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Interview no. 1503

Carlos Eduardo Casillas

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University of Texas at El Paso

Institute of Oral History

Interviewee: Carlos Eduardo Casillas

Interviewer: Arlina Palacios

Project: Paso del Norte Entrepreneurship Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: 6 January 2011

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Transcriber: GMR Transcription Services

Biographical Synopsis of Interviewee: Carlos Eduardo Casillas was born in Toynosa México on September 15, 1977. His father, Carlos Eduardo Casillas was in the transportation business and his mother, Mariella Lupe Casillas was a homemaker for her husband and three children. Carlos has one brother and one sister. He has a degree in computer science from The University of Texas-Pan American. Carlos is married to Christina Casillas and they reside in El Paso, Texas. Carlos is the co-founder and co-owner of E.R. Computer Doctors.

Summary of Interview: Carlos attended school in the United States while living in México with his family and at the age of 19, his father decided to move the family to the United States permanently. Carlos Sr. owned a transportation business and Carlos would tinker with the bus ticket machines. His fascination with computers grew and he got a degree in computer science. After college Carlos worked for his father some more before starting his own company, Icon Technologies. Icon Technologies went dormant and Carlos along with his business partner Ruben Ramirez started E.R. Computer Doctors in 2002. At E.R. Computer Doctors, Carlos and Ruben network computers, work with the operating systems, clean infections, connect them, set them up and try to help the customer with their computer issues as best as they can. They work to take care of each and every customer. Since they rely on word of mouth, Carlos and Ruben work to make sure that every customer who has come into E.R. Computer Doctors will be treated with respect. Carlos is very hands on and it is only him and Ruben who run E.R. Computer Doctors. The advice Carlos would offer entrepreneurs is to be truthful with your customers, realize that owning a small business is not a 9-5 job.

Length of interview: 49:00

Length of Transcript: 24 pages

Name of Interviewee: Carlos E. Casillas
Date of Interview: January 6th, 2011
Name of Interviewer: Arlina Palacios

Interviewer: Today is January 6th, 2011, this is an interview with Mr. Carlos E. Casillas. The interviewer's name is Arlina Palacios this interview is part of the Basil Del Norte Entrepreneurs Oral History Project. Good morning, Mr. Casillas.

Interviewee: Good morning.

Interviewer: Let's start off with some background information. When and where were you born?

Interviewee: I was born in Reynosa, Mexico.

Interviewer: Uh-hum.

Interviewee: September 15th, 1977.

Interviewer: Okay. What were your parents' occupations?

Interviewee: My father has always been in the transportation industry. Busses. My grandfather was one of the founding members, when he was in Mexico, and then my father always followed in his footsteps. And, he's always been in that business, and my mom has never really worked, she has always been a stay-home mom. And, I'm sorry.

Interviewer: So, what was your father's name?

Interviewee: Carlos Eduardo Casillas.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Interviewee: I'm the Junior.

Interviewer: You're Junior.

Interviewee: I just don't like to use the word Junior.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Interviewee: I admit that.

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: I don't know, I just don't. Junior does not exist in my mind, but it's problem sharing the same name, because it can get a lot of confusion, especially when you have the same address. Not anymore, but back then, we never knew who stuff was for.

Interviewer: And, what is your mom's name?

Interviewee: Mariella Lupe Casillas.

Interviewer: And, they were both from Mexico as well, or –?

Interviewee: Yes. And, we have always been, lived on both sides of the border, but my father's business were always in Mexico. And, then in 97, that's when they started purchasing U.S. permits and bus company, so that they can start doing all the crossings and that's what actually brought us to El Paso.

Interviewer: Wow, okay. Okay, tell me about your childhood. Where did you go to school?

Interviewee: Well, I first was in U.S. schools, all kindergarten, elementary, I went to school in the United States. Then, I did junior high and high school in Mexico, and then I went to college in the United States. U.T. Pan American.

Interviewer: Okay, so were you all traveling back and forth, was that how you?

Interviewee: No, we half-lived on, no – we have lived on both sides of the border. Being U.S. citizens, we had our choice, let's say.

Interviewer: Okay, so which choice did you prefer? What was the –?

Interviewee: Well, to tell you the truth, when I was a teenager, I would rather be on the other side. I had all my friends and family there. When we moved to El Paso, I wanted to leave here so bad. I just didn't wanna be here. Now, I wouldn't change it for anything. So, it's one of those things, I got cut off from my roots and then moved to a place I'd never been to in my life. And, that's how we ended up here.

Interviewer: Do you have any siblings?

Interviewee: Yes, I have a brother and a sister. I'm the oldest. I am 33, my brother is 30, and my sister's 26.

Interviewer: And, what's your brother's name?

Interviewee: Alejandro Casillas.

Interviewer: Okay, and what does he do if you don't mind me asking?

Interviewee: He works at Mission Chevrolet.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Interviewee: He opened his own business also, but he did not really enjoy it, that part, so he decided to work for someone else. And, my sister works for my father still.

Interviewer: Okay. And, tell me a little bit more about that experience with the bus company?

Interviewee: Uh-hum.

Interviewer: Growing up and seeing the business aspect of things.

Interviewee: Well, I actually always been involved, never with the bus aspect, but since that company was one of the first ones, actually the first one in Mexico to ever use computers as part of their ticket sales. I would go in the summers and break stuff, I guess. Because I thought I knew about them, and I would start playing with them, but this is when I was a kid, probably 12, 13.

And, I would start going and pretending to know what I was doing. And, making a mess, but I kept insisting until I figured it out. That was my first school, I guess, when I came to computers. Then, going from being only in the summers to doing it every afternoon, and I've been involved in the computer part, I've never been in the bus or operation of the company. Always on the computers.

Interviewer: Always into computers?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: What was your fascination with computers?

Interviewee: I don't know. Pretty much it can do anything with them. And, this was back then when you really couldn't really do anything. But, just being able to do stuff with a machine, play games or add, print, anything, so I started actually also playing with code, writing a

little bit into the coding, and that started on my own, just once again, just playing, I started noticing that I can make a little program that can add up, then I figured out how to do other stuff, just starting basic and keep getting a little bit better at it.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Interviewee: It all started by playing, I guess.

Interviewer: So, it was something that you enjoyed?

Interviewee: Yes, of course. Yes, I've always liked what I do. It's one of those things, I guess I was born with that inclination towards computers or technology.

Interviewer: Okay. Let me also ask you, what language was primarily spoken at home?

Interviewee: Always at home, Spanish.

Interviewer: Always.

Interviewee: Yes. English has never been spoken at home. And, also with my wife. We both speak Spanish, but our lives are 90 percent English, so we spend most of our time out of the house and speaking English, and at home, we rarely speak English at home. Just when we're playing around or joking, that's about it.

Interviewer: Okay. And, I'd like to ask you a little bit about when you came to live here, and you mentioned that you were a teenager and you missed your family.

Interviewee: Oh, no, no, you see what happened is that as a typical Mexican family, my father said, 'we're moving.' It's not like you guys can stay, I was already 19 and he said, 'no, we're all moving,' so, it was my mom, my dad, my brother, my sister and myself. And, we didn't have any family really over there, it was just my family had lives in different parts of Mexico. But, we came over, I had friends, girlfriends, everything over there.

And, when we moved, I'm not kidding, I would go every weekend, I would drive over there, and it's an 800 mile trip, but I would go every weekend, and to be with my friends. Until finally, I started enjoying more of El Paso and having everything we like here, what we want here.

Interviewer: Right. Okay, let me ask you just for the record, what is the present name of your company?

Interviewee: E.R. Computer Doctors.

Interviewer: E.R. Computer Doctors.

Interviewee: I have been like that since February 5th of 2002.

Interviewer: Okay, let's go back to your education, and your college education. What do you major in?

Interviewee: Computer science. And, that's really not what we do here. Computer science is more into programming and algorithms and other, not related to our business part, but since I enjoyed more the hands-on, I decide to put that aside, we'll still use it when there's some customers that might request it, but we really try to stay away from the programming aspect of the business. We have other businesses that can assist us with that.

Interviewer: And, what was it that motivated you to major?

Interviewee: To tell you the truth, I was misled. Because I really, when I realized what computer science was, I really was wanting to go towards computer engineering, but I was too deep inside when I realized it, so I decided just to continue and not change. I went to a counselor, and based on, well, we took the test and based on that, I guess they saw computers, and said, oh, computer science, I guess, I'm not sure, but my real passion is more toward the engineering side.

Interviewer: The engineering side. What was your minor?

Interviewee: I started with communications, but I did not continue with any minor.

Interviewer: Oh, you didn't continue with a minor?

Interviewee: I left minor out.

Interviewer: Okay, so when you had a minor, what was it?

Interviewee: Communications.

Interviewer: Communications.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: And, why was it that you decided against --

Interviewee: Communications?

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: Because, first of all, communications really isn't, and electronic communications or satellite communication is not oral communication and I'm not that good at it. So, that's why I decided to -- I always wanted to change to get another type of minor, but I just -- it was easier I guess to leave it out.

Interviewer: Okay, so after you graduated from college what happened?

Interviewee: Well, I was working for my father. And, doing exactly, pretty much the same thing. The only difference that we do here, the only difference is, we will go to all the offices in different parts of Mexico and the United States. There is offices all over the place and we will take care of a whole network. It's kind of difficult having your father as a boss, so I just chose, I came to a point thinking, 'oh, what's better, keeping you as a father, or as a boss?' And, I just chose him as a father.

Interviewer: What was the difficulty?

Interviewee: That there was never a line. You never know when he's being your boss or he's being your father. So, that's why, at the office he would be my father, and at home he would be my boss, so it was, when it should be the other way around. So, I thought it was just easier to keep him as a father as opposed to a boss and father.

Interviewer: So, you decided to open?

Interviewee: Well, we started by **Icon Technologies** -- which was our initial business name. When we were working with them, because we were supplying them all the stuff, and doing the, well, let's just say we started with a steady customer list. That's how we started there, and we realize that it was not just him as a customer, we started seeing other people's interest, and so we started doing work for a lot of people, other companies, and that's when we decided, 'you know what? Let's stop doing this, let's just focus on our own business.'

So, we went ahead and started looking around, we found this place,

and we thought, 'Oh, it's good.' We went to a landlord, talked to him, he said, 'Great,' rented it, the day they gave us a key, all we did was sat on the floor and this is like 'Now what?' We're used to doing this, but we don't know the retail part of it, or the storefront part of it. So, we learned as we went, and as time went by and we've come this far now.

Interviewer: Okay, and you said that the other, the previous name was Icon?

Interviewee: Icon Technologies.

Interviewer: Icon technologies?

Interviewee: We still own it, but we just don't use it.

Interviewer: Oh, you still own it?

Interviewee: Yeah, we didn't change things, we own that company, but it's dormant, let's say, and we decided to make this one, called it E.R. Computer Doctors, my middle name is Eduardo. My business partner's name is Rubin, so we played with the name, E.R. as Eduardo-Ruben, Emergency Room, we came up with so many names, Extremely Reliable, I don't know, we played with that, but pretty much it's E.R. Computer Doctors, because wanted our name to say what we did. As opposed to Icon Technologies, can be any type, anything.

Interviewer: Tell me about the services that you provide here.

Interviewee: Mainly what we do, we work with computers and we network them, we work with their operating systems, we clean infections, connect them, set them up, pretty much anything computer-related. We can program, like I said, we just choose not. We leave websites outside, out of our business. We don't work with printers or monitors, but the basic thing, not by choice, but what the customers brings us, is infections. People mostly what they do is they like to download the free music, the free games, or free movies, and normally that leads to free infections.

Interviewer: Uh. So, do you see that often?

Interviewee: Many, many times a day, yes.

Interviewer: And, you mentioned that you don't work with monitors or printers?

Interviewee: We don't like to service them because to tell you the truth, it's cheaper for the customer to replace those things than it is to repair them. A computer still has some important stuff for you, you might have your documents that you don't wanna lose. You can always buy yourself another computer, but you can never buy your pictures, your family memories, music, whatever, it would be too expensive, so if you replace a machine those documents or those files can always be removed to another one.

And, the way or style we like to do, we like to keep the computer as close as possible if not identical to what the customer had, had prior to failure. As opposed to many of our competitors, let's call it that, they like to dump stuff on a single place and then the customer has to figure out how to find it.

Interviewer: And, do you have any memorable experiences with having to recover information for somebody or any?

Interviewee: Yes, as a matter of fact, we have done work, thanks to one of the agents in charge of the FBI, unfortunately, he got in trouble, but Mr. **Hargret** Crawford, I don't know if you remember him. He opened a lot of doors for us, business wise with agents, other agencies, we have done work for the City of Summer Park. We used to do all the work, we haven't seen him in a while, but all the employees were there and that administration, are still our customers to the date. And, we have recovered information for them, for Mr. Crawford, Mr. Crawford doesn't live here anymore, but like I said, he did open a lot of doors. And, those are, when we first started in data recovery, it all started by accident.

Because, we had a customer that came over to us and he brought us a broken computer, our work orders stated the customer's claiming his computer will not start. We know everything. And, then we call, we said, 'Sir, the problem with the computer is your hard drive.' He said, 'What do you mean? I took you my computer and it was working.' I said, 'Okay, and what we received here, what you started and I have a copy, it says that your computer wasn't working, it wasn't starting, and the reason it's not doing that is because your hard drive is bad.' 'Oh, no I have very important stuff in there.' He tried to trick us into trying to solve his problem.

So, between our knowledge and a little bit of equipment we had that we managed to get his stuff, but then our knowledge only got so far with the programming part, so we started purchasing equipment and software to try and get stuff out of damaged hard drives, and I would say that's our most memorable part, because

thanks to him, we started doing something that really wasn't part of our initial business plan or business or normal abilities.

Interviewer: And, going back to the business plan, what was your business plan when you decided, did you have one?

Interviewee: Just rely on our knowledge, I guess. Because we did not have a business plan. We started with our own money, we never did any business or plan anything, we just decided we know how to do this, let's open a place, and that's how we ended up.

Interviewer: And, your business partner, Rubin?

Interviewee: Rubin Ramirez, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Where did you meet him?

Interviewee: At the company where with my father. He was the IT manager there. And, when we moved in here, when we moved to El Paso, we were not very good friends, because at a point, I think he might've thought I was gonna be his replacement, and then I actually thought the same thing. But, I was put, I became his subordinate, and we actually understood each other very well as in how to work. We made a great team. And, that's how, we worked well there, and we work great here, too.

Interviewer: So, what were the challenges that you faced in opening the business?

Interviewee: Well, first get noticed, obviously. We started already with a little bit of momentum, because we already had customers. We have a lot of friends and family that has helped us out, as in referring us to other friends and family members. And, that helped us, like I said, a lot. But, getting noticed, getting the word out, also people, it's hard to have someone trust you, when you haven't existed or they haven't seen you in El Paso, right now, because right now our biggest, our best customers are, are best advertising is our own customers.

We don't really do any advertising, barely any advertising in our company, and our customers do it for us.

Interviewer: Wow, okay. So, you started up with your own money?

Interviewee: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Tell me about finding this place and renting it. And, sitting here on the floor afterward.

Interviewee: Well, what happened was, we initially thought we were gonna open at the other side of town, because we saw the base as the military, Fort Bliss as our possible main business source. When we started driving around, we noticed that there was like 10 million places like us, so we both live on the Westside, and while driving home one day, I called Ruben, I said, you know what, Ruben, there's a place called on Calden Cove, too. Which is almost on Wrestler and Masa. It seems like a good location, we called the landlord and told him, 'you know, we have this interest in renting,' and he made it really easy for us.

Because we noticed other places they wanted to know a thousand things, they wanted to have business records, and I think they wanted to go by percentage. I think, they go, they charge a smaller rent fee and they go on a percentage based on income. And, this guy said, 'No, we have a fixed rent. We need this, we need that. And, you're in.' So, we provided what he needed and the next day he gave us a key, because he needed to like get rid of the stuff from the previous tenant, I guess. And, we opened the door, we came in, and we saw the place and it's like, 'Now what?'

We just sat on the floor, and thought, 'What are we gonna do next?' So, our plan was to be a store, and a shop. But, as time went by we noticed that the store part was not really for us.

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: Because, computer parts is a very, a lot of people sell computer parts, and including the giants like Best Buy, back then Circuit City, Wal-Mart, Sam's, and our mark-ups would have to be minimum to a point of a few cents, a few dollars. And, people would buy computer parts, take them home, break them, burn them, and then wanting to return them claiming that they were damaged.

So, our profit immediately was a change just by shutting it back getting a replacement. We had people who were gonna replace it, but we were paying for the shipping, so it was becoming expensive, and not at all good for the business. So, we started having the customer, we will still stuff, okay, we'll sell hard drives, but only if we provide the service, if we install it.

The mark-ups are still minimum, when it comes to that, but we

make our money by the installation, and not only that, if it fails it will be in our control, because we'll be the ones that installed it. There was not a third party involved.

Interviewer: Okay, so initially, you were going to be a store and a --

Interviewee: And a shop.

Interviewer: And, a shop.

Interviewee: Now, we're just a shop.

Interviewer: And, how many other employees?

Interviewee: Just my business partner and myself.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: We do have a reason for that. Even though it takes us 12-13 hours of our day to be here, we open from 8 to 7 p.m. But, I'm normally here by 7-7:15, and we normally don't go home until about 8, 8:30, 9 p.m. But, the reason we don't like to hire employees, is because we know that in this line of business, it's very easy to lie to the customer. And, that's the most common thing. That's why you'll see all over the place, all over town, a place like ours come up and disappear.

All the time. Because, they come and they want to make rent, they want to be able to pay the rent with the next customer, as opposed to treating the customer right or whatever. And, there are many times customers think the computers are broken, just because the computer doesn't turn on. Many times you have the switch, the power supply in the back sometimes have a switch to conserve power, top of the switch the computer has in the front. So, they have someone complaining and they put a switch in the back, and they want to turn on the computer to find out, and it will not turn on, they'll come over to us, 'Hey, my computer's not working.' If we realize it's just the switch, we'll tell them it's just that thing on the back. There's nothing to purchase, all you have to do is press it.

So, we gain our customer's trust and that's how we do it. When we have seen in many other places where customers get their own parts sold to them. We have seen that a lot. I'm not gonna mention names, but customers have had that happen, they know the businesses, so we are members of the Better Business Bureau.

And, we were picking members until 2003, because when we first tried, they said we had to be in business for a year.

And, so we were not navigating with the same Icon Technologies, we had like one year with E.R. Computer Doctors. By the time the whole process went through and we became like members in like I said 03, and then we simply maintain an A-plus rating. Not a single strike we had in our, because we are making mistakes, we are human, but we make sure we fix them. We are professional, we make sure that whatever mistakes we make, we stand behind our product or our service.

Interviewer: And, tell me about these long work days?

Interviewee: I kind of am a workaholic. Since I wanna make sure that everything is done here, is done right, both my business partner and myself put a lot of attention into our customers' satisfactions, so the process of us doing our stuff, which is saving the customers, saving their computer, returning it, all that process is time consuming, so many times you have a process that is gonna take two hours to do. And, it might be doing it on its own. But, if it gets interrupted and it gets interrupted on the minute 10, Alison and you be sitting there forever, and you wouldn't notice it.

So, you'd have to be on top of stuff. So, I come early to make sure that everything is flowing. On top of that, when I go home, I always go out or have dinner, or eat at home, socialize a little bit, and then before I go to bed, every single night, I do have the ability to remote control all my computers in the office, because customers own computers to make sure that everything is flowing. So, that we try to use them to the best of our advantage. That way there's, I don't have to be copying something that's gonna take five hours, while we're in business hours as opposed to trying to do it overnight, that way it's to both our advantage, like I said, the customers and us.

Interviewer: And, your partner stays here that long as well?

Interviewee: Yes, we both work. Well, not-not always, because he has four little girls, so he has to go pick them up. So, he sometimes is a little bit earlier, but he compensates by coming in early in the morning, so it's, we take, it's about the same, it's just not always he can stay that late because like said, because of his girls.

Interviewer: Uh-hum. And, tell me how beneficial again, because I think your name is very interesting the way that you came up with your name,

how beneficial has the name been for you in terms of getting your, what it is that you do, out there?

Interviewee: I think it has worked really good for us, because I think it does say what we do, and people always come in and joke. Is there a doctor? Is there a doctor in the house? Or, I have an emergency or get the gurney let's go to the car. And, there's a lot of jokes, we would not have fun if we were gonna be using them. Like the stethoscope somewhere, that's gonna be too ridiculous. And, we decided not to, but customers do know, even people that we've never seen in our lives, they'll come and say, 'Okay, I need this done.'

There ain't no what we're doing without a meeting to ask. And, what advantages that you think that you have being the Hispanic business owner. Do you think there are any?

Interviewer: To tell you the truth, I really do not.

Interviewee: I don't know if there's a difference or not. I honestly don't, don't know. I really don't.

Interviewer: No? How about networking with other businesses?

Interviewee: Let me go and step back. One thing I do think that does work is the language thing. I'm able to speak to my Hispanic customers or to my anglo speaking customers. Either one, that's the only benefit I can think of.

Interviewer: It's the language.

Interviewee: The language. I think it's the that will help us, other than that I really, nothing comes to my mind.

Interviewer: Okay, let's see. Did anybody encourage to go into business for yourself?

Interviewee: Well, I guess seeing my father always being in business, and I always like to do things on my home. I'm the type of person that I have this mentality that if I want to do it right, then I'll have to do it myself. So, instead of a drawing tool for someone, well, if I do it myself I'm gonna create my great working environment, I think. And, a lot of people think, oh, great, you own your own business, you have all the free time in the world. Yes, I have all the time in the world unless it's before 5 am. and after 12 midnight, I can do what I want. So, no, it's not true that you have all the free and all

the liberties. Yeah, we have a little bit of benefits, like I can always, tell my business part, what I'm being, and I'm eating in t a few hours because I'm going somewhere. It's just based on the business needs.

I've also have to ask for permission, I guess. Being a responsible business owner you cannot just do that. All the time or any time. I had to balance it out.

Interviewer: So, who would you consider to be your mentor. Business wise, I guess, my Dad.

Interviewee: Yeah?

Interviewer: Computer wise, life, I guess. I don't know. I just started on my own, I guess. Just being allow to touch him and break him and fix him, I guess, was a point that Kyle, I was interesting by I didn't know much about them. So, I just started playing. Until, I finally figured that out.

Interviewee: I find that very interesting. Tell me about that, tell me about playing with the computers, while you were a child.

Interviewer: Well, ever since I was a kid, I would break and fix my own toys. Normally, I was very good at the taking part, but putting back together was not always my sight but I would just do it. I would break something and then 'I didn't want to tell my parents, I didn't wanna get grounded, so I refused.' I forgot I was to fix it, and even one time my TV in my room, broke, and I was selling your soul and I took it all apart. I didn't fix it, but I just decided to take it upon myself to fix it.

I don't know, I always tried it. I' the type of person and not just technology, I also play with my Vehicles, anything and I'll just dive in.

Interviewee: Okay, and what role has your family played in encouraging you or in mentoring you. Not just you're a father. But, talk about your father, if you want, but your wife or your cousins or your brothers and system – and my wife for instance, she's always every morning, I would always tell her, we communicated a lot and I always tell her, 'You know what, right now I don't think the business is doing that great or you know, what we're doing grey. And, every morning she just cheers me up and says, 'You know, you're gonna do great. You're gonna have a great day.'

And, I always leave home, like is this gonna be a great day? And, she has helped us a lot every since them, from the beginning she was here all the time with us, too. She would, if we got close. They would go see one person, I would go see another one, and she would stay in help us here. And, we would trust her, for the whole thing, because you know I was going to be making up stuff for the customer or anything, so definitely I don't think we would've been able to proceed without my wife's help.

Interviewer: What's her name?

Interviewee: Christina. Christina Casillas.

Interviewer: Okay. And, did you meet her in college?

Interviewee: No, I met her at a friend's house. It was a going away party, she was leaving, she was gonna go study in Canada. And, we met and we liked each other, and ever since this happened 12 years ago, 11 years ago.

Interviewer: That's nice. It's nice to have support.

Interviewee: So, yeah, she has always helped me. And, now that she has her own job, and she'll still gives me my peptalk and all that – that actually does help, instead of like, she sees me worried she'll cheer me up. So, it does help. But, brothers and sisters, my sister, they've always, the way they help me out is by referring people that will tell me, 'You know what? Your brother does this?' And, that'll help me with my friends and family.

Just like that, they haven't actively participated in the business at all. But, and my mom also for instance, when we started, and she knew I was here, all day, every day, she would bring me food every single day. Every single day, and she would bring it always two croissants. One for her and one for me. That happened for I guess, a year, year and a half. Until I asked her, please mom, you're doing too much for me, and I feel bad for her, because she was going out of her way, too. So, I asked her to please stop doing that, but if not she would probably still be, uh, blaming me for everything.

So, no. I helped in every possible way received a lot of family mostly. And, friends still buy referrals, and so everyone has been an active part of this business growth.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit more about your mother. I've heard about your father, but tell me about your mother.

Interviewee: Well, she's the one that took care of us, always make sure we being responsible, I guess. On my father's side, we got it, I guess by osmosis, because by seeing it, he was always at work. But, my mom took care of the discipline mostly, and showing us how to do things right, and being responsible I guess. Wake up early, be on time, if we said we're gonna been doing something at whatever time, make sure we arrive, clean up. She played a lot of big roll in I guess personality wise and the way I look to do things. If I tell a customer I'm gonna be there, at a time, I'll do whatever it takes to be there. And, if I'm not gonna be there, I'm gonna have sure I call, because I don't like that to be done. I don't like to be too much lying to my customers, so. I see my mom like her imagine being don't be late, so that's why I attribute that to her.

Another thing is, she always taught us to be courteous to everyone and if I see a lady carrying something make sure help her with it, or give her my seat, stuff like that. And, that's what actually ever time we see a costumer bring in a commuter, it doesn't matter if it's male or female, we make sure we run outside and help him. Once again, I do see that's where I think of my mom. Every time I see someone else, I see my mom telling me, 'Hey, go help him!' That's the way, that's her teachings I guess I see there.

And, she's always been a great doctor, mom, life, everything, all our lives we had everything in order. Our clothes was always there, everything was just a bill. I get married, and all of a sudden, I was part of life. And, I get here and I see that now I have to. I'm sorry, I'll go back. I go to college and I go live with three roommates. Three? Yes, it was a large apartment and we were three, and all of a sudden, all those things were no longer available.

There was no more food on the table, by the time we got from school, home from school, the bed wasn't done. The clothes wasn't washed, so all those things you take for granted. You don't realize they're not really like that. There's someone behind the scenes. And, in this case, my mom.

Interviewer: Oh, that's nice. So, getting back to your business. What were the economic conditions in the region, when you started? Do you remember how that was?

Interviewee: I don't think there was any really bad economic, I'm gonna say as good or bad as because they had been like for the past few years

because, as much as they say of the crisis and anything, we haven't done a very steady business situation, I didn't notice when they say that the world is falling apart, on our, yeah, we see a little bit of – it's like a rollercoaster, but that terrible. I guess, El Paso doesn't get to hear that much. We get the good and the bad news. So, if they said they were starting economic boom, El Paso still doesn't see it that fast, or there's an economic downfalls. But that still doesn't happen that fast, so I'm gonna say, it was average for the region?

Interviewer: Okay. Let's see, what factors have helped you grow in your business?

Interviewee: As in increased amount of customers, you mean? Or –

Interviewer: Maybe, if that's been a factor.

Interviewee: I'm gonna say one fact that will our customers come back is the way we treat them. We always go the extra mile. For instance, once we told a customer that their computer needed something done, since we offer a free estimate to our customers who are coming in, if your computer needs this done. Well, we're working on it and the customer already has a quote, we're working on it, we realize that what we told them was not what it was.

We will absorb that. We will make sure, I will not be changing the quote on that customer. I stick to my word, and that will – I just don't wanna, I don't wanna lose my customers' trust. Because our customers can make us or destroy us if we don't keep them happy, so I make sure we're gonna change that. You know, listen to our customers, be professional, we always tell our customers, for instance, we tell them about their computer is gonna be ready, whatever the day, whatever time, we're closed at 7 p.m., so most of our customers we talk – pickup time will be between 6 and 7.

Many times they'll tells us, 'Will, you please make it faster?' And, I'm the analogy person. I tell them that something's fixing their computer, it's like baking a cake. Just because they need it faster, doesn't mean I can have it faster. Can I just increase the temperature in the over and the cake will bake better, it might even burn. Same thing here, there's processes to follow, and there's just stuff that you cannot make it happen. They offered us, we respect the customers, the way they bring it, we work on a first-come, first-serve, because when there's customers all signed, show up and say 'I'll pay you more money if you see my computer first.'

And, the reason we don't accept that is because, the other customer had a workup earlier, they decided to bring it soon, they just planned their day. And, I already told them a time, and I told them your computer's gonna be ready at 5 p.m., just because another person shows up and for me to take another \$50-200 from – I'm not gonna be able to keep this promise. And, now I made a little more money here, but now I lost this customer and his friends and his family, so I'd rather just keep it out of respect for everyone. And, the way they arrive.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: So, I think all those things have played a role in our business. Mostly being honest to our customers.

Interviewer: That's a good way to run a business. Have you expanded beyond the local area?

Interviewee: We have, no. We tried opening a n East Side location. But, since I'm a control freak, I want to make sure that everything is approved by me or by my business partner, as in work wise, it's impossible. I cannot be in so many places, I wish there was like a teletransporting machine that I can just appear somewhere and it's not possible. And, in order to have, in order for me to be comfortable having my name on it. I wanna make sure it has the same quality and dedication we put to every computer that leaves here.

So, that's the reason we haven't grown. I know, it might be a blessing and a curse, because it's keeping, the delegating part is the part that I trust issues, I don't wanna my customers lied to.

Interviewer: Uh-hum. But, if you could, say you could clone yourself and there'd be two, why the East Side?

Interviewee: Well, just to have more ground. We do a lot of work on the other side of town. Yes. East and Northeast.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: And, we do, for instance, we do rush calls, we go see customers, and we see a lot of people on the other side. Yesterday we probably saw four people on the Arbor area right now, we have a person that was – would help us just pick up computers. Because when the customer does, just go and come and pick up my computer, and don't troubleshoot it here, just take, then we can

have someone pick it up. Because there's no, but most people want us to [inaudible] first to see if it's possible for the computer not lead, and if it's ultimately necessary, then they let us bring it.

If not, we can fix it there and then for them. But, people already know the way we work during all that stuff, we can rely on a third person to go and get those machines for us. That's about it. But, we go all over town. We go to Cruises, we have a customer that we got to Albuquerque. We have computers shipped over to us from Seattle, Houston, people that have been our customers for many years and they got relocated. They just don't want anyone else to touch their computers and they'll ship them over to us.

And, it happens quite often.

Interviewer: Really?

Interviewee: It's a common thing, yes.

Interviewer: So, you also go out into the field, I was thinking that they brought here in.

Interviewee: No, we go out a lot. We go out, our calendars are mostly full. In average, we see about 30 people a day. That's about it. Between going out and receiving in the office, we see about 30 people a day. That's our average.

Interviewer: And, how many computers have you seen shipped in from clients that have moved away?

Interviewee: I'd say on the average, two-three a month.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: There's months that we don't see any, of course. That's why I'm averaging it, but I'm gonna say two-three a month. We have a customer, who used to go to Juarez, but we would not cross that border for anything. We have crossing over they have business on this side of the border, and on the other side. And, some of them have been able to accommodate us to the point that they allow us to do all their work here. And, then we'll remote control their computers from here, but if we need a hand over there, they hire another computer, which is gonna be guided by us.

We'll tell them what we want them to do. There's a few customers that have a lot of us do that.

Interviewer: Okay, so you don't go to the Juarez, because –

Interviewee: There's not any amount of money will make me cross that border.

Interviewer: No?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Because of the violence?

Interviewee: Exactly. Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, looking back on your business.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: What would you have done differently?

Interviewee: I don't think I would've changed anything. Because everything that we have done, mistakes and non-mistakes, have taught us how to get better at what we do, and to tell the truth, I really don't think I would change anything. We learn from everything, so I like the way life has brought us to where we are. And, my business partner, and myself, when it's calm in here, we're like, 'What would you have done different?' or 'Would you do it all over again?' Because it's been an interesting way of getting, when we first started we were staying here until 2 a.m., we were staying here and being here the next morning at 7 a.m. We used to be open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. But, we decided to close at 7 p.m.

Because, even though many times we're still here, just closing the door, having a little piece and quiet to be able to continue our work, helps a lot and that's why I like to arrive early before opening time. And, a lot of customers do appreciate that we are open, because they can drop off their computers before they go to work, and our staying open till late, not 8 sorry, late, will allow them to pick them up after they leave their work. And, that also puts it ahead of the competition because most people close at 5 or at 6 or even at 4 p.m.

Interviewer: So, you and Ruben have contemplated what you may have done differently?

Interviewee: Oh, of course. And, we have come to a conclusion that we really, I don't think we would've changed anything. I mean, if we have to do it all over again, we probably would do it the same way.

Interviewer: Okay. And, what advice would you offer another Hispanic who's starting a business today?

Interviewee: Well, to be professional, to tell your customers the truth, and be persistent, there's no such thing as 9 to 5 in my experience, so hey, even when I'm not here, I get to, my business is always in my head. Always, always, and I'm troubleshooting, I'm not kidding you, I leave, let's say I go home tonight, and there's a computer that was brought to us and I haven't been able to decipher the problem or anything, I take it home and all of a sudden, I sometimes have woken, like in the middle of the night, and 'Eureka! I got it.' I'll write it down, because I'll never remember.

And, I come in and many times it has worked. Because, unfortunately, with computers, even though they're supposed to be an exact science and mathematically controlled, they behave a lot of times like a social phenomenon and they'll do whatever they want to.

Interviewer: What experiences have you had in terms of weird glitches with computers if you've got one on the top of your head?

Interviewee: Man, one particular one, no, but we have customers that have 12-20 identical computers, let's say, identical to every point, and the computer is not working properly, and we follow the same procedure, we have two identical problems. We follow the same procedure, and it won't do it. We follow all the stuff that we normally do, and will just not be responsive. That's when I say they behave more like a social phenomenon and be completely unpredictable.

They sometimes take a life of their own.

Interviewer: Interesting. Just make sure that I covered everything. Well, my last question is what hopes do you have for the future?

Interviewee: Well, to have my business continue to grow. I really want a franchise this, that's one of my ideas, more than expanding as in opening more shops, is sell my secret recipe of herbs and spices, and be able to expand as a franchise, that's my, that's my goal.

Interviewer: Really? Tell me about that?

Interviewee: Because, for instance, one of the things I think we have that is great for a business is the way we do things. We have a process that we have developed throughout the years. We have a lot of technology, a lot of money involved in our different types of software equipment, and each computer receives, depending on the problem, we follow the type of troubleshooting, or depending on what the customer request, we follow that type of troubleshooting.

And, based on that we get a result, and so far it has worked great, because our customers do like what we do. And, we are not gonna be nickel and diming, like for instance, one of our competitors would say, like, 'To install the operating system, we charge so much.' Sometimes a customer comes to us and says, 'How much do you charge to do this?' 'We charge X amount of money.' They say, 'But, why? If this person is gonna charge me so much?' I say, 'Okay, because what we're doing is we're doing the whole circle for this much. They're gonna do Windows, and also one of your drivers. Well, that's another \$50. Oh, you wanted your software? That's another so much. Oh, you also wanted your information saved? Oh, that's another so much.'

By the time they're done, it's 200 or 300 percent more than what we had originally quoted. Or I tell them also if they decide to go that way, I have become so confident in what we do, that I tell them, 'Okay, go ahead and do it. And, I will see you soon.' And, yes, we do have a lot. We have a collection of pink stickers from a specific business, that they apply to your computer when you arrive so that they know that you're bringing it in, that way you can take it out of the store.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: We collect them. They're our trophies. Because of their unreliability. Also, we do a lot of data recovery for other places. Not for them, but after they break them. We get to recover. Unfortunately, the customer gets to pay, because they took it to computer shop number one, and they charge a max amount of money to fix the computer, when they realize that they lost all their stuff, they bring it to us. We're not gonna charge them for the process, because it's not really our fault, so now whatever they pay shop number one, and now they're gonna pay us so the customer ends up losing, when they could have paid me an initial fee which was gonna be 1/3 of what they charge them for the actual recover.

I always tell my customers, it's cheaper to cure a cold then to

revive the dead. And, initially I was just gonna cure the cold. But, now that they took it somewhere else, and they charged them only so much money, now they're bringing it over, and they really are dead. And, that's gonna be more expensive. And, that happens quite often.

Interviewer: So, the franchise, do you see it coming in the foreseeable future?

Interviewee: I've been inquiring about it. It's just I have to figure out a way to make it, I wanna make sure that everything is covered as in legal, that way I don't just put it out there and everyone starts doing it. I wanna make sure I can cover all the bases, so that no one can show up and like Chuco's Tacos and they're rolled tacos, and you know that company in Austin that tried to lute Chuco's Tacos and they didn't get in for the Chuco's part, they got in for the rolled tacos, because they had them patented. So, they figured out a way to cover all the rolled tacos and the tomato sauce and with the cheese that's the part that they had legal rights to.

So, that's what I'm trying to do – figure out a way to control that, so anyone who's doing it will be able to collect on it.

Interviewer: Is there something that you want to tell me that I may not have asked you about your business? About yourself? Anything?

Interviewee: To tell you the truth, it doesn't come to my mind. I over-answered I think every question as I always, like I said, I start talking and I won't stop.

Interviewer: This has been a fantastic interview. And, I appreciate your time and having us here today.

Interviewee: Thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you so much. This concludes the interview.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 49 minutes