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## Interview no. 1502

Arnaldo Chavarria DDS

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University of Texas at El Paso

Institute of Oral History

Interviewee: Arnaldo Chavarria DDS

Interviewer: Kristine Navarro

Project: Paso del Norte Entrepreneurship Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: 3 December 2010

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Transcriber: GMR Transcription Services

**Biographical Synopsis of Interviewee:** Dr. Arnaldo Chavarria was born in 1960 in El Paso, Texas. His father was Armando Chavarria who worked for Farrah Manufacturing and his mother Ramona Chavarria was a homemaker and cared for her nine children. Dr. Chavarria attended Hart Elementary, Guillen Middle School, Bowie High School and Ysleta High School. He has an associate's degree in applied science with a major in dental hygiene from El Paso Community College. Dr. Chavarria is a graduate of the University of Texas at San Antonio School of Dentistry. Dr. Chavarria is married to Helen and they have two children. Dr. Chavarria is a dentist in El Paso.

**Summary of Interview:** Dr. Chavarria is the sixth child in a line of nine siblings. After graduating from high school, Dr. Chavarria briefly worked at a factory before applying and getting accepted to the El Paso Community College Dental Hygiene program. Dr. Chavarria worked as a dental hygienist before applying and being accepted to dental school in San Antonio, Texas. After graduating dental school, Dr. Chavarria worked with Dr. Watson, the El Paso City/County Health Department as well as La Fe Clinic and Sun Plaza Clinic. Soon after, Dr. Chavarria opened his practice on the Eastside of El Paso. Dr. Chavarria has received assistance through the United States Small Business Association. He is a member of the American Dental Association, The Texas Dental Association, and the El Paso Dental Association. In addition Dr. Chavarria is a member of the Seattle Club's El Paso Chapter of the Thunderbird Study Club which is a study organization for local dentists to keep up to date with strategies and dental procedures. He attributes his work ethic and humble heart to his father and mother who taught him how to work hard and trust in the God. The advice Dr. Chavarria would offer those wanting to be a dentists is to get good grades because dental school is competitive, be prepared to work hard and sleep less, and to gain experience in the a community public health setting or partner with a senior dentist.

Length of interview: 95 minutes

Length of Transcript: 42 pages

Name of Interviewee: Dr Arnaldo Chavarria  
Date of Interview: December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010  
Name of Interviewer: Kristine Navarro

KN: Today is December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010. This is Kristine Navarro. I am interviewing Dr. Arnaldo –

AC: Arnaldo.

KN: Chav –

AC: Chavarria.

KN: Chavarria. I said it incorrectly. I do apologize.

AC: That's okay.

KN: Good morning.

AC: Good morning.

KN: How are you?

AC: Very good.

KN: Good. Good. Can you tell me a little bit of when and where you were born?

AC: I was born and raised here in El Paso. Grew up in – was born and raised in South El Paso and grew up in South El Paso. And went to school in the El Paso School District, in the accelerated school district.

KN: Can you tell me about your parents and their names, please?

AC: Yes, my dad's name was Armando Chavarria. He passed on a few years ago. And my mother still lives. Her name is Ramona Chavarria.

KN: Can you tell me what your parents did for a living?

AC: My dad worked in the manufacturing industry. He did that for 35 years and retired from that. And my mom was a homemaker. She had a full-time job raising nine kids.

KN: Nine brothers and sisters.

AC: Nine brothers and sister.

KN: Are you –

AC: Five sisters and three brothers.

KN: Are the middle, the –

AC: Sixth. Honorable child number six.

KN: Can you tell me who your dad worked for in manufacturing?

AC: He worked for **Ferro**, Ferro Manufacturing.

KN: Did he share any stories about working for Ferro?

AC: My dad enjoyed his job. It was manual labor but he really enjoyed his job. He had nine kids to raise and feed and – one thing that I learned from my dad, he was very industrious. He was not necessarily a workaholic but I learned the true meaning of work ethic from him.

KN: Tell me how or tell me what you saw that he did.

AC: I remember one particular day he got up – he woke up, got ready to go to work and his back was hurting bad. He says, I have to go to work. I have to go to work. So he managed to drive himself to work, in pain, but he got to work, he punched in to the time clock. He just fell, fell on his back. His back gave out on him.

He was rushed to the emergency room and he had back surgery. So he was off for a short period of time to recover and he goes back to work.

KN: Right after that.

AC: Right after that, yeah. No – no rehabilitation, no – straight back to work. I mean that's – that's what I learned from him is a work ethic.

KN: Did he used to come home tired?

AC: Yes, he did. Yeah. I remember, also, that he would just doze off watching television, yeah, at the end of the day. But the next morning he was back on the scene, back to work. Yeah.

KN: Do you know what he did at Ferro?

AC: I'm not sure. I'm not sure.

KN: Do you remember attending any of like the Ferra Christmas parties or anything when you were younger, at the Colosseum or anything?

AC: No, I didn't. But he and my mom did.

KN: They did.

AC: I have – three of my brothers kind of followed in his footsteps. After high school they worked at Ferra for a short period of time, and even one of my sisters worked at Ferra too, so. So it was kind of – not necessarily a family tradition but, you know, Ferra provided employment for a lot of people in the barrio where I grew up.

KN: Did you ever hear it called Ferra University?

AC: Yes, I did. Yeah.

KN: And tell me what that meant to you or –

AC: Well, since I didn't work at Ferra – right after high school is when my brothers went to go work. My dad took them and they got hired. So it was like after school you go to Ferra. And that was what a lot of people do after high school is to go to university. In our case, it was the University of Ferra.

KN: Can you tell me a little bit about your mom and the influence she had on you?

AC: My mom, again, you know, people say that housework is not – it's a cush job. It is not. You know, I have two kids, teenage kids, and, you know, raising two kids is a full-time job. Raising nine is, you know, is that much more work.

But my mother was a – and still is a – well, her health is ailing right now and her memory has – is not the same as it was, but one thing that I learned from my mom is her faith in God. She had a lot of faith and never – never liked to miss going to church. And read her bible periodically and from her actions, her way of being, I – her humble way of being I learned a lot from her.

KN: Do you remember any stories that you'd like to share with us about your mom and having nine kids in a household?

AC: You know, people say that nine is a big family, and it is a big family in today's world, but I enjoyed being in a big family. I love all my brothers and sisters and before I met my wife, or when we were dating, I used to tell her, yeah, I want to have a big family like my parents, maybe beat my parents by one. And she says, you're looking at the wrong person. Good luck. But, no, we were blessed with two children, but big families is – it's never –

KN: What did you enjoy about a big family?

AC: Never a dull moment. There's different – there were different generational gaps, so. I was born in the '60s, in 1960, as a matter of fact, and my brothers were listening to their music back then. So I was influenced – I was listening to '60s music not because I wanted to but because I had to. I was watching '60s shows because they dominated the television. So I got – I got a good rounded experience in the '60s. And, of course, my years were the '70s. And so I learned that a lot from my brothers and sisters.

KN: Where did you grow up in South El Paso?

AC: I grew up on Virginia Street, Virginia and 7<sup>th</sup>.

KN: What was it like back then when you were growing up in South El Paso?

AC: You know, I was happy. I was content. It was a good growing up. We were poor. I didn't feel I was poor. I mean everybody was poor. Nobody said they were. Nobody had to say anything, but life was easy. Life was fun. I went to Heart Elementary School from kindergarten to 6<sup>th</sup> grade and, after that, I went to Bowie, Bowie High School, the old Bowie High School. Later they opened the new Bowie High School. And I attended Guillen Middle School and later on transferred to Bowie.

When I was a freshman, towards the end of the freshman year, my parents bought a house in the lower valley, so I was forced to move to the Ysleta School District.

KN: Interesting that you used the word forced.

AC: Yes. Back then there was no – if you lived outside of the district, you'd go to the school that – what district you live in. And that's why I say forced. I wanted to stay at Bowie and finish out because I had a lot of friends, but things happen for a reason. It was a good move. Had it not have happened, I probably would not have been a dentist.

KN: Tell me why.

AC: During my senior year, I was in the counselor's office and I found a brochure on dentistry, and I picked it up, started reading on it. And I asked my counselor, wow, this is good information. And she – Ms. Irma Sanchez, she was my counselor throughout my high school (**inaudible**) and she says, I have more information if you want. Yeah, could I borrow it?

So I did some research on dentistry, went to the library, checked out books on dentistry, and that was it. That was it.

KN: How did you know? How did you know it was your calling?

AC: One of the things that I read – you know, if you like working with your hands, which I do, and dentistry is an art. There's a lot of art to – and science to dentistry. If you like working with your hands, which I do, if you like working with people, which I do, you know, that was the perfect combination for me.

So I asked her about dental schools and she says, well, El Paso Community College has a dental hygiene program and a dental assistant program, so that stuck in the back of my mind. And after I graduated from high school, I was working at a factory, not Ferra, and decided that I needed to go to school.

So I remember Ms. Sanchez told me about that dental hygiene program and in enrolled at community college and applied to the program, got accepted after a year. Yeah. And became a hygienist – well, I got an associated degree in applied science with a major in dental hygiene, and that was a two-year program. That was going to be my stepping stone into becoming a dentist. And it was.

One of my other – one of my other things that I wanted to do was to become a teacher. Since junior high I wanted to teach English, so that was also one of the options that I had. And dental hygiene gave me the opportunity to see dentistry, experience dentistry, and if I liked it I was going to pursue it, and if I didn't, you know, I could always go back to teaching. And dentistry won over.

KN: Tell me about high school and about – you started at Bowie.

AC: Yeah.

KN: And you were there two years, three years?

AC: I was Bowie, actually, let me say three years. I would say three years. Seventh grade – Bowie had 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade back then, so.

KN: Okay.

AC: So 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 8<sup>th</sup> grade and freshman year I was two semesters there that I was at Bowie and I transferred to Ysleta.

KN: Okay.

**(Interruption)**

KN: This is a continuation of the interview with Dr. Chavarria. Sorry.

Let's go back about high school and what that experience was like at Bowie.

AC: I had a lot of friends at Bowie and, you know, friends that I run into and friends that I grew up with from the barrio. And, you know, I like to say that I have two sets of friends, my Bowie friends and my Ysleta friends. And that was a blessing in disguise. You know, I didn't want to leave Bowie because I didn't want to leave my friends behind but it opened the door to meeting other people and, you know, your world of friends just grows that much more.

KN: Why is Bowie so close-knit? What is it about graduates from Bowie?

AC: Well, I didn't graduate from Bowie but I have a brother and a sister that did. It's a state of mind, I guess. I guess growing up in the barrio, Segundo Barrio, and coming out of there is a – there's a lot



of success stories of people that have come out and done well. And I don't know, the Bowie spirit is – I can't describe it. You just have to be there to experience it.

KN: Growing up in the Segundo Barrio, is it a close-knit – are people very close-knit there? I mean do they rely on each other? Is there a sense of network?

AC: There is. I grew up in a neighborhood, I mean, the apartments were right next to each other. You pretty much live with each other, right next to each other, and there is a close-knit and these are friends that – neighbors that kind of become family. And to this day I see some as patients, you know. They were kind of like brothers, you know. Yeah, grow up as calling each other brothers and we're not but spiritually we are.

KN: Can you tell me, what did you all do for recreation down in the Segundo Barrio? What did you do for fun?

AC: We played football, street football.

KN: Tell me about street football. Let's talk a little bit about street football. I've heard about it, but tell me about it.

AC: It's touch football. You know, you play on the streets. The stop sign is an end zone and this car is the other end zone, and it's – it's not tackle football. It's just – it's supposed to be touch football but you may get tackled every now and then. There's not very many parks so the parks are the streets. I don't know how it is nowadays but that's how it was back then. Everybody is out on the streets playing.

KN: Did you have lookouts for cars or anything?

AC: Yeah. Yeah, always. Yeah, car coming, you know. If you scored a touchdown, nuh-huh, the car was in the way. You had to stop playing. Yeah.

KN: Since you were number six, did you get picked with your brother's teams or was there a little competition or –

AC: No, it was mainly – because my brothers were older already and so they hung out with the older boys, and I hung out with my contemporaries, guys my age, my grade level.

KN: And did you have to watch out for your younger brothers and sisters as well?

AC: Yes, I did. Well, I was the youngest of the sons, so I have three younger sisters, yeah. And you do look out after them and so do your friends.

KN: So it's like a giant family.

AC: It is. Yeah, it was. Yeah. And also growing up at Segundo Barrio, I used to frequent going to the Boy's Club, and it was kind of almost an everyday event. I'd come home from school, have dinner, do some homework and then head out to the Boy's Club.

KN: Tell me about the Boy's Club. What do you remember about it?

AC: Oh, it was a lot of fun. It's a lot of – a lot of good memories. You run into people from all over the barrio. I mean there's sections of the barrio, oh, don't go there because you don't belong to that part of the neighborhood. Well, everybody meets out at the Boy's Club. You make friends from all over Segundo Barrio, yeah.

KN: So you understood where you could go, where it was safe and where it wasn't safe.

AC: Well, yes. But I never felt threatened or – I felt safe everywhere I went. And everywhere I went – you walk everywhere. We only had one family car and that's what my dad used to go to work. So anywhere you went, you walked. I walked all over the barrio. Never felt threatened. But, yeah, some say, oh, you don't belong to this part of the neighborhood. I never felt that. Never experienced it.

KN: Can you tell me a little bit about – let's go back to the Boy's and Girl's Club, where it was and –

AC: Back then it was the Boy's Club. Now it's the Boy's and Girl's Club.

KN: Okay.

AC: Because things have changed. It was on Florence Street, Florence and 6<sup>th</sup>. And there was always something to do at the Boy's Club. I became a very good pool player. They called me a little shark at age eight. There was a tournament and, you know, everybody signs for it and I won the 8-year-old's champion pool tournament.

KN: Really? Just on your own, teaching yourself or –

AC: Well, I mean, you learn there and you practice there, and they decided to have tournaments. And they had like six different pool tables and each pool table had an age level, and I was lucky to win the 8-year-olds.

KN: Now, did this help you further on, the pool playing?

AC: No, it was just for fun.

KN: Okay.

AC: Bragging rights.

KN: Did you play – participate in any sports when you were in high school or –

AC: No, I did not. I – well, I played organized sports, played football.

KN: Okay.

AC: Played basketball, played little league, baseball. But my true – my true love was playing the drums. Yeah, I played – I started playing drums in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and I played on until high school. High School. Yeah, that was my true love.

KN: Tell me what it was about playing the drums. Is it – you can see it in your face. You can just tell you just loved to do it.

AC: Yeah, wish I had some drums. Yeah. It was – it was a challenge, you know. I'd like to say that I was – became good at it, but really I was not. I enjoyed playing it so much. One of my dreams was to become a band director. And, as a matter of fact, when I graduated from high school, I was – I got a music scholarship to **(Inaudible)** University and, you know, and before the scholarship, you know, I'd talked to band directors and I would ask them about being a band director. And they all said the same thing, that it's hard work. It's a lot of hard work. The pay is not what you think it is. So my recommendation to you is to think about it, explore other avenues. But if you really want to be a band director, be prepared for hard work and not a very good salary. So that got me thinking. And during that time I was looking into dentistry, and so when I weighed both, dentistry kind of won over. But music was, and still is, a big part of my life.

KN: Can I ask you why you did not – I know you chose dentistry, but why you did not pursue the degree at (**Inaudible**), the scholarship at (**Inaudible**).

AC: Why was that? It was going to take me away from the city and I think it was something I wasn't prepared to do, venture out. And, you know, when – community college was in the city, so that had some bearing. But all in all, you know, what dentistry offers me – and it was a good decision. I don't regret making that decision. And, you know, when you look at the whole picture, yeah, dentistry just won over. Yeah. It's a good living.

**(Interruption)**

KN: Okay, this is a continuation of the interview with – if I can get these three – all right, sir, I apologize for all the starts and stops, but we'll continue on.

Let's talk a little bit about after graduation and what you did, after high school graduation and what you did.

AC: After graduating from high school, I did like every other teenager does, go out and look for work. And, you know, I went everywhere. I applied everywhere and nobody wanted to hire me because I had no experience. And, as a matter of fact, my friend – my best friend Frank and I, we went everywhere. And I was kind of discouraged.

And one morning my uncle comes and – early in the morning, knocks on the door, you want to work? Yeah. Get dressed; come on; let's go. Well, where am I going to work? Well, you want to work, don't you? Yeah. Well, come on. So he took me to work where he worked, at a company where he worked.

The company fabricated duffel bags and that's what I was doing, silk-screening and it was like a two-plant operation. It would do the silk-screening here and it would get sent to **Waters**, where they would get assembled. They would bring them back and we would ship them wherever they needed to be shipped. And that was my summer job.

But – and I moved up really quick. They moved me to head of the shipping and receiving. But it's not what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to go to college, so that fall I – I registered at the El Paso

Community College and – knowing that I wanted to go into the dental profession.

I signed up for the basic classes, English, History, Psychology, Sociology. And second semester, registered again. Took science classes and I applied for the dental hygiene program and I was granted an interview and got accepted into the program. It's a two-year program and finished as a dental hygienist.

And coming out of dental hygiene, I worked for Dr. Watson. He practices in the lower valley. And that was my first dental hygiene job. And Dr. Watson is – I consider him my mentor. He knew I wanted to go to dental school and he would encourage me. And he allowed me a chance to work and go to school at the same time.

And during that time I took – it was a four-year period. I was taking the pre-dental classes that I was lacking. So I went back to community college. I took two semesters of organic chemistry, took a biology class and I took a physics class. Did a biology class at UTEP and another physics class at UTEP and, you know, that – I had met all my dental school requirements. And I applied to dental school and I got accepted to both schools, Houston and San Antonio, so.

KN: What made you choose San Antonio?

AC: San Antonio, I saw it more like an El Paso but maybe twice as big. And that appealed to me. I'd been to San Antonio before and I had visited, and I enjoyed the city. And that's really why I decided to go to San Antonio because I kind of had a – had a connection to it, if you will.

KN: Can I go back to starting college? Had any of your brothers or sisters attended college before you did?

AC: Yes. I have a sister that is a nurse. She attended community college and she also attended UCLA Nursing School, so. And she's a practicing nurse. And I have other brothers that went to college but didn't finish their degree plans. But they – military was their thing.

KN: What made you decide that college was the key ingredient?

AC: Since elementary school, I mean, teachers tell you, you know, if you want a better life, if you want – education is the key. And, you know, I believed them. And even as a little boy I strived to do well

in school, and academics, I knew back then, was the key. I mean you don't see it back then but later in life you'll look back and, yeah. I had new good teachers throughout elementary school, middle school and high school, and, you know, they taught from experience that education is key and that it's no secret. Everybody knows that.

KN: Had you been exposed to UTEP or community college early in your childhood?

AC: My brothers and sisters went to community college, so that's how I related to it.

KN: Okay.

AC: Yeah.

KN: Do you find that important, as part of your enrichment, the exposure to the university and to the community college?

AC: Rephrase that.

KN: Can you – going to – or having your brothers go to community college, was that important for you? Was seeing them go to community college, was that important for you? Did it make a difference?

AC: Yes, it did, I mean, because they too wanted to make something of themselves and, you know, everybody has their paths and, yeah, seeing them go that route. And, you know, for us, college was like not very accessible.

KN: Tell me why.

AC: Because there were so many of us that my parents really could not afford to send everybody to college. So – but there – I was willing to apply for loans, which I did, and apply for grants, which I also did. And that was a big help.

KN: Tell me why you were not afraid to apply for loans, because many people are very afraid to apply for loans for school.

AC: Well, it's really the only way. If you don't have the money now, I mean, you could borrow it. Granted, low interest at the time. I just had a feeling that this is going to work out and loans you can

always pay back and grants. And if you're very lucky, fortunate to get a grant, you know, that's free money.

KN: Did anyone help you through this process of applying for the loans or getting the money for college?

AC: No. I pretty much was on my own.

KN: You did it on your own?

AC: Yes.

KN: And you just found out the information or –

AC: Found out the information. Of course, everything has a deadline so the sooner that you find out when you need to turn in your applications, you need to meet deadlines. So I was fortunate enough that I knew that I was going to go to college, so I got a college catalogue and I was scared registering because I had never done this before. And I was lost, you know, fresh out of school. I didn't know what I was doing. I almost got discouraged.

KN: What is the difference why you didn't?

AC: When I went to register, I met up with a friend of mine, an old high school buddy, and he was just as lost as I was. So here we are trying to figure it out, put it together. And then we met up with another friend and he's just as lost but he had his sister to help him. So we kind of tagged along and she kind of helped us through the registration process. And so that's where I got my courage back. It's good. I have somebody that can help me. And the counselors were very helpful.

KN: At community or –

AC: At community college, yeah, because they – I guess they see you as, you know, this young kid that's probably scared, but they were very helpful.

KN: Looking back now, is there anything at the university level or the community college level that could have helped you through this process or – I mean, that fear. All freshmen have that fear.

AC: Yes. Yeah, if there's people there to help and understand that these incoming freshmen don't know anything. They've never experienced this before. All this is new. Yeah, if there's

somebody there that can walk them through and – that would have been a big help. Yeah.

KN: Starting to attend college, you're on your own, was that a different experience for you?

AC: It was. I was used to being in school with students my age, you know. You talk freshman English, there was freshmen students, and so on and so forth. In college, it's everybody. You're there with adults. You're there with, you know, all ages. And that was kind of different experience. I had never experienced it before. You know, being in a sociology class with a Vietnam veteran sitting next to you and, you know, an older gentleman wanting to do a little something different for his life and, yeah, it – it was a cultural change.

KN: Did it make you nervous?

AC: At first it did, but once being there it's – you know, the focus is to do well in class and in school and that's everybody's aim and, yeah, you – you learn to be part of the group.

KN: Going – transitioning from community to the university, was that a difficult transition?

AC: No, not really.

KN: Tell me why.

AC: I think I was very well-prepared at community college. I took a biology class. It was an evening class because that's the only time they offered that biology class. So – which was better for me because I was able to work during the day and go to school in the evening. And it was a biology class and biology was one of my strong courses. I enjoyed it in high school. I had it at college and I had to take another one at the university level. So I had a good background in biology so I did well in the class.

KN: Was the size bigger than –

AC: Yes, it was a lot bigger. It was an auditorium full and, you know, had never been an auditorium-sized class, and biology, of all science classes. And as the semester went on there was some – the size of the class got smaller and smaller. Towards the end of the year, there wasn't such a big class, but I prevailed. I finished the course, even had a lab that went with it on Wednesday. Labs were



four hours. But, you know, I enjoyed the lab, especially at UTEP one of the – we were doing ecology, and the ecology at UTEP, the desert landscaping, is – was part of our, you know, what we studied. And one of the little field trips that we had was walk around the university and study the plants. Yeah.

And (inaudible) was – UTEP was already doing it because it's the natural landscape, but back in the '80s it was not big. And, I mean, UTEP was already doing it before it was a big thing.

KN: Was going to school – I mean going to work during the day during the day and going to school at night, was that difficult?

AC: It was. That took a lot of time, you know, working all day and going to class filled up the day plus weekends to study or evenings to study. So, yeah, it was a sacrifice but, looking back it was a sacrifice well made.

KN: Did you know what your goal was when you entered community college?

AC: Yes. Yeah.

KN: Are you very goal-orientated?

AC: I am. I am. You know, I have one-year goals, five-year goals, ten-year goals. You know, I – you learn from others that if you set goals, well, you know what, why (inaudible). People tell you this is the road to success. Yeah, I'm going to follow that. Yeah, I'm going to follow that advice and not have to figure it out on my own because others have already done it.

KN: Who instilled this goal – I mean having the goals, I mean, who in your life do you think played a major role in having the goals?

AC: Teachers did. Yeah.

KN: Were there any teachers in particular that you – that stood out?

AC: Oh, they all do. I remember my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. **Loria**. Yeah, I had a very good start at school. I loved going to school because of her. Mrs. **Sandrano** was my first grade teacher. Second grade teacher was Mrs. Rogers. Third grade teacher was Mrs. Sandrano again. And fourth grade was – oh, Mrs. Rogers, no. That was second. Second grade teacher was Mrs. **Rodsky**. Mrs.

Rogers was my fourth grade teacher. Fifth grade teacher was Mrs. Montoya and sixth grade Mr. Scott. All wonderful teachers.

KN: You remember, so obviously they made a huge impression.

AC: Yes, they do. And that's one of the things – I wanted to become a teacher, and I had good teachers, and that was one of my backup plans, you know. And I respect teachers, the work that they put in and the dedication that they have for their students.

And even today, the teachers, I see them as patients, and the stories that they tell me. It's a hard profession but they love what they do, you know. If things would be different, they – they wouldn't – they wouldn't change anything.

KN: Okay, let's jump ahead a little bit. Sorry. You decided to go to UTSA. Why had you now decided to leave El Paso where earlier you had chosen not to?

AC: Well, El Paso does not have a dental school, so the choices were, if you wanted to stay in Texas, San Antonio, Houston or Dallas. I applied at all three schools and I got granted interviews in Houston and San Antonio. And I think my first choice that I wanted to go was UT San Antonio. I got an acceptance letter from Houston and hadn't gotten any word from San Antonio yet. And time was kind of closing in. I had to send some money to reserve my spot at Houston, so I says, okay, I'll just decide – I'll just go to Houston.

Well, the next day I get a letter from San Antonio, congratulations, you've been accepted. So. So it's nice to have a choice and knowing that you got accepted to both schools, it's like, wow, I made it.

KN: When you left to San Antonio, were you nervous, were you –

AC: Yes, I was. I started school in August of '85. I got married in April of '85.

KN: Okay, so you'd just gotten married.

AC: So I'd just gotten married. I was a newlywed and –

KN: Tell me your wife's name, please.

AC: My wife's name is Helen.

KN: And how did you all meet? Oh, a good story. You can tell.

AC: I was working as a dental hygienist at an office, Dr. Highland's office, and one of the dental assistants, Liz, kind of introduced us. We would go out on Friday nights and that's when I met her. We would meet at Liz's house and then go out to the clubs. So that's how we met. And, yeah, we started going out.

KN: Did she know your goal was to go away for school?

AC: As we dated, yes. I told her what my plans were, what my goals are, and she knew all along. Yeah.

KN: Okay. So you got accepted. You just got married. You got accepted.

AC: So I got accepted. So we pack our cars and we head out to San Antonio. Don't have a place to stay, so we start looking for apartments. That was an experience. We had no plans. I mean coming from a guy who likes to plan, we have no plans. There was not Internet then.

So we get to San Antonio and we came across this place, Apartment Finders. They were able to find us an apartment right there and then. So, yeah, we moved into our first apartment and it was like, oh, home; this is going to be home. So that's – it was very nerve-wracking, especially when you don't have plans.

KN: So not having plans is not a good thing for you.

AC: Is not a good for me.

KN: You're a very – you like to have –

AC: I like organization. I like planning. I like goals. Yeah. It's – yeah.

KN: So how was this adjustment of just driving to a new town and – I mean how did that weigh on you?

AC: Well, Helen was working at Cielo Vista Mall. She was working at a store, at Foxmores, and when she told them that we were going to move to San Antonio they said, oh, we have a Foxmores in San Antonio and we're looking – and she was a manager trainee here at Cielo Vista, and we're looking for a manager at our San Antonio store. So, you know, things just fell into place.

She worked as a manager at Foxmores while I went to school. She didn't work all the – maybe two years after that she started working at a bank. The hours were better, so that helped. She was – she's a blessing. She helped me through four years – through four hard years of dental school.

KN: How were the four hard years? Tell me about that. Describe that to me.

AC: They were demanding both in the clinic and academically. You're always studying. You're always reading. You're always doing lab work. You're always at the school doing something. And then you come home and fortunately for me I had somebody to come home to. And some of my classmates, you know, they were single. I'm sure that would have been more hard, but I – she's a blessing. She put up with me for four hard years.

KN: What's the best part of dental school that you remember? I mean what –

AC: San Antonio Dental School is one of the better – one of the best schools in the nation. Again, it goes back to the instruction. I had some very good instructors, professors, and I was very well trained. I mean coming out of dental school I felt very confident to good dentistry. I didn't have the fear or anxiety of working. I was ready to go.

I think one of the things that helped me – I was already accustomed to working in a dental office environment as a dental hygienist, so that was a big plus for me.

KN: Would you recommend that step to other people?

AC: That's one way of doing it. And I know other hygienists that have done that. The other way is going through the pre-dental program and – that's what my daughter wants to do. She's going to UTSA, San Antonio. She's a freshman and her goals are to become a dentist. So – but she's doing it the – I guess the traditional way of doing it, go to four years of – a bachelor's degree and then apply to dental school.

KN: What advice would you give your daughter going through – you know, preparing for dental school?

AC: Yeah, getting accepted to dental school is very competitive, especially now, moreso. What gets you into dental school is good grades. And I had been – my daughter is a very smart girl. She – I have a lot of confidence in her. But that's what I tell her is to keep up the grades. You study because – you never stop studying. Even as a dentist, you never stop learning. You're always learning something new. But to get into dental school, it's – it is not easy. Yeah. And she knows it.

KN: Any advice you would give them to succeed through dental school? I mean you know the pressure that was applied and –

AC: Yeah, it's –

KN: Were you ready for that when you left?

AC: I knew it was going to be hard, so. In almost any profession, it's – anything you do is going to be demanding. It's going to be hard. So be prepared to work hard and sleep late, don't sleep, try to have some good nutrition.

KN: Did you eat well when you were –

AC: Well, I had a wife there that made sure I did.

KN: Okay.

AC: So I was lucky. Yeah.

KN: So after you finished dental school?

AC: After I finished dental school, I had a – you know, working as a dental hygienist, through dental school, I worked with three different dentists in San Antonio, and two of them offered me to become their associates when I graduated from dental school. So I already had a place to go work if I wanted to.

And another dentist offered to sell me his practice because he was wanting to retire. Plus I also had the dentist to work with, Dr. Watson, and he also said, hey, listen, when you come out of dental school, come on back and we'll work something out. And that's what I did.

I came back to El Paso, worked as a dentist, an associate dentist at Dr. Watson's office, and did that part-time. I also worked at the Health Department as a public health dentist and –

KN: Tell me what that was about.

AC: The City/County Health Department treated – does treatment on children, indigent care, and that's what I did. I treated a lot of kids. And that was – it was a good experience for me. I enjoyed working with the Health Department.

KN: Tell me why you chose to work part-time one and part-time another.

AC: Well, while the business, my practice, grew, it was kind of – not necessarily slow, but I didn't have a full practice then. I wasn't very busy, so my time at the Health Department gave me a good chance to practice dentistry. And I worked there everyday. There's always work to be done, so.

KN: Can you describe what that experience was like?

AC: You know what, the staff there are so dedicated and I just fell into this clinic where people care about the patients that they treat, and I really enjoyed that. I worked at the Health Department for about five years in total. But during that time I met Salvador Balcorta. Salvador Balcorta is the director of La Fe, the clinic, and back then he was going to become director and he approached me one time and asked me, hey, listen, I want to talk to you. And, yeah? Son, he says, I want you to come work at La Fe for me because I want people from the barrio to see that you're a product of the barrio and you made it.

So I went to go work at La Fe Clinic. Did that for about two years. Yeah. Another great experience. Another great chapter in my life.

KN: Tell me why.

AC: Again, the population there is, you know, they have their needs and their needs are great. And when you can deliver dentistry and make life better for them, that's a big reward.

KN: How many families have you touched and how many have –

AC: Oh, I –

KN: – working there?

AC: I don't keep numbers of that. I just do what I have to do and, yeah, it's – I have no idea.

KN: Are there any stories you want to share about working there that just broke your heart and –

AC: None that really stand out, but everybody there was so gracious of the – for the work you do and – especially when you have a person that had a bad dental experience and then they don't go to the dentist because of a bad experience. So when they come back because they're in serious pain and they need treatment, and then you render treatment and they say, wow, that was not bad at all. So all this time I avoided coming to the dentist because I thought it was going to be a bad experience, and after that, when they keep coming back, yeah, you broke that chain of fear. Yeah.

KN: Can you tell me, after you worked at La Fe, I mean, what was that like for you? I mean going in every day knowing – I mean, did people – were they surprised that you came from the barrio?

AC: They probably didn't know, but I know where they're coming from, so. Everybody deserves respect, so if you respect who they are, or anybody, for that matter, it doesn't matter their background. If you deliver care and know in your heart that you're doing the right thing, that's really the secret to my success, I guess. I don't know if it's success but that's how I like to treat people, with respect.

And, at the same time, you know, people come to me, respecting me, and respecting my – not necessarily my authority but – well, I have patients that say, you know what, I come to you; I want you to take care of me. So they already have given me their trust.

KN: How important is that trust to you?

AC: It's very important. It's – when you know what needs to be done and people trust you, yeah, they keep coming back. And it's very important. Once you lose a patient's trust, it's – you've kind of lost, yeah.

KN: So after La Fe, you worked there two years.

AC: After La Fe, well, during that time – when I worked at La Fe, it's – I worked at the – at the county jail. That was an experience too. Again –

KN: You did both?

AC: No. La Fe had a contract with the city, with the county, to provide the dental care for the inmates, and one of the things we – really all you do there is remove teeth. These are teeth that are badly – not salvageable, badly broken down, and so I did a lot of oral surgery at the jail, through La Fe.

There was also this – this – what do you call it, the senior citizen's residence on San Antonio Street? Sun Plaza. I was the dentist in charge of Sun Plaza, so once a week I would go to Sun Plaza and treat the elderly. And so I got that experience there.

KN: What did you learn from that experience at the jail and the elderly?

AC: You know what, the inmates are there, you know, they're just trying to serve their time and get out, and if you can make their stay comfortable and – a toothache can just linger, and linger, and linger, and when you provide care, I mean, they – they are grateful. I mean you just made life bearable. I mean it's unbearable to begin with, but, you know, any little thing that you can do to help.

KN: And what about the elderly?

AC: The elderly, oh, they appreciate everything you do for them. Elderly, you know, they have their medical problems. They take a lot of medication. So treating an elderly person is not just doing dentistry. You have to know what their illnesses are, what their medications are, how it's going to affect your dentistry. So, yeah, you take the person as a whole and not just treat their teeth. You're treating the person as a whole.

KN: You mentioned earlier that dentistry is a science. Is this the reason why or can you tell me why?

AC: Yes. Yes. Dentistry is a science. There's – there's some medical science to it. You know, it's – there's always that misconception, well, you're a dentist; you're not a doctor, you know, a medical doctor is a real doctor. But if a patient has teeth that's connected to the whole body, the mouth is a big part of the body. That's where the science comes in. You have to know how diabetes, for example, effects the oral environment. Heart problems can stem from – or there's a link between periodontal disease and some heart problems.



So the whole body is one body and every part of the body is connected to everything else. So that's where the science comes. The art part of it is recreating teeth and the way they function together and the way they fit together.

KN: Have you ever recreated the teeth or given someone their teeth back or – and that was missing teeth, or given them a bridge and they were just –

AC: Yes.

KN: What is that feeling like?

AC: Yes. You just stand back and just see the big grin on their face. It's – words can't describe it. You just feel the satisfaction and reward. I have a patient who chipped her front tooth and that's an emergency to some people, you know, to have a broken front tooth. So we did some bonding, made it look like her natural tooth. Yeah, she – you saved my life. Thank you for seeing me. Yeah.

KN: It was important to her.

AC: It was important to her. Teeth are important. People with a bad dentition don't smile much and their self-esteem is not – and I tell people – you know, people tell me, I don't smile because my teeth are crooked. Don't let that keep you from smiling because that says a lot. That comes from within. Yeah. Your teeth may not be straight but a smile says a lot.

KN: Tell me, after you worked at the county and at the elderly center what you did next.

AC: After that I felt that I was ready to go into private practice. So – and that's what I did. And I opened my first office on Montwood and I worked out of the office – on December 27, 1995 was day one that I opened. And I told the director at La Fe, you know, I'm going to go into private practice but I'm still going to work at La Fe while the practice grows, maybe give it about a year. And he says – his words were, you're not going to last a year. Like, huh. Being you're going to leave before the year's over.

KN: Okay.

AC: And sure enough, at six months my practice grew, and I thank God for that. Yeah, I approached him. I told him, I said, hey, listen, I have to be at the office full-time. What did I tell you; you were

going to be out of here in six months. And luckily, yeah, that first day that we opened, you know, I hadn't advertised. I hadn't put out the word, hadn't – but it was a good location. And that first day that we opened the doors, five patients walked in. And from there, the practice grew, so.

KN: Tell me why you decided that you were ready. What were the contributing factors?

AC: I was very well-prepared from coming out of dental school. I felt that I was ready to practice dentistry, and working at the – the experience that I had working at Dr. Watson's office and the Health Department, at La Fe, and doing all phases of dentistry, I was already practicing dentistry in a public health setting. So I figured this is the time to – I could have done it sooner but, looking back, if I had to do it all over again, that's what I would do is to gain the experience and then venture out to the private practice setting.

KN: Were you ready on the administrative side of opening a new practice?

AC: I'm not a – my background is not in business.

KN: Okay.

AC: And that's where my wife comes in.

KN: Ah. Tell me how this partnership works out.

AC: She has been doing our home finances, so she has experience doing that. She was a business – a business major at UTEP. Yeah. And even when we were at – when we were living in San Antonio, she attended UTSA. Accounting major, I take that back. So that was her background. So, you know, I do dentistry, you do the accounting, it works for me. I'm still not a very good businessman. But I'm learning.

KN: She handles that side.

AC: Yes.

KN: Did you – were you encouraged to start your own practice?

AC: It was a goal that I had and, yeah, I – it was scary to do, which means that you have to come up with a good amount of money to

start, seed money. And we kind of saved for it, saved for it. We put up some of our money. I went through the Small Business Administration.

KN: Tell me about that experience.

AC: I thought it was – people used to tell me, oh, that's – that's a lot of paperwork. And that's what I had in mind that it was going to be a trying experience. During that time they had a program called a LowDoc program. And LowDoc stands for low documents. You didn't need all the documents that they required at once.

So that's what I did. I went through the – I forgot the name of that program. And they – they kind of help you along and give you advice. And I got all the paperwork together, came up with a down payment, applied for the loan, and I was lucky that I got the loan.

KN: Did anyone tell you about this Small Business Administration? How did you learn about it?

AC: How did I learn about it? I knew SBA was there all the time. And I remember we had a business class in dental school and I asked about the SBA, if SBA helps – if a dental office is considered a small business. And they says, yeah, of course. SBA will help dentists do a startup. So I kind of already knew that.

KN: So that exposure in dental school towards that administrative side was critical for you then.

AC: Yes. Yes. I mean it wasn't – it wasn't – it was a one-day seminar that we had on administration, but, yeah, that's when everybody had questions about – I mean, everybody had questions because we don't normally have business classes in dental school. Yeah. So that's where I learned about it.

KN: Did anyone help you – did any of the chambers help you fill out the paperwork or was it just you and your wife filling out the paperwork?

AC: Yeah, just she and I. I forgot what that program was. The Star Program, I think. These are retired businessmen that volunteer their time and talk to people, help people in filling out the application, or, you know, coming up with a business plan. And that's one thing that I learned in dental school, have a business plan. And I had a business plan. It was one of our projects to do

in school, you know, come up with a business plan, whether you make one up or have something that you're working towards.

KN: Did that surprise you, having this aspect in –

AC: Yes.

KN: Okay.

AC: You know, I had no background in business, so it was a challenge for me. And I put together a business plan, and it was that same business plan, when I started my practice, that I used. And I kind of tweaked it and changed it around. And I was working with an accountant at the time and I presented my business plan to her and she was, wow. She made a little modification here and there and we presented that. When I went to the banks to present, I presented business plans to three different banks. That same day I get a call from the banker, we can help you.

KN: So you had no problems acquiring funding then.

AC: No. And I remember when I first met him, I presented my business plan to him and he's flipping over the pages, did you do this?

KN: Yes, sir.

AC: Huh. And he's the one that called me that same day at 5:00, congratulations, there's no problem; we'll help you.

KN: Were you nervous about going to the banks for –

AC: Yes, I was. Yeah. But – yes and no. I had a plan and, you know, it's all laid out, so. Yeah, I – the banker calls me that day and the following day I called the other bank and talked to the banker and asked him about, you know, so what did you decide? And, well, we still have to go to the board meeting and present it to the board. Well, because I got – I got approved at this other bank. Oh, well, what did they offer you? Well, this is what they offered me. Oh, well we can't beat that. So.

KN: May I ask if it's a local bank or was it an out-of-state –

AC: It was a local bank. Both banks. Yeah.

KN: Okay.

AC: Yeah, Texas Commerce Bank. An old bank.

KN: I used to work there. Yeah, not that old.

AC: Yeah, I went to Texas Commerce Bank and I went to Bank of the West. And Texas Commerce called me right away. They offered me the loan.

And then, ironically, the same banker that worked at Texas Commerce ended up at Bank of the West, so. And he calls me back, hey, listen, if you ever need to upgrade or, you know, if you need any more money, let me know and I'll help you along the way. So I always had that – knowing that a banker is there to help you, that's a good feeling. Yeah.

KN: What challenges did you face when you first opened your business?

AC: I don't know. There weren't really challenges. I mean I was ready to practice dentistry and when we opened, I mean, things just fell into place and it was – the timing was right. The – everything just worked out. Yeah.

As far as challenges, I guess trying to grow the practice, you know.

KN: Did you have any trouble growing the practice?

AC: No. One of the things that they taught me in dental school, business, location, location, location. So – and we were at a very good location on Montwood. High traffic. I did some demographic studies and the 79936 area was one of the fastest growing in Texas, so I knew that was going to be a high – and then the traffic on Montwood was – went to the city. Did some research on the traffic counts and it was a very high traffic area. Montwood and George Dieter.

KN: Would you say you were very prepared before you opened your business?

AC: Yes. Yeah. Advanced planning and, yeah.

KN: So you looked at demographics. What else did you look at before you opened?

AC: I did some projections. You know, how much I project to be earning and how much I project to pay out as far as supplies, payroll. So knowing those numbers, you've already set goals. So now you try to meet those goals. And thank God, you know, things – we exceeded those goals. So.

KN: Do you still have a business plan in place?

AC: I do. It's up here but I do. There are some other things that I want to do as far as for the practice.

KN: So how many years have you been in business?

AC: Been in business 16 years now.

KN: During your time of opening your own business, was being Hispanic, was that an advantage or a disadvantage for you?

AC: I don't know if it was an advantage. I mean I live in an area where most of the population is Hispanic, so it's – no, I think it was an advantage, living in this part of the state. Yeah.

KN: Do you speak Spanish?

AC: I do.

KN: Did you speak Spanish at home, growing up?

AC: I did. Yeah.

KN: And your parents spoke Spanish as well?

AC: My parents spoke Spanish.

KN: So you're fluent.

AC: Yes.

KN: Okay. Being a small business owner, do you have face any challenges now?

AC: Yeah, there are some challenges. In dentistry, it's – and I don't know how it's going to effect our area, but there are some areas that are underserved, especially the rural areas. And there is a shortage of manpower or dentists to provide dental care. So that presents a challenge. The American Dental Association is working

very hard to meet those challenges, and there are groups that are trying to fill those challenges.

And one of the proposals is they're trying to come up with like a mid-level provider, trained people to perform dentistry. Not doctors, but. And the challenge that we posed – that comes out of that is patients are being treated with somebody that doesn't have a doctorate degree, and who knows what's going to happen. That's – not just locally, but as a nation that's – their solution to solving this problem is train others to do the dental work.

But there's more to that than – than just training somebody. I mean if you're not very well trained and prepared, if you don't have the experience then I don't see how anybody can do dentistry and treat patients. Patients don't know any better. But somebody that is here in the trenches, you know, I can't see anybody doing dentistry that's not very well trained.

KN: What do you think is the solution for the roles they're lacking?

AC: My opinion is to, you know, have dentists – coming out dental school, you come out with, especially nowadays, you come out owing a lot of money. Education is not cheap. And it keeps getting higher and higher. And dental students come out owing a lot of money.

I think one of the solutions that you have some of these dentists have a loan repayment program to forgive their loans if they work in an underserved area. My opinion.

KN: Why do think that the Association has not looked into that first?

AC: They have.

KN: They have. Okay.

AC: Yeah. And they are working towards doing something like that.

KN: Okay.

AC: Yeah.

KN: Do you think that would help solve this shortage? Is there a shortage?

AC: In our area, I don't see it. Of course we're not in a rural area, but there's some areas in New Mexico, some small towns. Probably west Texas, where, you know, the attraction for somebody to live in a small town, you know. The state used to have a dental mobile van that went out to the small rural communities, but I don't think they do that anymore.

So what the solution is? I don't know. That's my solution to the problem.

KN: Were you surprised when you first opened your business how expensive running a business would be?

AC: Yes. Yeah. It is expensive. Especially dentistry. I mean there's – the equipment is not – is expensive. Just one – just this one chair, this is one operator, and there's – there's a lot of equipment. This is just one camera. So if you do this in another room, in another room, in another room, the cost goes higher and higher. Yeah, it is – dental equipment is expensive.

KN: And how do you get training? I mean how do you learn new methods or keep abreast of new things?

AC: Through dental conferences, dental conventions, dental seminars. As a matter of fact, I went to a seminar last night. There's always continuing education everywhere. And you have to. The state mandates that to renew your license you have to have at least 12 hours of continuing education every three years. And not because the state mandates but because if you're practicing, you have to keep up. I mean things are changing, materials get better. So all these new changes make delivering dental care a lot better.

KN: What are the biggest changes that you see have impacted your practice?

AC: One of the things now and – is the use of implants to restore teeth. Yeah. Restoring teeth is the closest thing there is to restoring a natural tooth is with implants versus doing a bridge, whereas with a bridge you have to prepare two healthy teeth to replace one. With implants, we're conserving the natural teeth and just replacing that one tooth. That's one the big technologies that has come up in the last I'd say 15 years, implant dentistry.

KN: Can I ask you about the day-to-day operations and how that – do you deal with that or does –



AC: We all deal with it as a team. We have our front office people that man the phones and set up appointments. Every day is different. And then they schedule appointments for us. And, like I said, every day is different. We do different procedures, fillings, extractions, crowns, bridges, the dental cleanings. Gum treatments. And in between that you'll always have somebody calling with a toothache so you have to get them in somewhere and get them in as soon as possible. Yeah, every day is different.

KN: Can you tell me a little bit about the – any liability issues that you may have and the insurance and has that gone up as you've practiced?

AC: Yes, it has. I do carry liability and it keeps getting higher, goes – keeps getting higher and higher. But it's one of those things that you pretty much have to have, yeah.

KN: Are you involved with any of the – the Hispanic Chamber or the Greater Chamber?

AC: I'm not.

KN: You're not. Okay. Can you tell me what role your family has played in the growth of your business?

AC: My family has always been very supportive and, you know, I think they look at me as somebody that has made it. But, you know, the dynamics of my family, we're still – you know, my brother is the oldest. He's the elder of the family. My sister and then my other brother, so the family structure is still there.

The – oh, what would you call it? The stratus or the – yeah, just because I'm a dentist does not make me any better or higher. I'm still number six. Yeah.

KN: What role do you think they've helped play in your –

AC: Yeah, like I said, they've all been very supportive and –

KN: What role has your wife played?

AC: Oh, she's – she's my number one. She supports everything I do. And I'm very fortunate that she does because I – sometimes – dentistry takes me away from the house, going to seminars and – she tries to go to most of them. And just this October we had a seminar. I'm an alternate delegate member to the American Dental

Associate, so that took me to Orlando for our annual session. Had to miss my son's Friday football game for that and that – that was a – well, anyways, it just happened once, so. But she's been very supportive. I don't think I can serve an organized dentistry if I didn't have a supporting wife.

KN: Let's talk about the American Dental Association that you've mentioned. Do you see that there's more Hispanics involved or is it still a –

AC: I don't know what the numbers are but, yes, there are more Hispanics. There's a Hispanic Dental Association. I'm not a member of it.

KN: Okay.

AC: But, yeah, there's more and more. And Hispanics from different backgrounds, you know, from Central American and South American countries, Puerto Rico, and – yeah, but it's – for there to be a Hispanic Dental Association, you know the numbers are big.

KN: Why is it important to you to be a member or involved in this organization?

AC: The American Dental Association and – there's three layers to being a member of the American Dental Association. There's the American Dental Association at the national level, the Texas Dental Association, and there's the El Paso District Dental Association, and I belong to all three.

And what these associations do is they look out after the public's interest. One of the things that we're trying to not fight but find another solution to the mid-level providers because they don't have the training and the background that someone that's trained in four years of dental school, and even specialty have to render treatment. And, as an organization, that's – that's how we fight these things, together as one.

KN: Do you think that the cost of dental school has made it just so prohibitive that most people are in fear of going to dental school?

AC: I think so. Yeah, when I graduated from dental school, I came out owing \$32,000.00. I thought that was a lot of money then. When I hear of some that are coming out owing \$100,000.00, oh my god, it's – yeah, it's – I think you can deter somebody from saying, no, I can't afford it. And, of course, nobody can afford it but that's

where the student loans come in. And that's what I did. I had to borrow the money. There's no way that my parents could have helped pay for it. Yeah.

KN: Do you think – what advice would you give to people that are interested in starting their own practice and what that's like.

AC: My advice is to gain experience either at a public health setting or some – some dentists that are either retiring or their practices are strong are always looking to bring in an associate. That's another good way to start is to gain experience, kind of increase your practice, and maybe venture out or partner with a senior dentist.

KN: Why is that important?

AC: Dentistry is not easy and, you know, coming out of dental school, yeah, you learn, but really you learn more once you're out in the real world. And that's where continuing education comes in. And once you get exposed to – dental school, you treat – they screen your patients, you know, this is a good studying case, this is a good studying case. There's a lot more there of study cases, so that's where you get the experience, in working with somebody with experience. That's where that comes in.

KN: And what do you do if it's in – if you were new and –

AC: That's – I'm a member of a study club and that's what I do. I –

KN: Tell me about the study club.

AC: It's a group of about 30 dentists and some specialists and some general dentists. You know, everybody runs into a case that, oh, what do I do? You know, you scratch your head and, oh, I'm going to take it to my study club members, and you take x-rays, you take models of the teeth and kind of discuss the case with people that have done similar cases. And you learn from them. This is what I did. And this is what I would recommend you do. And that's where you get help.

The study – it's the Seattle Study Club that I'm a member of, our El Paso Chapter of the Thunderbird Study Club. We also get a quarterly publication of different cases as well. And all these are documented from start to finish. And that's where you get some ideas on how to treat certain cases as well.

KN: So you're always learning.

AC: We're always learning, yeah. I'll tell you, last night I was at a seminar. Yeah. Yeah.

KN: I mean is the study club, I mean, is that critical, do you think?

AC: I think it's critical.

KN: Tell me why.

AC: Without it, you know, you're not exposed to different cases. You know, you learn from everybody and –

KN: In sharing the knowledge, is there a problem?

AC: No. Of course, everything is confidential. You don't share anybody's information. And everybody understands that nothing goes out of that study club.

KN: But it's just the learning.

AC: It's just the learning, yeah. And even the publications that I get, there's no names, no – it's just the case, pictures of the teeth. You really don't know who that person is.

KN: Have there been times where you've been able to use the study club for knowledge in your own practice?

AC: Yes. Oh, yes. There's a case that I'm working on that I presented to the study club and I'm working with a periodontist and between the two of us – and not just him but we're doing implants and bridges and it's – it's a complex case, but things are moving along as planned.

KN: I'm actually surprised that dentists actually work together. I had no idea.

AC: Yes. Well, there's – everybody competes with everybody.

KN: Right.

AC: But we're not really competing. We don't see it as a competition. The dental community here, everybody helps everybody.

KN: Is that normal?

AC: You know, I'm only exposed to our community. I don't know if it is in others but our dental community is very close, very tight-knit. We had a colleague that recently had a stroke, and the circle of us went to his office to treat his patients so that – and I was talking with a friend of mine and he was saying, you know, this you don't see in a big city environment. We may be a big city but we still have that close-knit – had it been in Dallas, or Houston, yeah. Here in El Paso, everybody looks after each other.

KN: Had this started beforehand?

AC: Yes. It's –

KN: So it was already going when you came onboard?

AC: Yes. Yeah. And I was very – not shocked, pleasantly surprised. I was like, wow, I thought we were competing with other, but we're not. We're all in the same boat. So that's good to know, knowing that your colleagues will help in a time of need, yeah.

KN: And how many members belong or dentists belong to this study club?

AC: Oh, there's about 30, 30 to 31.

KN: And did you all just find it or was it word of mouth?

AC: No.

KN: How did you –

AC: Seattle Study Club started in Seattle and it has spread to different parts of the country, different cities. There's two chapters here in El Paso, and I belong to the Thunderbird Study Club. One of our members started the club and, you know, invited – you really can't have a big group. You know, it's easier to manage if it's a small group and, you know, for meeting sakes and time sakes, when we meet. But, yeah, he started the group and he invited, you know, dentists that he works with and he invited me to join his club and, sure.

Yeah, I look forward to our meetings because we – we just don't – we delve into dentistry, to – and the cases that are presented are the challenging cases. So that's where a lot of the learning occurs.

KN: I mean that must be nice to have a place to go to bounce ideas or bounce –

AC: Yes.

KN: – situations off.

AC: Yes, it is.

KN: And knowing that, I mean, they'll give you honest feedback and –

AC: Honest feedback. And it's not like, well, I'm not going to give you my secrets. None of that.

KN: I'm pleasantly surprised.

AC: Yes.

KN: Okay. Just a couple of closing questions. Looking back on your business, would you have done anything differently?

AC: No. No.

KN: Now, you changed locations.

AC: Yes, we did. We outgrew the Montwood location and we were leasing space over there, and – you know, I thank God. I've been very blessed. Our practice has grown. And we outgrew the other place and I was fortunate to fall into this place. And we're not leasing space anymore. We bought our spaces. You know, it was a good investment and, you know, that was 14 years after we first opened but, you know, the timing of it was right that –

KN: Were you scared? Were you apprehensive about making a transition to your own building, your own bigger space?

AC: No, not necessarily. The major apprehension was, again, procuring funding because this was going to be a major financial commitment and –

KN: Did you have any trouble?

AC: Again, we went through SBA. We were able to procure the funds to purchase the place and furnish it. We bought new equipment. But once we got settled in, you know, we got in the routine of seeing patients and knowing what the numbers – financial numbers

are, you know, things are falling into place and things are working out.

KN: How do you acquire those financial numbers? Is that through your wife or is that through communication with your accountant or –

AC: Yeah, we work very closely with our accountant. She was here a couple of days ago and did the profit and loss financial statement, and she says we're doing well, so, yeah, we work very closely with her.

KN: How important is that relationship to you?

AC: It's very important. I mean I – my specialty is dentistry. Business is another specialty and my business savvy is not what I'd like it to be, but, yeah, you go to a dentist to get your dental work done, you go to a business to do the business aspect, so.

KN: So that's important.

AC: That's important, yeah. Accountants are very important. Bankers are very important. Attorneys are very important.

KN: Do you rely on them to –

AC: Yes, I do. Attorneys to evaluate contracts. You know, leasing contracts or buying contracts, what am I getting myself into? And they can read it and tell you. Of course the accountant can tell you, you're hurting here, or you're doing well here, you know, make appropriate changes.

KN: Do you do a constant revaluation?

AC: Every quarter.

KN: Every quarter?

AC: Yes.

KN: And you make adjustments to –

AC: Make adjustments as far as, you know, as far as business, we need to do something to bring it up, yeah.

KN: Are you surprised at how much business you're actually doing? I mean, business-wise, I mean –

AC: Yes. This location is a very good location too. When we – while the place was being under construction, the landlord says – was telling us that, you know, a lot of people were looking into this location. So we decided to put up a sign, a banner, that says, coming soon, Dr. Chavarria. And patients already that I was treating on Montwood would drive by and say, hey, I saw your sign out there; are you moving; or when are you going to move? So they already knew that we were going to move. And everybody said the same thing, on my way to Sam's, I saw your name up. So Sam's is a very good draw.

KN: What made you think to put a banner?

AC: He suggested it. You know what, people are asking me, they call me all the time, why don't we put a banner, and his phone stopped ringing.

KN: So it's the little things.

AC: It's the little things. Yeah, exposure. Yeah.

KN: Are you – so marketing is coming, playing a role?

AC: A big role, yes.

KN: Do you now do more marketing or do you –

AC: Yeah, one of the things that I want to start doing, and I don't, and I should, is to have a website. I don't know how my name turned out – is on the Internet already. If you Google my name, it has my name on it, but it has the Montwood address, and I don't know how my name got there. But we draw patients from that. When people are looking for a dentist, they Google a dentist in El Paso and we – on our health history we ask how did you learn about us and people write Internet.

KN: Are you surprised?

AC: I'm very surprised. It's – I have to jump on the bandwagon and, you know, that's the way things are evolving.

KN: So will you be creating or building a web page?

AC: I will.



KN: Are you ready for that?

AC: That's going to be another planning and another – yeah. But we are ready. Yeah. We have to plan for it.

KN: So you see it as an opportunity –

AC: Yes.

KN: – to grow your business.

AC: Oh, yes.

KN: Are you always looking – did you always have to look for opportunities?

AC: Yes, you do. If you want to stay business healthy, you have to. Yeah.

KN: So when you moved to this new location, were you surprised about – well, did anything come out of the blue that you were surprised about, moving to a bigger location and any headaches or any opportunities?

AC: No, it was a very good transition. We – the office was ready to move in. And at our old office, we stopped working on a Thursday. We were off on Friday because of a seminar. And we came over the weekend to stock and bring all the supplies, and we were ready to work on Monday. So it was maybe a little – a little bumpy to start, but it basically was a smooth transition, yeah.

KN: Were you surprised?

AC: Yes. I was expecting chaos. But –

KN: What attributes the smooth transition? What do you attribute that to?

AC: I think advanced planning. We kind of knew ahead of time that this is what we need to do and we get the rooms set up already. Because this room was all ready to – or this office was all ready – we were ready to start work. We just needed to bring our supplies. So, yeah, it worked out really good.

KN: What advice would you offer anyone starting a business today?

AC: Know what you want to do ahead of time and kind of work in that – in that business. Learn the insides and outsides. Educate yourself. Plan. Plan is – I can't work without a plan. And even when I do dentistry, we have what we call treatment plans. Yeah. You just don't start – and then you present these treatment plans to the patient. Now they have a plan to work with, so it's advanced planning.

KN: Why do you think you succeeded where others failed?

AC: I felt in my heart that this is what I wanted to do. This is – this was my calling, if you will. And I think I have a leader that helped me along the way.

KN: Who was the leader?

AC: Our Lord Jesus Christ. Yeah. He's – he has been there for me through difficult times and through successful times, and I look to him for guidance for everything. Yeah.

KN: What hopes do you have for the future?

AC: Oh, the future looks bright. I have a good – I have a good family. I have a loving wife. I have a savior that's looking after us and I enjoy what I do. And I hope to be doing it for many years.

KN: Do you have any final thoughts before we close?

AC: No.

KN: Okay. Thank you, sir.

AC: Okay.

KN: That wasn't too bad, was it?

AC: No.

KN: That wasn't too bad at all.

**[End of Audio]**

**Duration: 95 minutes**