Convair, which later became Boeing. And I did that job for awhile. And Harry got a good job in a [inaudible], and he was a good retailer. And I said,



Harry, let's go on." He said, "Well, I might want to stay here." And I said, "Well, you can, but our plan was to go on from here." He said, "Okay. I'll go with you." And we wound up buying a Plymouth for \$250.00. And it was a good car. The only problem was the brakes didn't work. But I was able to maneuver and overcome that. And then the next day, we left for California and driving this old car.

And we'd bring it into a gas station, and we'd say check the gas and fill it up with oil. And we kept that car in El Paso. We got here, and amazingly we got jobs within a couple of days. Management training jobs with Franklin stores, which was a chain out of New York, prior to that Louisiana and Mississippi. And after that, we did that for a while. But the part that I didn't tell you about was after we left Fort Worth on the way west, we stopped in Roscoe, Texas with a retailer by the name of Bernie Schlanski. Bernie Schlanski sold cotton. He said the only job here is picking cotton.

And I just sat in the car and let Harry go in and talk with him. I said well that's the only job that they have, it doesn't give us much choice. Let's take it. So we bought a cotton sack from Bernie Schlanski at \$7.00, which was a lot of money then. And we went out and picked cotton all day. And at the end of the day, Harry was lying on his back, and I said, "Harry, how would you like to do this job again? We made very good money, \$6.00." Which was a lot of money in today's market. And he said, "No, I don't want to do it." I said, "Why not, Harry?" He said, "I don't think there's any future in this job."

And so we did it for one day only and headed west, and that's when we wound up in El Paso and canvassed the town and got a job as management trainees at Franklin store in El Paso. The store is still there. I don't know who's in it, but the store is still there. It was right like sort of pressed –

KN: How did you decide where to go in El Paso? Did you just look around at different department stores?

DS: Franklin then was it.

KN: Okay.

DS: And we got a job doing that. I didn't like it. Harry stayed with the company, and he didn't go to California like I planned, but he stayed with Franklin and got a job in Brownsville, Texas running a

retail store. He was very good at it. He later became a millionaire in Brownsville and then in L.A. And I didn't like retail. It was too confining. So I quit after a couple of months and got a job selling surgical supplies for a company in El Paso. And while I was doing that, I met a lady who wanted me to sell her clothing.

KN: Do you remember her name?

DS: Florence **Cullham**. The name of the company was Western Manufacturers Representatives.

KN: Okay. Go ahead. What made you all decide to stay in El Paso?

DS: When did I decide?

KN: What made you all decide to stay because you were continuing your journey driving? But Harry stayed with Franklin, and you stayed as well in El Paso. Why?

DS: Well, let me get accurate. It's a very good question.

KN: Okay.

DS: I met Florence Cullham, and I decided to quit the surgical supply job and head west. And Florence met me, she said I want to hire you. And I said, well, I want to finish my idea of going west. She said, "Why don't you sell for me for one week? And then whatever you want to do." I went out for one week, and I sold thousands of dollars worth of goods. And I figured this is what I really want to do. But it didn't stop me from continuing my trip. I said, "I'll call you when I'm back in New York and see if I want to come back and do this." And I traveled to California and stayed in Santa Monica.

I didn't look for a job there, but I stayed there, and I visited our relatives that were out there. Then I came back to New York and got a surgical supply job in New York, and I was thinking of going with her. The owner of the company was J. **Beiber** and Company, and he said you could make more money here, and I want you to stay, and I said, "I'll let you know." And I was looking around at what the salesmen were making, the really good salesmen were making on the job at Beiber and Company. They were making like \$16,000.00 a year, which was pretty good money in those years. It was like multiply it 10 times today.

But I felt that I could make much more selling garments, and I took the job with Florence for one year, and then I took over some of the lines and got lines of my own and started selling on the road.

KN: So you returned, you left New York, came to El Paso?

DS: Yes.

KN: What year was that? Do you remember around what time?

DS: Yeah. That was '52.

KN: So you came back to El Paso, and what –

DS: Started selling manufacturers for a career, and that worked out very well. And one of the lines I represented was Majestic Knitting Mill, and Bobby worked there. In fact, the picture that I showed you was taken right around that time. She was a secretary for the Knitting Mill, and I was a salesman. Are the cameras all over?

KN: Yes.

DS: And I was a salesman, and we met –

KN: You met in New York?

DS: We met in New York at the same place we worked at, Majestic Knitting Mills. I was there for about a week, which I did every six months to keep in touch with my manufacturers. And she was there working as a secretary. And she was starting a show business career, and she was very good at it. And she was going to get more involved in show business and quit her job, but she was still working there. And I was going to go back on the road and do my job, and we went out one time. And during the one week I was in New York, it was love at first sight. And knew that I wanted to be with her.

And I didn't ask her to go on the road with me at that time. It wasn't really done that way in those days, in the '50s. And I said well, I'm going to go back on the road. I'll be in touch, I'll call you, I'll write to you, we'll write to each other. And then I'll be back. And I knew it would be a matter of months before I came back. We were both committed as far as being in love was concerned, but we didn't have any other commitments. We were not engaged, we were not married. I went back on the road, and I called from Las Vegas, and I said I want to send you a ticket. I

want you to meet me in Vegas and just have fun. She said what about my job.

I said quit your job because my earnings are very good. You don't need the job. And she said call me back. After that, she spoke to her family. I called her back, and they would have been horrified if she left and just travelled with me. She said my parents were horrified. They're not going to let me go, and I don't want to get into a big battle with them. She was in a battle with them over being in show business. They didn't like that. So I said, "Well, I really want you to be here. And I want you to come. And think about it. I want you to do it." And she thought about it again. We were writing to each other. She said, "I really can't do it." And I said, "Well, I'll be back in New York in a week."

And that was during the first six week period we knew each other. And I was back in New York, and she said, "I'll travel with you, but only if we're married." And I said, "Why don't we just get engaged, and not be married?" And she said, "You know, I was engaged twice, and I don't like this engagement idea." And she happened to be right because she didn't want to travel with me or be engaged to me unless we got married. And I gave it a lot of very deep thought. It was not easy because I was single, and I loved the life I had.

And I gave it some very, very deep thought. And I looked at it realistically luckily that the way I analyzed it, if we didn't get married, then on my next trip, she'd probably be with somebody else. And she said I'm probably right. She said more than likely, that would have happened. So we got married within one week at a beautiful place in Brooklyn, and had a nine month honeymoon. The first two weeks, we were in New Orleans when New Orleans was really New Orleans, and the restaurants were the best the excitement was great, the entertainment was incredible. We stayed in one of the finest places there and loved it. Our honeymoon was great.

And what had like an eight month honeymoon until she got pregnant, and then she went back. But we lived first class from beginning to end every place we went.

KN: So she travelled with you on the road?

DS: Yes. But she complains now all I allowed her was one suitcase.

KN: That's not a lot.

DS: And I had a car and took the backseat out to make room for samples because I had a lot of samples.

KN: And why were you so successful in selling? What do you attribute to your success in selling?

DS: Well, to start with, mainly I loved people. I wanted to help them and do the right thing. No. 2, I just loved getting out and selling and communicating. And I loved the garment industry, the companies I was selling for. And the trend was up right from the beginning. How can you not – if you know there's something you love doing, and you're making a lot of money not being a starving show business individual, how can you not love it. I loved it. I loved the people, loved the associates, loved everything about it.

KN: What were your first impressions when you came back to El Paso? What were Bobby's first impressions?

DS: Well, I liked El Paso the first day I got here.

KN: Tell me why.

DS: Because it was so different from New York, and I was looking for differences and learning more about other parts of the country. And I loved it when I got here, and I never quit loving it. The way it worked out in the long run, it was ideal because I didn't have a home. After we got married, I had my headquarters here at the Del Camino Motel, which was the best place in town. And they took messages for me, phone messages and everything. And I used that as my headquarters and traveled up and down the border plus Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Everywhere.

KN: Tell me about the Del Camino and what that was like back then.

DS: It was the finest place in town. Best restaurant in town. They had different bull fighting things there like uniforms of some of the best bull fighters that ever lived. And it was a great place. They had swimming pool. We actually went swimming in December. Now, Bobby doesn't want to swim unless it's heated, well heated all year round.

KN: So you came back to El Paso, you and Bobby returned back to El Paso. And you continued to travel for eight months, is that what you said?

DS: Yes. Well, she was pregnant, so she went back to New York, had Steve, our first child at the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital.

KN: Were you at the hospital?

DS: Yes.

KN: Okay. How did that change your lives, having your first child?

DS: Well, first of all, I wanted a son for my first child, and I said to Bobby ahead of time, if we have a son for our first child, I wouldn't say it today, but that was my thinking then. Everyone wanted sons pretty much. Fathers wanted them so they could work or for whatever reason. But I said if our first child is a son, I'm going to get you a mink stole from my father, and they were worth fortunes in those days like \$3,000.00, \$4,000.00, \$5,000.00 and now worth \$40,000.00 or \$50,000.00. So everybody was happy with our first son.

KN: Excellent.

DS: And we loved him, and he was good looking and healthy, and what more could you want?

KN: What did you do? Did you –

DS: We didn't plan on having a child. And Bobby wanted to travel with me for a couple of years, and then raise a family. But as luck would have it, she got pregnant the first year, and we have wonderful children and grandchildren.

KN: So how many years did you sell as a manufacturer rep? How many years did you do that for?

DS: I was selling in the '50s and went into my own business. Probably about 12 years.

KN: Okay. So tell me about going into your own business. When did that start?

DS: I started my own business in the '60s, and my earnings before I went into my own business was as I told you, equivalent to making a couple of million a year. And I wouldn't make that much my first year in business, but it gave me another challenge, more excitement. And I went into business with Leon Majors and set up a contract plant by the name of Don Leon at 1704 Texas Street. I

still own the building. And Leon Majors, my partner, knew everything about the inside end of the business. I knew nothing. I didn't even work for one day at a garment company. I went right out on the road and started selling. And Leon knew everything about it.

He could take a sewing machine apart and put it back together. He could run a cutting room. He could cut garments. He could sew garments. He was great at maintenance, and people liked him. And he was able to develop a crew to get rolling on, and we were making stretch garments and started the name American Stretch doing the stretch garments. And he was working only for my company, American Stretch. Don Leon was the production end of American Stretch, which was the sales end. And the first year, we made pretty good money. I kept my [inaudible], so my income didn't go down. But we sold \$6 million worth of goods year 1, which is not bad for any company, especially then when – did I say \$6 million. It's wrong, \$600,000.00. It's like \$6 million today.

It was \$600,000.00. I want to correct myself. It's an important thing. And at the end of the first year, I decided to go into manufacturing in a larger scale, and I was selling hosiery at the same time that I was selling my own line. And a gentleman from Reading, Pennsylvania who was born in Europe and was Czechoslovakian and was making hosiery in Czechoslovakia and was very, very successful at it. But the Nazis tried to take over, and he had to leave without getting killed. And what did he leave for? Instead of America, he went to Cuba. And he set up a hosiery plant in Cuba, and there was no danger of getting killed in Cuba, but Castro took over everything. Everything he could.

And Douglas Rose was his name, and he wound up luckily, there's so much luck in my life and his life, he dropped a machine off a truck, and he had insurance, \$25,000.00 worth of insurance. So he left for America, and Reading was the capitol hosiery manufacturing capitol of the world. And he set up a little company and could do a lot of great production work. He found me. He came to El Paso to meet me, and asked me to take on his line. I said, "You came at the right time because along the border, hosiery is a tremendous seller." And besides that, it enticed me because my whole hosiery line could be in an attaché case. The line others were selling garments outside of my own, you had to carry big bags around selling garments. So this is perfect.

So I gave up some garment lines and took his lineup. And there were colors that hardly anyone could make. He was a genius on

everything in hosiery. One of the first ones in pantyhose. And there was a color along the border by the name of Sangria De Pecho. It was a vivid, bright color that the Mexicans loved, and he was able to duplicate it. And I was able to merchandise his line and sell a lot of goods. And within one year, I got together with him building a multimillion dollar business. And I was sorry to leave him, but I said I have to because I've got to make the new companies we've seen.

And you know anybody to replace you, and I said I'll look. So he was out looking himself in Dallas. One of my clients, he went in to him, and he said to this client, he said, "I need help. Don Shapiro went into his own business. And I'd like to know if you can find another Don Shapiro in selling." He said, "You don't have to look any further." So Douglas says, "Why? Who do you have for me?" He said, "Nobody because there's no one like him." And I stayed in the garment business with Don Leon and built a business from a small one to eventually an over \$45 million business. And we hit our peak, we were doing 80,000 garments a week.

KN: Okay. Let's back up a little bit when you first started. Did you encounter any problems when you first began? Any access to capital issues, money?

DS: Yeah. Money was the only problem. We had a very good start with the right guy in production working for me. And when I first came to El Paso, I had a net worth of \$40.00 working door to door selling. And then I was successfully selling, and my income went up. And when I wanted to start a manufacturing company, I needed more money than I had. And there was a bank in El Paso by the name of Sam Young, El Paso National Bank. And I had a little experience with the bank. They were lending me money to buy my car when I needed it. And I went to the committee at El Paso National Bank, and they said, "What are you asking for?" And I said, "Fifty thousand dollars."

And I started the company, and I had a balance sheet with plenty of customers. I really didn't have much of a balance sheet but aluminum. But I had the ability to earn a lot of money, which I was doing. And Jimmy **Onick**, who is a great guy and he was on the committee, he said, "I'm sorry, but the committee turned you down." I said, "What will I do?" And he said, "Well, they turned you down. They won't give you enough money to start a company."



KN: Did they say why they turned you down?

DS: Credit. My credit didn't warrant what I was asking for in their opinion, which was logical. They weren't me. They were afraid that if they stuck their neck out, Sam Young would slap them down. But what happened later, I became very friendly with Sam Young just saying hello. And I'd come up and tell him what I was doing. And I showed him where I opened up J.C. Penney, and I started a new company, and I was having goods made for me both here and in other areas. And I said, "I feel it's right to let you know that I've got to leave the bank." And he said, "Why?" I said, "Because I wanted to start my company, and I know I'm going to make it.

And I've showed you what I'm doing. And I asked them for \$50,000.00, and I they turned me down. I just wanted to give you the courtesy to let you know I'm going to go wherever I have to go to get the money." And that struck a chord with him. And he said, "How much did you need?" "Fifty thousand." He said, "Well, you've got it. I'm going to lend you another \$10,000.00." I said, "But the committee turned me down." He said, "I don't care about the committee, I'm lending you the money." Which was the most remarkable thing to happen to me in banking then or ever since. Today, it's a different world.

KN: Why did he do that, do you think?

DS: Why did he do what?

KN: Why did Sam Young do that? Why did he go and just say I'll give you –

DS: Because he had guts, and he knew I'd make it. He had confidence in me. He had no fear of doing it. He told me about Hilton who he financed when he needed money bad. He was almost broke. And Kaiser who set up the automobile company. He was very proud of people that he would start small and grow big, which I later on did.

KN: So once you received that influx of money, what did you do on the production and manufacturing side?

DS: I put it all into the company and bought fabrics, and put money into equipment that we needed. And we were making only a few items, mainly stretch garments. And ironically, my No. 1 salesman went to start his own company. His name is Barry Smith. He happened to be a bright guy and a good salesman. He started his

own company making jeans. So it opened my eyes that jeans are not a bad thing, and we started doing it on a very, very small scale. Barry Smith went bankrupt in less than a year. And we went to an auction and bought the machinery and the fabrics and the thread. Whatever we needed for our manufacturing company.

KN: Why do you think you succeeded and Barry Smith failed?

DS: Well, the main thing was the company all went into the right things, and I bought it for a song, so that didn't hurt. I bought it for pennies on the dollar. If I bought it in the open market, I would have had to pay more. But that was a big help. And the other help was that Leon Majors, my friend and partner, was making jeans for 30 years. He was with Man Manufacturing and Billy the Kid, and he knew his business. So the combination of me getting a lot of things at a low price, his manufacturing ability, and my selling ability. It was an unbeatable combination. Nobody could beat it.

KN: Why did you all choose each other as partners, you and Leon? How did you know?

DS: Leon? He was a genius at what he did. I needed someone like that. He was highly recommended. He was running a little contract plant that couldn't make it. And everybody recommended him. He was a great mechanic. He could do everything.

KN: Let's go back a little bit about your first business and how you started. Why did you decide to go into business for yourself?

DS: Because I felt that – let me pause for a minute. I felt I'd have more excitement and more control, which I wound up having for many, many years. And I felt I could be more creative, and I didn't have to listen to anybody else. I made my own calls, and I could stand on my own ideas and work ethics.

KN: Who encouraged you to start your own business?

DS: My father didn't encourage me. He said I was making so much money selling, why take the risk. Because he did for a good many years, but he was comparing it to the fur business, which was not a good business. He wound up losing everything in manufacturing. And he said if you're making so much money, which I was and I would have continued, why take the risk?

KN: Why did you?

DS: I'm a natural born risk taker. And like I told you, the excitement was greater, and I felt I had better control and could do whatever I wanted to, which I did for a while, but not forever.

KN: How did you determine the need for the business, opening the manufacturing?

DS: It was obvious. Well, the manufacturing people and clothing, almost every one of them did very well with or without ability.

KN: Okay. So you opened American Stretch, and then you bought out Mr. Smith, and then what happened? What business did you open?

DS: Well, then I bought a label, Action West. And Dick Rosen started a company that also didn't succeed making jeans. And someone had a use, by the name of Marty Kahn, he was a good salesman, but a con man. And Dick didn't do well. He meant well. He tried hard. He worked hard. And he didn't make it. He asked me if I would pay \$1,000.00 for the name Action West and all the labels and everything that went along with it. And I told him you got a deal. And we used that forever. Could I get another drink of water? Do you want to do that right now?

KN: Yeah. Let's go ahead. Can you share that story with us one more time?

DS: There were a lot of adventures for newly married couple, Bobby and I. And as I said, we only knew each other six weeks, then travelled. And I was selling, outside of the two weeks off at New Orleans, I was travelling on the road and selling. Should I do that now?

KN: Yeah. Go ahead.

DS: And Bobby made a trip with me through west Texas. We stopped where I picked cotton in the town of Roscoe, and I drove up with Bobby, and I was driving brand new car. And Mr. Schlanski, this is only two years later, gave us the cotton sack, so we sold it back to him and left because my friend didn't want to work more than one day as a cotton picker. And I drove back with Bobby to sell to Bernie Schlanski who sold ladies wear and girls wear and menswear at a general store in Texas. And I walked in the store, and I told him I just wanted to say hello, and I have line, and I'm married, and I'd like you to meet my wife. He came running out.

He wanted to see what kind of a car I was driving if I had a line, and he expected the worst. And he said, "Oh my God, Don

Shapiro, in two years, you went from a cotton sack to a Cadillac.” And later on in life, Bobby said that would be a great name for a book.

KN: It would absolutely. Absolutely. What else did you learn by being on the road for so long?

DS: I’m sorry?

KN: What did you learn – what kind of sales tips did you learn while being on the road for so long?

DS: Well, Bobby brings up the story I went into Eagle Pass, Texas like the first month we were married. And the manager was Vander Newman. And I brought the line in and went through it. For one thing, she was surprised that I didn’t talk like a New York garment center salesman. They were good, but in a very different way. They were called garment center guys, and they dressed sharp, looked sharp, had a shine. And a lot of them were high pressure. And I was the opposite because I felt I could learn a lot more by listening, which is good for my nature anyway. And I was working with Vander Newman,

I wasn’t trying – showed him the whole line. He said okay, I like this, this, and this. He gave me an order. He said, “I’d like to buy this.” I said, “Don’t buy it.” And Bobby couldn’t believe because these guys would load up on everything they could. And he said, “Why not?” I said, “I don’t think it will sell.” So what I did is create confidence like few other salesmen ever did because I was in tune with the need of the buyer, and I felt by doing the right thing with them, I’ll get more permanent business ongoing.

KN: Did you –

DS: That was my theory of selling, which a lot of them got into that later, but they didn’t believe in it then.

KN: Did you have any mentors while you were growing up that kind of helped to guide you to learn?

DS: Well, actually I bought a book like my first year of selling. I bought a book written by an insurance salesman. His name was Frank Vecture. He was also an ex major league baseball player, first year. And I read the book, and it had a lot of very good ideas. Basics that were true. The name of it was *How I Raised Myself From Failure to Success in Selling*. And he had a whole series of

things that made sense, mainly perseverance. Never quit. And that's my attitude. It always has been my attitude in selling. Even when I was selling in Harlem. Never quit, and I totally believed in what he wrote, and the things were very sensible.

In the beginning, there was a lot of the things that he used to be successful as a ball player, which I could relate to. It took a lot of perseverance to be a major league baseball player or any sport that I ever got into. Like wrestling took a lot of perseverance and never quit. Those were some of the first things I ever learned about selling and business. And it goes right on through.

KN: Okay. Let's talk a little bit about your business. Let's start with the Don Leon Productions. What did you learn from that venture?

DS: I'm sorry, from what?

KN: From your first business? What did you learn from your first business that you started?

DS: Well, actually, when I was a manufacturer's rep, that was really my first business. And I travelled and used the same idea to sell people what they want, they'll reorder on. But a lot of the manufacturers back east wouldn't give credit to the people in Mexico because it was not easy to check. And the factors, none of them would give credit to them. So I set up my own factoring company. That was really, outside of being a manufacturer's representative, which is a business, I added on being a factor, like a banker and checking my own credit. If I knew the people well, and I did, I would call on them and if they couldn't check credit, I'd say okay.

I'll give you 30 days, but I made 3 percent factoring commission. And that was one of my first thing I ever did was be a manufacturers rep and being a factor for my own accounts. And after that, I became a manufacturer. So one thing led to another.

KN: What made you make that transition into manufacturing?

DS: Necessity.

KN: Okay.

DS: Necessity because I didn't want to lose business, so I became a banker. And I didn't want to work for one company, so I became a manufacturer's rep, which gave me control and more money.

KN: Okay. Let's talk a little bit about American Stretch, and can you tell me a little bit about that product and what you did?

DS: Well, right after I met – I was selling stretch garments. When I met Leon and went into business, he had the capability of manufacturing all this items. And we bought machinery and some of the money I borrowed from Sam Young was used to set up a plant, set up machinery and equipment, and buy fabrics.

KN: Okay.

DS: And that's how we got started in that business.

KN: Okay.

DS: And it was successful on a very small scale. And later on, I explained how I went from there to the jean business.

KN: Okay. Can you tell me about how you went from there to the jean business?

DS: I thought you covered that.

KN: That's okay. Let's do it one more time.

DS: Okay. I went from American Stretch to the jean business because my No. 1 salesman by the name of Barry Smith went into manufacturing jeans.

KN: Okay.

DS: And he went bankrupt in a little under a year, and I saw the opportunity in jeans in 1974, and I wound up going to an auction and buying everything that was auctioned off. Equipment, fabrics, labels, everything.

KN: Okay.

DS: And shortly after that, another friend of mine didn't make it in jean making, and I bought his label, Action West. So we had everything to start and run by having all the ingredients, together with Leon Majors who is a tremendous mechanic and production guy.

KN: What did you see about the jean manufacturing as the potential?

DS: Young people loved it. I thought it had a great future, and you had to do everything right. Color, fit, styling, everything. And then

when it got a little difficult here, we went right into Mexico and opened jean companies in Mexico.

KN: How did it get difficult here?

DS: The competition got more important, and price became more important. By going to Mexico, we saved a lot of money.

KN: Okay. Let's talk about when you first started Action West, and you started making jeans. Can you tell me a little bit about that process?

DS: Well, it was a natural because Leon knew how to do it all from a manufacturing viewpoint. And all I had to do was go out and meet the people that I knew for many years, and sell them. And I started selling bigger and better people at that time. And our jean business kept growing and growing to the point that the union beat Willy Farah, which was a big misfortune because Willy Farah did more for his people than anybody ever did in any business. But they beat him by the secondary boycott because they handcuffed the retailers and wouldn't let his trucks deliver. So I learned something on that. And then we were doing very, very well, and the International Ladies Garment Workers tried to organize us.

And I connected with a lawyer from L.A., a labor lawyer, Fred Richmond, and he set up a plan that we could win with. And part of the plan was to meet every group of workers one on one and as groups, and I did. They liked me, they liked my message. One of my messages was Willy Farah had maybe 12,000 employees. He did a lot for his people. They liked him. The union won, and there was no Farah anymore.

KN: Can you tell me how you prevented or how your relationship with your employees, that they did not want a union?

DS: Well, they liked me. We treated them right. And one thing I learned at NYU, not a lot in school but always have an open door policy. And one of the lawyers said always do that. Always communicate. Had an open door policy. I told them that in my speech. Every one of you, every day, had a right to come in on any grievance. You don't need the union if I'm giving you that opportunity.

KN: Would they come in?

DS: Yes.

KN: And what would they tell you?

DS: Whatever the grievance was, and we cured it.

KN: Were you able to fix the grievances, if there were any?

DS: Always.

KN: Okay. When you started, did you have a business plan? When you first started?

DS: Well, I had a selling plan when I first started. That was to become the most successful salesman in the garment industry and the entire southwest. I achieved the goal. The business plan was to do the right thing and make money and utilize all the resources that I was lucky enough to have.

KN: Did you have any obstacles when you first started your business?

DS: There was always obstacles.

KN: What was your biggest obstacle?

DS: Well, one of them was restraint to trade. Like some of the big manufacturers were afraid of me, and they went to the suppliers and wanted them to not sell me. And there were some of the manufacturers that wouldn't, and it might have broken the law, but I wouldn't call – the President of America happened to be Linden Johnston. And I didn't speak to him, and I spoke to his Deputy Chamber of Commerce Director, and the message got through, and letters went out. And I got help.

KN: What kind of help?

DS: By having the government put a lot of pressure on the mills. They couldn't stop selling me. They had to sell me or be investigated heavily.

KN: I notice that you usually call the person at the top. Is that a pattern or is that –

DS: That's an absolute pattern. In fact, when I started selling the big chains in west Texas, one was C.R. Anthony, I went right to the office of C.R. Anthony, and I told them what I could do. And he did it. He said meet this one, meet that one. He turned me on to the right people, and I wasn't afraid to use his name, and it worked. If I started from the bottom, and went over there head, then I was



out. But if you start from the top, they can't hurt you by saying you're going over my head because my message is coming from the No. 1 guy. That worked in politics and a lot of things and business and banking.

KN: Can you tell me what factors helped your business grow?

DS: I'm sorry?

KN: What factors helped your business grow?

DS: Picking the right people, for one. Communicating with everyone that I worked with, and building capital by doing the best I can for them. I put myself in their position, and I didn't care whether I made a sale or not, it had to be the right sale.

KN: How would you choose the right people?

DS: To sell or to work for me?

KN: Both.

DS: Well, selling, I mean, it's a known fact who the big buyers are, and I picked them. And I was lucky in picking the right people as bosses like Leon Majors who ran production. And later on, financial people that helped in finance. And I was lucky, I got the right people and I did the right thing from there.

KN: Did you go with your gut when you hired people?

DS: To a large extent and investigating, but it was more of a gut feeling.

KN: Tell me about possibly being the largest jean manufacturer in the country. Can you tell me about that time period?

DS: Yeah. Well, what date was on that?

KN: 1974, I believe.

DS: Well, that's when the Gunther Jean business started, but they weren't big in production with Willy Farah who at one time was the biggest jean manufacturer in the world. And that went back to the '50s and '60s. And then after the jeans started here, it started around the '60s, I got in in the '70s. But everyone big came here because the labor situation was right. They could do business if

they wanted to, and the laborer – unions were not strong. They started to get strong with Willy. And I told you about my case where I went through talking to everybody, and they voted. The unions can't win unless they vote.

And 85 percent of the workers here voted for me. When it came to Willy Farah, they all wanted to vote for Willy, but Willy said don't vote for me. They said why, because secondary boycott, they won't take my goods and the company will go under unless we capitulate to the union. And they voted for him, and the business went out anyway later on. But he tried to do the right things for the workers by saying vote for them and keep your jobs. Unfortunately, it didn't work out.

KN: Describe to me why you decided to go into Mexico.

DS: I'm sorry?

KN: Tell me why you wanted to go into Mexico. Why you took your plants into Mexico.

DS: For one thing, it was a hedge against the unions. And prices were lower. And I felt we had a big future there, and it was so close. And they were very good at what they were doing. They were good sewers.

KN: Did you have any problems in Mexico while you were there?

DS: Very few. The one main problem was the union. The CTM, which was the biggest union in Mexico, that was one problem. The other problem was very, very minor. There was a legal problem. I thought I had problems with the legal laws of Mexico. For example, if you fire somebody, you have to keep them for six months whether they're right or wrong. And one guy was wrong, and we fired him. And we wound up working through my lawyers, his lawyers, the government. The bottom line was we settled for \$1,000.00. I love the laws in Mexico. They were much better than here because here people can sue you, and they're wrong.

I mean, there they were wrong and I was right, but they settled. Here they may settle but they're going to cause me to spend money. And a lot of times, we settled cases, but we were right. Shouldn't have because of the nature of the law. But in both cases, we beat the union. In Mexico, I won, ironically, 85 percent of the workers voted for Don Shapiro and not the union.

KN: Tell me about your most successful years with Action West.

DS: Mostly in the '80s when we built our business up to making 80,000 a week, and we had a good run. But I made money every year for about 30 years. Towards the end, it all stopped when the big retailers got involved, and everything was going to China. And we opened up factories there. We did contract work in China. The control factor, which was extremely important to me, didn't happen anymore because I had difficulty controlling things in China. Mexico was not a problem. And the other thing was controlling the big retailers.

So I wound up going against my gut feeling, which was sell a lot of people, and you couldn't do it anymore because the big retailers like Wal-Mart were putting them out of business. We were selling Wal-Mart. Selling all the big ones, but I didn't have control over them like I did with hundreds of retailers. It wound up where we had a very small percentage of retailers in America, which is very bad. And every manufacturer lost a lot of control. And I'm sure other industries did as well.

KN: Do you attribute that that was the downfall, was the loss of other retailers?

DS: I'm sorry?

KN: Do you attribute that for the downfall, the loss of other retailers being able to sell your product?

DS: Retailers had too much power, we sold it. We did a lot of business. But the control was not there, they could, for example, hold up shipments and cost the supplier a lot of money. And I didn't like any part of that. It's one of the reasons I sold out.

KN: Tell me about the role –

DS: Even the successful ones now. Dave Greenburg was one of my salesman and a very good friend. He had built a very big business, and he's still in business. But he's controlled a lot from the big retailers who call their shots and don't really respect the manufacturers like they did. Another thing retailers did, not to me but to other manufacturers like the big ones like Macy's and all the other big ones, they would tell the manufacturer we'll buy your line. We'll put it in, but if there's a mark down, you have to take 45 percent of the mark down.

Dillard's was famous for that, and they forced manufacturers either had to cut them out or be responsible for 45 percent of the mark down. I never bought that idea.

KN: Can you tell me the role your family has played with your business?

DS: They've been very big working for me except Bobby. And emotionally, everyone was together and working together. And we had a lot of fun. And took vacations together, and it was a great life for a lot of years. They were totally supportive. Everybody was in the family.

KN: Can you tell me the role of each child, and what they did?

DS: Lori was our designer. She was an artist and painter and our designer. Her ideas were tremendous. And my son, Randy, was operations manager. Steve was involved in sales and opened up a lot of very important people. And I was still involved in sales and merchandising, but they took over a lot of that. I was overseeing everything. We never really had an argument. I would listen to what they had to say and had the final say, but in most cases, it didn't matter because we practically agreed on everything because we had a common goal.

KN: Which was?

DS: To make money and treat people right and stay in business for a long time.

KN: So let's talk about when you actually transitioned the business, when you sold your business, Action West. What made you decide to sell it?

DS: I saw the handwriting on the wall.

KN: Which was?

DS: Which was too much power in the hands of the retailers. Profits were not that good partly because of the powerful retailers. And profits were not there, and we just saw the handwriting on the wall that it was a good time to get out. And we had a couple of money losing years. Out of 30, I think the last couple of years showed losses. It was the right time to sell out, but we had a hell of a run.

KN: Tell me a little bit about your showrooms that you had.

DS: We had beautiful showrooms. Bobby helped in setting them all up. We had a great showroom in New York with a penthouse. You could walk out in the outside, and we had a beautiful one in Dallas at [inaudible] property, the Apparel Mart. And we had one at the L.A. Mart, and the Las Vegas Mart.

KN: And why were those showrooms important?

DS: Because we meet new people, and a lot of the companies gave their buyers buying power, and they'd spend it at the Mart.

KN: What do you attribute your success in being so good in selling your product? Why were you successful?

DS: Well, it came down to selling anything, and the basics are the same whether it's my product or someone else's and trying to put in something that will sell. But the main thing is get inside the mind of your buyer, do a lot of listening, and find out what they really want, and get them what they want.

KN: Did you meet often with your staff at Action West?

DS: Yes.

KN: How often did you meet?

DS: Almost every day, but they were not long meetings. I didn't like meetings.

KN: And what would you tell them?

DS: I would listen and find out what they had to tell me and find common ground where we could help each other.

KN: Did you also play a role in the production side as well?

DS: No.

KN: No?

DS: I tried to find the best production people I ever could, and I didn't play a role other than bringing the business in. But if you're bringing a lot of business in, it makes their life a lot easier.

KN: Okay. Did you meet regularly with your production people? Did they tell you their needs?

DS: Well, it was mostly with salesmen, but I met daily with our production people.

KN: You did?

DS: Every day.

KN: Okay. Did you go into colored jeans as well?

DS: Yeah. In fact, the pictures you saw show a lot of colors. They did that big article where color was king, and they did the articles on all of our family, which you're entitled to look at, photograph. You have their permission to do whatever you want to do with them.

KN: And what made you decide to go into color jeans? Did you see that coming?

DS: I saw the trend coming.

KN: How did you know about trends?

DS: Lori had her eyes open every day about trends, fashion, color, fit, everything.

KN: Did Lori come to you about trends and talk to you about them?

DS: Always, on a daily basis. She was a big part of merchandising as well as designing. And the two go hand in hand.

KN: Okay. What was your decision – you decided to sell Action West. Was that a tough decision to make?

DS: No. It was very easy because things, as I explained, we had a long run, but it was ending. I could see it. All I had to do was find the right buyer, and the price, had I sold at our peak, it would have been much, much greater. But the kids were in the business. I didn't want to – they had great jobs and making great salaries. And I was doing well, I had no reason to sell until the business took a turn for the worst, and the whole industry did. And evidentially, I made the right decision because I sold out in '03, and five years later, there was no industry here anymore. Everybody pulled out.

KN: So who did you sell Action West to?

DS: Fred Sternburg. He was one of our suppliers in China and lived in Florida. And he bought it, and put me on a great contract. That's how Coronado Consulting started was out of consulting contracts.

KN: Okay. Tell me about that. And that's a business that's fairly open –

DS: A three year contract with a very good salary. Randy and Steve had great contracts. My salesman in New York had an ongoing contract. He was a commissioned man. And ours were great contracts. And I kept all the buildings and sold him all the business, giving him an opportunity. But it was, unfortunately, a tough opportunity. He lasted only one year. And our contracts didn't last any longer. It didn't matter because with all the buildings, built a terrific renting business.

KN: So tell me about –

DS: I have seven buildings now.

KN: You have seven buildings?

DS: And we're operating every one of the buildings.

KN: And what do you –

DS: He had two of the buildings himself, but he left. I replaced him with other tenants who were doing very well.

KN: So the transition into Coronado Consulting, what did that entail for you? How did it change for you?

DS: Well, I wasn't running it anymore.

KN: Okay.

DS: But I gave all my ideas, any way I could help I would to Mr. Sternburg.

KN: Okay. So you had the real estate still?

DS: Oh, I kept all the real estate. That was never an issue. They never had it.

KN: Why did you keep the real estate?

DS: I kept it.

KN: Why?

DS: Because it's the greatest business in the world.

KN: Tell me about that.

DS: That's another story. When I was traveling on the road, I traveled to Phoenix a lot. I decided being a land speculator in Phoenix because I had money to invest in. So instead of doing the stock market, I started being a land speculator in Phoenix. I only did it on three deals. They all made plenty of money. Outside of Phoenix on the north side where it was growing that way. I saw Phoenix growing in that direction, and I bought land in that direction.

KN: What did you learn from those transactions?

DS: That real estate is great and forget about the stock market, and invest in real estate. Then later on, I invested in buildings. Only buildings that I could use. I didn't invest in other buildings, but we wound up buying eight buildings and using them all.

KN: While you had Action West?

DS: As part of Action West.

KN: Okay.

DS: And then later on, I sold a couple but kept seven that I have now, and I'm renting them now.

KN: Okay. Tell me how did you learn about real estate? Just through the transaction deal?

DS: It wasn't by accident, it was through my retailers, and they showed me deals where they were making more money in land than they were in their retail. One of them was Ramos Sarconi, a very colorful Italian guy from Italy, and he had Sarconi's Store in Tucson. And later on, his son became big in music and was a Carnegie Hall musician. And he made a lot of money. He made more money in real estate than his retail business. But I saw little retailers doing well. Everyone did well in Phoenix at that time



table. It's not that way anymore. It's worse than anyplace in America right now. I hit it right.

Timing has been my luck and my failings. A lot of it is luck, being at the right place at the right time.

KN: For Coronado Consulting, what made you decide to start renting out the space? I mean, is it one large space?

DS: I had no choice. I was renting. After we weren't doing so much business, I rented space out. And after Fred Sternburg pulled out, while the contract was on, he pulled out and went to New Jersey and Florida where he lived. And I had no choice. I had to rent the properties.

KN: Did you rent the whole building?

DS: I rented one building completely, and one building partial, and later on, filled in all of it. They're not all rented now. When real estate is not as good as it was when I went in originally. But it's still good at making money.

KN: So let's also talk about out of Coronado Consulting, you have another business that you started in 2003, Coronado Construction? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

DS: Coronado Construction is a roofing company, and while I was owning the buildings and renting them, I had a lot of trouble finding an honest and good roofer because most of them wouldn't come back. Every building, even homeowners will tell you, when things went wrong, you couldn't find them. So I started doing in house work with my own people. And then later on, I had to get people more sophisticated. And by accident, I met some people – should I tell Bobby's story?

KN: That's a great story.

DS: I was buying a product at Home Depot, and a guy in the roofing business introduced me to two guys that were very knowledgeable as roofers, and they were homeless. So I put them on to try them out. They knew their business very well on working roofs. And I found a spot for them in one of my buildings where I set up a place for them where they could live, and I paid them, of course, what the right wage was. And they helped me get rolling. And one of them is working for me in maintenance, and the other is not

working for me, but I wound up finding crews that were spectacular.

And today, I've got an associate who knows every end of the roofing business, and we're working very well together and doing business every day. I have more than one crew, but one of them is very good on very large transactions. And I bring in major business on large projects right now.

KN: How did you get into roofing?

DS: Well, the way that I told you, after my own buildings being in maintenance, and we were doing such a good job that other people came to us to do their roofs.

KN: So they approached you and asked you?

DS: Yes, they did.

KN: And did you see this as an –

DS: I took every job. Every job that was given to me, I've taken. And we still are.

KN: Did you see this as an opportunity?

DS: Great opportunity because we treat people right, which I learned very early in the game when I was selling, we never lied to people, we never failed to show up when there was a problem.

KN: What have you learned through this business of Coronado Construction?

DS: I learned that the basics are the same in every business.

KN: Which are?

DS: Well, it's doing the right thing, work hard and make a lot of sales, and treat people like you were selling yourself.

KN: Okay.

DS: And never give up, perseverance has got to be there always.

KN: We're kind of wrapping it up, and there's just a few more questions. Have you ever experienced any type of discrimination?

DS: Have I what?

KN: Experienced any type of discrimination or any problems with people or anything?

DS: Never because I don't discriminate. Actually, there was one law suit. This was a bogus law suit. It was sexual harassment, and we had a lot of people would come in on bogus cases, and we'd sometimes settle it. And this lady was fired for whatever reason. She was a financial lady in our financial had fired her, and they had built up a case against us. And they couldn't do it on treating her wrong. The case was on sexual harassment that never happened. They were accusing, not me, but people that worked for me.

And the bottom line is, she was guilty of sexual harassment. She would bring tapes in and play them, and they were bad and all that. The case was all ours. And we went to Court, and she hired a good lawyer and depositions and all that. And finally, she could never prove her case and never would, but I didn't want to go on and on and on wasting my time, my employee's, and wound up settling a bogus case.

KN: Did you have any dealings with the Small Business Administration while you were growing your business?

DS: Yeah. We borrowed some money from SBA to make our business bigger. And Cindy Arnold was the head banana, and she was having some problems with manufacturers. And we had a meeting that was on TV and in the papers about not having the right thing done with them by some manufacturers. I sided with her. The other manufacturers there said they were only trying to help their people, trying to do the right thing. They want to make a living. She's not doing anything wrong. So we became lifelong friends after that.

KN: Can you tell me, are you a member –

DS: That is the Mohara Brothers, I don't think they're doing much now, but they were?

KN: Are you a member of the Chamber of Commerce?

DS: No, but one of my best friends runs it, Bridgett Dade.

KN: Okay.

DS: I may join. I'm not against it, but it didn't tie in. The need did not tie in for us, but it does for a lot of people.

KN: Okay. Can you tell me about your community involvement in the community?

DS: Bobby's much more involved than I am. But I did get involved with the History Museum with the lady who runs it who is very good, very talented with what she does. And I walked into the History Museum one time, and I saw something regarding an anti Farah poster in the museum. And it turned me off. And I spoke to the powers that be at that time, it was not who is there now. And they told me they agreed with me, they'll see what they can do. But they never did anything. And when the new lady started, she had a belief to do the right thing. And incidentally, while the bad things with Farah were in the museum, the positives about us [inaudible].

But it didn't matter, I didn't like Farah being mistreated when they were so good. So she said, "Well, what can we do about it?" I said, "I'll tell you what we can do about it. I'm going to have Jimmy come in, if you're willing to meet him. He's the ex President of Farah, and let's see what can be done." Bottom line was that Jimmy did a good job, she did a good job. Other people, including, Adare Margo helped out, and they decided to do something about it. And Jimmy called me and said, "Boy. You gave me some assignment here."

But the windup was they invited Farah people to come in and say what's going on. Four hundred of them showed up, and they served dinner and everything else. And it was a tremendous success. And the museum opened with the idea of open arms. And they have big Farah displays right now.

KN: Okay. Can you tell me a –

DS: It was an idea, and then Bobby said, "You know what? You come up with ideas, you make other people do all the work." And she did a lot of work on the project.

KN: She did as well? Looking back on your business, would you have done anything differently?

DS: I'm sorry?

KN: Looking back on your business, your several businesses, would you have done anything differently?

DS: Well, I made a lot of mistakes. I would try not to make the mistakes that I made.

KN: What were some of your mistakes?

DS: Everybody makes mistakes every day.

KN: True. We all do.

DS: I mean, every day you might make a mistake, but what I did, if I made mistakes, I would address them. And there was stress involved, but I was able to handle the stress better than anyone I know. And instead of grieving on mistakes, I would try to correct them and use them to my advantage.

KN: What advice would you offer a young entrepreneur starting in today's world?

DS: Can I stay with the other question first?

KN: Sure, go ahead.

DS: Like every bad thing that happens, can have a silver lining. And you can capitalize on the bad things that are happening and learn from them and do what you can. So I can't say I regretted from my mistakes, even though some of them were wrong, I tried to correct them. And major mistakes, I just tried to correct them and not dwell on them. But there was a lot of stress when we were having problems getting the deal done with the factors. I'd say the worst problems I had I could have avoided because I needed the factors. Towards the end, they became very different. After my friend, Jerry Gumaldi, sold out, he was the head back in New York.

And we had a great run with him. He was like a Sam Young. And great with us and people he believed in. After he was out and other factors came in, they were very tough to deal with, and that's when I wanted out. Luckily, I was able to get out.

KN: Is this for funding issues you're talking about?

DS: Sorry?

KN: Out of Bank of New York, the funding to fund your business or line of credit?

DS: There were factors and a bank. So that to General Motors, and he ran that for a while. He sold that back in New York to General Motors, and then he sold out his contract for an enormous amount of money. When he was out, everything changed.

KN: How important is banking to any business today? I mean –

DS: I think they're less and less important.

KN: Tell me why.

DS: Because they don't give a damn about companies. Like the Joe Gurmaldi's are not in it anymore. Sam Youngs are not in it anymore. They only want the cold, hard companies that don't give a damn about anybody but themselves.

KN: How does that effect the business community itself?

DS: My business community?

KN: Right or just a business leader?

DS: As soon as the people got out that mattered, it had a difficult effect. The rapport was not there. The workings that they should be doing, they weren't doing. It was like a partner non functioning and drawing money. That's what the banks are today.

KN: Any advice to someone who needs a loan from the bank or anything?

DS: Good luck.

KN: A lot harder obviously. Is there anything that you'd like to share that we didn't capture through the questions that I missed? Any advice to young entrepreneurs starting their business today?

DS: Yeah. Well, I think we went through all of it. The main thing is do the right thing for your clients, and you'll own them forever. And the other thing is have a lot of perseverance. Never give up on anything. Do a lot of listening and a lot of studying of what's happening. And get into what you really enjoy doing. Don't get into things you hate like a lot of people do. If you love what you're doing, you'll succeed. And try to hire the right people.

Delegate the right ways, and do the best you can. But if you never give up, that has a lot to do with it.

And about retiring, I might reflect on that. Running two careers instead of retiring, and I could have a long time ago. And I feel anybody who has a talent in business, in show business, or art or anything, my advice to them is never retire.

KN: Tell me why.

DS: Because if you love what you're doing, you will enjoy it much more than retiring or spending your money having a good time. I've always had a good time in running a business or running two businesses like I've usually done.

KN: Do you love what you're doing right now?

DS: Oh, absolutely. Every minute of it. Especially what you and I and your people are doing right now. I love it.

KN: Okay.

DS: And you're doing a great job, and that's why I respect you, and I'm delighted to deal with you and your staff. You're great.

KN: Well, thank you. Any last words?

DS: Give me a hint.

KN: Any last reflections? You know, this is kind of the moment where people kind of look back on their life and think about, you know –

DS: Oh, I look back on my life from the time I was an infant, and there's hardly anything I'd change. I was lucky enough to – I mean, there were hard times like I mentioned financial, and towards the end, and going to China. Things didn't work out then. In fact, ironically, I sold out at the right time, but I sold out to Fred Sternburg. There were things happening, and he was one of my suppliers. And there were things like transshipping, which I wasn't knowingly doing, but it was happening. He did it, and the other Chinese guy I dealt with did it. And consequently, after I sold out, there were millions of dollars of goods that were stopped at the port, and they wouldn't let them across.

So I don't know how he got out of that problem. I tried to help him talking to political people to give him a break and let it happen

and all that. But these things were nothing in my doing, but it was a streak of luck that I sold out prior to that or I would have seen worse problems that I had ever know. But I've had a lot of good people. A lot of good family. A lot of good luck. And everything I did, I was happy to do it, and I was lucky to get out at the right time and get into real estate and roofing at the right time. It's all working out.

KN: It is. Thank you.

DS: Thank you for everything. You're wonderful.

KN: You're sweet. Okay. Continuation with Mr. Shapiro on July 20. Go ahead.

DS: We were talking about failures, and I wanted to let you know about the situation when I drove a brand new limousine, fully paid to deliver it to a Fort Worth car dealer. And the first one I spoke to was Mr. Baum who was the owner of the dealership. And I was a graduate accountant, and I wanted a selling job. And he said, "Well, we don't have any selling jobs, but if you could start in our bookkeeping department, we might consider giving you a selling job." So I started the bookkeeping department, and I had no interest at all in that. So at the end of the day, they found mistakes, and they fired me after one day.

And I didn't go back to sell cars, but probably the biggest mistake he ever made in his life firing me because I know I would have made him a fortune of money in his own business. If he hired me as a car salesman, I would have been a natural just like every other selling job I had. But I did feel bad because that's the only job I remember failing at and getting fired.

KN: What did you learn from that?

DS: The only other one that was close to it when I was in retailing here in El Paso. And Ben Schegman was the manager and a very tough guy. He didn't fire me, but he got on my case, and I quit. But that job was not for me. And what was your question?

KN: What did you learn from that experience?

DS: What I learned from that is try everything, and if it doesn't work, don't be afraid to get fired and don't dwell on it. Go on to what you do like.



KN: So go ahead and finish your story about in El Paso and the person, Ben, the dealings with him.

DS: Oh, Ben Schegman was a brilliant retailer from Boston in Franklin Store. And he hired both of us right away. And it got so that he was sometimes rude to the girls and to everybody. And I didn't like retailing anyway, so I got out of it.

KN: Okay. You also had a life guard story about being a life guard.

DS: When I was graduated and went into the Navy at 17 and went to NYU, I was a life guard during every summer. And one job I had was in Rockaway Beach where they have miles and miles of beach, thousands and thousands of people on the beach. A lot of them would drink and eat heavy. And at lunchtime, whenever we had lunch, they'd have problems. And I've had to go in there and save them. But we learned, and the way I got the job as a life guard and any other life guard did with the City of New York, tougher than any other place, I think except Australia.

And you had to swim in competition. You had to do everything that a life guard had to do, but you had to be fast and race in a quarter of a mile deal. And the guys, no matter how good they were, if they weren't fast, they weren't get hired. But they hired me, and I got the job on Rockaway Beach. And there were a lot of people getting in problems because the jetties had barnacles on them, and if someone got stuck on the jetty, you'd have to get them out at any cost. But the way we would do that, if they were heading towards the barnacled jetty, we would be aware of the currents.

And we would use, instead of being afraid of the current, we would use it to go around the end of the jetty and save their lives. And what happened, they taught us being a life guard never be afraid and never panic. Mainly never panic because if you do the right thing, part of it is grabbing the other person, take a deep breath, and take them underwater. And they're going to let go if they're drowning no matter how big or strong they are. If you know how to do that. And I learned never to swim against the tide. If you're out there and in trouble, take the tide as your ally, and come across on another beach, even if it's a mile away.

KN: What did you learn from life guarding?

DS: Sorry?

KN: What did you learn from life guarding, the job as a life guard?

DS: Never panic, for one thing.

KN: Did that help you later on in life?

DS: Oh, many times in life. And did I tell you the Galveston story? I didn't put that on tape? Well, one story I was telling you was in the mountains. And there was a lot of sand. And I was driving and selling in the mountain area. The other guys were in front of me, and there was a lot of sand and dust and I couldn't see anything. And I was edging off to the edge of the road, and luckily I sensed it when I got to the edge, and my car was halfway teetering off the cliff. And if I panicked, I would have been finished. What I did instead of trying to get out quick from the front door, I went over to the back top and got into the back seat, opened up the back door and walked out and called a tow service and got out of it.

But if I was to panic, I would have tried to get quickly out of the front door and forced the car over the cliff. My body weight made the difference.

KN: Any other life lessons that you'd like to share as we're ending?

DS: Yeah. The other one we can talk about. When I was traveling on the road, I was in Galveston, which was a gambling town. And I got into a poker game with, not with the house, but with some guys private game of our own. And I was doing good, and then I lost some money, and then I won it back. And one guy owed me \$20.00, and I didn't know if I'd ever see him again, so I said, "What about the \$20.00?" He said, "I want to pay you. I owe it. I'm not denying it. I have no money. If you come to my house, I'll give you \$20.00." So we both grabbed a cab to his house, neither one of us had a car. I went to his house in Galveston, and he opened the door and had me come in.

And he said, "I'm not going to pay you the \$20.00." And he pulled a gun on me. And he was about four feet away from me. He said, "I'm going to shoot you." And I didn't flinch, and I didn't blink, and I just looked at him to see what his move would be because if he made his move, I would have made my move. But I wasn't going to initiate it. And he threw the gun on the couch and he said, and he was much bigger than me. He said, "I can take you without the gun." So as soon as he said that, with my wrestling ability, I tackled him, knocked him on the ground, and was beating his face. And four friends came by. They just walked in after it.

They might have suspected something. They walked in the house, his roommates. They started to rip my shirt and trying to pull me off. I let them pull me off, and I figured that this is one \$20.00 bill I can live without. I don't need to fight four guys. And I walked out. They didn't try to fight me, hurt me, anything. That's the unusual part of the story. Today, they'd try to beat you up. They had four on one, which is really amazing.

KN: Absolutely. Okay. Thank you. Okay.

DS: El Paso Inc. has been very cooperative doing a whole story with the front page on me, and they're great people to work with. Tom Fenton is wonderful. And I told him one time before we even did this thing about my experience in Mexico City because when we were doing business in Mexico City, we had a deal with the politicians. They were all in one area. And I had to get a quota in order to run my company. And I had to get together with them and get the quota in order to do the job. And I had a meeting with politicians, and I was afraid I'd be late.

But in Mexico City, sometimes you raise your hand, and it's like 5 pesos. And the cab stops and puts you on, and you pay him. Take you where you want to go. So there was one guy driving, and I put my hand up. He stopped at a red light. So I got in the back of the car and said I want you to go here and there. I told him exactly where to go, so I could get to the main political place where they decide on quota. And he took me right to the door. I wasn't late. I couldn't find a cab anywhere, it was so crowded. So I said, he took me right to the door, and I said, "How much money do I owe you?" He said, "You don't owe me a penny." I said, "Why not?" He said, "I'm not a cab." He was probably afraid.

Tom Fenton said he was afraid of my commanding way of doing things, and he took me there. I don't know. He might have been just a nice guy. But he said, "You don't owe me anything, I'm not a cab driver."

KN: Okay.

**[End of Audio]**

**Duration: 131 minutes**