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Interview no. 1519

Moe Beltran

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Moe Beltran

Interviewer: Homero Galicia

Project: Hispanic Entrepreneurs Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: January 29, 2009

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Transcript No.: 1519

Transcriber / Summary: Daniel Santana

Moe Beltran describes his upbringing on the 3100 block of Alameda in El Paso, Texas and then his later business endeavors. He was eager to graduate from high school so he could enter the military during the Second World War. He graduated from El Paso Tech High but was too young to enroll in the military; Instead, he was offered a job at Bigsfield where he worked until 1945. Beltran went on to help with his father's locksmith business, International Bike and Key Shop. Before he was seventeen years old, he married his sixteen-year-old wife. In 1951, Mr. Beltran purchased the El Paso Key Fitting Company. Along with servicing the local community, Beltran's company was given contracts to work for federal agencies such as the DEA. He elaborates on his experiences in going to the banks to attain funding and loans. He also notes his extensive time working with the El Paso Chamber of Commerce. He worked in various groups such as the Better Business Bureau and Minority Business Council, which encouraged larger banks to do business with El Paso's smaller Hispanic-owned firms. Beltran credits his successes to the values his father taught him. Mr. Beltran states that his involvement in these boards is his method of a paying back the city that has been good to him. Beltran went on to have ten children, six of whom still work for him. He thanks his wife for mostly raising his children since he had to work long hours to allow his business to succeed. Beltran encourages greater Hispanic involvement in the business sectors so that they may open opportunities to future entrepreneurs. He, however, had to stop his involvement so that he could spend more time with his family. Beltran concludes the interview by listing his various heroes and reflecting on his current health as an eighty-year old man that exercises and stays active.

Length of interview 72 minutes

Length of Transcript 57 pages

Name of Interviewee: Moe Beltran
Date of Interview: 29 January 2009
Name of Interviewer: Homero Galicia

This is January 29, [2009] at 2:10 p.m. This is an interview with Moe Beltran who began a business called El Paso Key Fitting. Moe, thank you for taking your time to share with us. It's an important story I'd like to ask you and let's begin.

HG: Where did you grow up, here, in El Paso?

MB: On Alameda street, 30 and 3100 block of Alameda. I was born on the 3100 block of Alameda and grew up all the way through into the 3000 block of Alameda.

HG: And in high school—

MB: In those two blocks, that's where I lived all through my high school days. Back in '43 when I graduated, in January '43 from high school, I mean, from grammar school, that was during the war. Friends of mine and myself thought that we should go to school and take our high school—four years and turn them into two years of education so we could go into war. So we approached the different schools around town, Bowie, El Paso High, Austin. They told us, No, there's only one school that you guys can go to if you want that kind of deal where you can go two years and graduate your nineteen credits that you need to graduate high school. So we went to El Paso Technical High School. That was the name of it then, which is on Rio Grande. The campus for the community college is nowadays. We approached the teachers there and they were nice. They said, What is it you want to do it? We want to go to war. There's a war going on and we need to take our education before we go to war. So what is it you want to do after that? Well, my dad has a little business of his own; I'd like to continue that. And the other guy says, you know, I'd like to have a business of my own because his dad, he always worked at SP Shops and all that. So we embarked on our education.

HG: Your father had a business?

MB: Yes.

HG: What kind of business?

MB: Well, in 1917, [19]18, he started the bicycle shop business and then he went into vulcanizing, tire vulcanizing. And he became pretty good at it, too. And there, came in a carpenter who needed lock work on cabinets that he used to make. He used to put locks in them and he wanted the locks to have one key to operate the locks and that's how it started my dad to become a locksmith. He went as far as going to find out code books, and what have you, that he acquired from my dad—started him as a locksmith. That was back in 1918, 1919 on Alameda. And, of course, that's where I picked up. We used to live there—where I was born—the back of that building was the living quarters. My dad divided it and the front portion of it was the business. So I dragged myself around on the floor of that shop back out there. As a matter of fact, that's where Dominguez Sheet Metal is now. So, I tell Frank to take care of that place. A good person was born in that area. (laughing) Anyway, from there, we went across the street and we stayed in that block until about 1939. Then we moved out there to 3000 block. It was there, where I started my high school days.

HG: So you used to go to the (missions??).

MB: Yeah, the teachers said, Okay, we can do it. We can do it but it's gonna take you from six o'clock in the morning until five o'clock every day. You will not have any vacation period. You will not have anything. You will not even have a lunch period, unless one of the teachers wants to give it to you.

HG: Wow. So you finished Tech?

MB: Yes, we took our vocation training with machine shop and we took mechanical and drafting with another—and we took all our classes. I mean, we had about twenty-two, twenty-three classes in English.

HG: How many of you did this, [inaudible]?

MB: Two of us, in particular. Actually, there was three of us. We all have our businesses, still, to this day. One of them is retired, anyway.

HG: Who was that?

MB: That's Henry Armendariz.

HG: What business did he get into?

MB: Well, he's still in the insulation business. He's working for a place out there, close to where we grew up off of Alameda behind the Garden Angel Church, there on Durazno street.

HG: And then you went in the service?

MB: No, never did, but when I graduated, I wasn't sixteen years old. This was January of 1945 and my friend and I went to the post office. He went and applied for the Marine Corps and I wanted to apply for it also but they told me, You're too young. I'm sorry. But we can get you a job at Biggs Field, you're a machinist and you have drafting. On the day you're sixteen years old, we'll call you on that day and we'll give you a job at Biggs Field as a machinist apprentice. And by God, the very same day that I started working at a place on Texas street, I worked the morning; my dad came in at noon and told me that Biggs Field wanted me to report at one o'clock. And I started working there and then the war ended in '45

but they kept me till the end of November of that year. Good money, eighty bucks a week at that time was lot of money.

HG: Wow, and you were single?

MB: Yes, I was single. Not quite married yet.

HG: Wow, and so when that finished—

MB: Well, the thing about it, that helped us develop our business, was the education that we got, the teachers. I mean, we had beautiful teachers. As a matter of fact, they all either had master's [degrees], or what have you, and they used to educate people from the college at that time. They would come in at summertime to get schooling there.

HG: Was Tech dominant Hispanic or—?

MB: Oh, definitely, by all means. There were several Anglo young people there also but the majority was Hispanic. I'd say 90 percent.

HG: Yeah and the teachers?

MB: They were all Anglo, everyone of them. Beautiful, beautiful teachers.

HG: So when did you begin thinking that you wanted to start your own business?

MB: At that time. Actually, when I was relived of my job at Biggs Field, that's when I started with my dad. I started developing my dad's business, which was doing fairly well, now a lot more locksmithing than anything else; and the bicycle work. No more vulcanizing tires or anything, (preparing??) tires. It was the

International Key and Bicycle Shop, the name of the place on Alameda—3039
Alameda was the last place we had it in.

HG: How old were you then?

MB: I was sixteen, still.

HG: And then after you came out of Fort Bliss—Biggs Field—

MB: Biggs Field.

HG: —you were eighteen?

MB: Well, I continued there with my dad, there on Alameda. And then I was married. Before I was seventeen I got married, started a family. So I never made it to war and when the Korean War came around they sent me a 4A, I believe, that I would get called upon if there was any need but I was too well married, too many children to be taken in.

HG: You married at seventeen.

MB: Almost seventeen, my wife almost sixteen. Yes.

HG: And you were working for your dad?

MB: I was working for my dad.

HG: And you were working at Biggs Field also.

MB: No.

HG: You had already finished?

MB: I'd already finished Biggs Field. That's when I started working for my dad. And so, I wouldn't take too much out of my dad's place. I would work after hours picking up different jobs, fixing washing machines, repairing cars, doing automobile work. I was a machinist. I could do a lot of different thing. That was my income. My big income came from that and the rest was from my dad. But I started developing my dad's business quite well. I started so much so that when 1951 came around, the Salcedos were developing their business into—going into, rather, locksmithing going into wholesale business.

HG: Wholesale keys?

MB: Yeah, well, I would have to say that it was a contracting business.

HG: The Salcedo brothers had a key business.

MB: El Paso Key Fitting Company was theirs. Their daddy developed it in 1917 on Texas street.

HG: Oh, that was El Paso Key Fitting.

MB: They came and offered me, because I was already doing most of their business anyway because they were not paying attention to the locksmithing business, I was doing most of their business in my little Model A. I'd go up and down Texas and Alameda street doing all the car lots keys when they needed them. And that's when I started doing safe work also, changing combinations on safes. And I'd get a call to open an occasional one and that's when I started picking up. So in 1951 I was hired by them for three months. They told me, If at the end of three months, you still want to work for us or you want to buy the business, we will sell it to you.

HG: Really.

MB: Ten thousand dollars flat—lock, stock, and barrel. So I worked with them. I worked with them until—that was in November of '51, 1951. By the end of January, they told me, Okay, tomorrow's gonna be February the 1st. Do you want the business or not? I told them, "I want the business."

HG: Because you had developed it?

MB: That's right. So I bought El Paso Key Fitting Company.

HG: Did you have the money to buy it?

MB: No, I didn't. In three years, I paid him the \$10,000 and I would buy the stock from them on a monthly basis, which amounted to about \$600 or \$700 a month, of stock that I would buy from them.

HG: So when you bought—

MB: Locksmithing supplies, locks and all that.

HG: So you bought El Paso Key Fitting?

MB: I bought El Paso Key Fitting Company with the understanding that they would never go into the business, word of mouth. They'd never go into the locksmithing business again.

HG: They were—

MB: It's gonna be yours and yours forever.

HG: They were doing commercial?

MB: They were doing contracting work only, and wholesale. They had a store there on Texas street, their property, where they developed, they used to wholesale, buy—

HG: How many brothers were there in Salcedo—?

MB: Three. Carlos, the owner, the oldest, then Alfredo and then—actually all three of them are dead now—and then Eddie, Eduardo Salcedo. And two sisters, one of them still lives.

HG: But later they got back into the business?

MB: Well, they went on for about nine, ten years without being able to do much at anything else that they could do because their business went (sour??) and they couldn't connect. They did too much credit business and they never were able to recover. So they went out of it—even the contracting business—and they went out in different ways. For ten years, they went out like that and then they started asking me permission to get back into the business. The older one, Carlos, first and then Eddie. Fritz never did, of course.

HG: Fritz was Alfredo?

MB: Yeah, it's Alfredo, which his kids are there on Alameda. I mean, on Texas street now. Wonderful family, regardless. I thought, Hey, there will always be plenty of business. The city is growing; there's business for everybody. Because these guys come into it, if I go back that's my fault, not yours. Get in it. They said, Well, I'll get off here and they (Dale??) said I'll get over here. Would that bother you? [I said,] "No way. Just go and get in it." So they got in it.

HG: So who is your market, your specific market, when you started?

MB: The whole city. I developed into the whole city and out of town. I used to (business??)—especially in safe, which became my strength. Biggs Field, the federal government, was my big strength.

HG: What would you do with safes?

MB: Open them up, repair them, send them back to their own label to have the protection that they were originally acquired at the factory. Yes, had to have the passion to continue to preserve the label, specially with the government. To this day, we do it. We do it at Biggs Field; we do it with the federal agencies here. DEA, the intelligence agency, and all those, still do a lot of work for them.

HG: So where did you learn safes?

MB: On my own. Started working by changing combinations to the safes.

HG: And—

MB: Reading.

HG: When it came to business, how did you learn to run your business?

MB: By the palm of my hand. I learned this from my dad. He says, “There’s one thing you want to do in life.” My dad would say, “You never owe money to anybody. If you borrow it and you tell him you’re gonna pay him in three days or in a week, you make sure that you pay it. If you don’t have beans on the table to eat from, but you pay them. You never work on anybody else’s money.

You make a promise to pay them, and if they’re good enough to lend it to you, and you make a promise to pay him, you pay him at the time, or before, but not a

day late. You learn to do that and you're gonna be all right." And that's how I learned, by doing exactly that. So when I say I run the business by the palm of my hand is to have in mind what would come in every day, what would go out every day. And I would keep that in mind. I would write, of course, my entries on a daily basis, of course. And at the end of the month I would know what was happening, where money went to and always putting something aside because he says, "You always save. If you don't have too much to eat, that's all right. But save, save money every day. There's always a rainy day coming around and you're gonna need money for it."

HG: So you had a system of cash flow in your head and—

MB: A system of cash flow in your head that works for anybody, to this day. I don't care with all computers or what have you, if you don't learn to do that in your mind, you don't have much going for you.

HG: At that time, when you were starting in growing your business, El Paso was not—the majority were Anglos and the minority, at that time, were Hispanics.

MB: Oh, yes.

HG: And your customer base were pretty much Anglo businesses?

MB: Of course.

HG: And how did they treat you then?

MB: Well, there was always that part that you don't even want to talk about where they fail you because you were Hispanic. They always give it to the Anglo sector. Sometimes I would price up jobs and I thought I was gonna get it because I knew I had the best price and the best deal, but they would turn around and give it

somebody else. They used your figures. And I found this out the hard way. They use your figures to peddle the job to somebody else and what have you. That happened for many a years here. Even all the way through the eighties I suffered a lot of that. Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes. The Providence Memorial Hospital, I will never forget that. I had already made all the drawings for the front, all the glasswork and everything. And presented it, got the job and there's another guy that happens to be the boss of one of my children now, got the job away from me because he knew Sam Young, the guy from the First National Bank, which was the big honcho at the board of directors for the hospital. [He] turned around and took the job away from me and gave it to this guy after it had already been given to me. And there was another one in the schools here. The Independent School District, I got some jobs there, Mario Montes. And Mario Montes walks into my office and says, "You know what? I have to take it away." Because this guy went to the school board and told them that I wasn't qualified to sell contract hardwood. By this time, I was doing contract work. selling hollow metal doors and frames and contract hardwood for different contracts around the city.

HG: Mario Montes worked for the school district then?

MB: No, he had his own business, still has his own business, big contractor. He worked for R.E. McKee. As a matter of fact, him and—

HG: Zambrano.

MB: —Zambrano, were partners.

HG: And so he took the job away from you or—?

MB: He came and told me that he had to take it away from me and give it to this other guy because I wasn't qualified to handle that kind of work. And I know that you

are qualified because you know more about this contract hardware than any of these guys put together in town.

HG: And so who did they give that—

MB: —but because they have the schooling and they have the, *este*, and change the rules in the—with the architects and what have you. The rules of the game.

HG: What companies were those?

MB: What?

HG: Those companies that got the contracts, were they—?

MB: Well, they gave it to the next highest bidder and, of course, that was the one big honcho, here, in town. I wouldn't like to mention names.

HG: Those were Anglo businesses?

MB: Yes.

HG: Okay. And this went all the way up the eighties?

MB: Up the nineties.

HG: Really?

MB: The ninties, and then I got out of that business. As a matter of fact, that almost broke me, (laughing) that business because it went bad. It went bad. They started taking those businesses away from me and I had them going already. So I closed

up that part of the business, the contracting business, and I just kept my locksmithing business, and my automatic doors and all that.

HG: Did you go to banks for financial help when you needed it?

MB: Yes, fortunately by then I had some properties and I had some money stashed away. That helped me get the quarter of a million dollar loan, \$234,000, to keep my—I paid everybody, to the last penny.

HG: What year was that?

MB: Between '85 and '90.

HG: So how long had you been in business to build up that kind of revenue?

MB: Well, I got this business. Like I said, I bought it on February the 1, 1952 and the question was?

HG: So it took you that time to build that kind of a capital base?

MB: Oh, yes. Through the seventies, actually. From '52, so it took me about twenty years—twenty-two years it took me to buy—. By that time, I had developed the property on the freeway that I have. A rental property and I had my business, my businesses plus my house. I had three properties—two business properties and my home. And I had them paid up already.

HG: Had you gone to the bank before then?

MB: Oh, yes. I always have used the bank for smaller stuff. Buy my vehicles, put them on a note.

HG: And they were pretty good to you?

MB: Always.

HG: Who did you go to at the bank?

MB: There was a time when I used to go—when I borrowed \$50,000 from a bank on my word alone. You don't see that done anymore. Bill Squires was the first president at the Continental National Bank at that time and I told him I need \$50,000 for a couple of weeks, maybe less. [He said,] "You got it, Moe." He gave me a check for \$50,000.

HG: But you were already an established business when you did that?

MB: I was an established business but he knew me well and my brother.

HG: And how did you get to know Mr. Squires?

MB: Through the business there at the bank. I became part of the bank. I bought a little stock in the bank.

HG: Okay, okay, because—

MB: Whatever they allowed me to buy at that time.

HG: Because Continental Bank at that time was chartered as a minority bank.

MB: Yes, exactly.

HG: Who started that bank?

MB: Well, it was several people that started it. It was—. All of a sudden I can't think of their names right now but there were, one, two, three, four, five, six different Hispanic people that were the heads of it.

HG: Now, was that the bank that Leo Cullens and Lelo Jacques and –

MB: Lelo Jacques. Leo Cullens was never involved in the board but I'm sure that his money was involved there. But Lelo Jacques, it was—oh, what's his name? The house builder, construction builder. You know them. I used to deal with them when I was developing the Minority Business Council. You were with the Minority Business Council at the Chamber of Commerce. You got to know all those people, there, who (had an occasion??) that used to help me with the banks, as a matter of fact.

HG: So you were an officer—you were—

MB: I was never an officer.

HG: But you were on the board or just an administrator?

MB: No, I wasn't on the board either. I was just an investor. I was part of the original people that invested money to make the bank happen. They only allowed us a certain amount of money.

HG: What year was that?

MB: Oh my God, I don't remember now but it must have been the late seventies.

HG: And did you ever have a hard time with banks? You always had a good relationship with banks?

MB: Never. Never, thank goodness. And the reason being is because I was always—always had good back up on my own. I had properties, in other words, and I had savings, so—CDs or what have you.

HG: How did you learn to develop properties, buy properties? Is that something your father taught you?

MB: No. I guess, you could say you have some type of business acumen that comes [inaudible]. Good common sense, the God gift.

HG: So you always had—

MB: The colleges can show you a lot. They cannot show you what God gives you. Good common sense, that's all it takes. Good common sense.

HG: So you grew your capital base as you grew your business?

MB: That's what you have to do.

HG: And then when you went to the banks you had a capital base?

MB: I had a capital base to fall back onto that helped bring about the loans that I wanted for whatever.

HG: But you also had relationships with the bankers?

MB: I developed a business that said to them—every time I went to them, I tell (it told??) them I don't need to give any money down. I would buy a car or I'd buy something and just said, "If you don't trust me, don't give me the loan. If you trust me then give me the loan the way I ask it."

HG: Oh really?

MB: Yes. And I want to buy a car and I don't have to put a hundred dollars down or anything. You put everything down on the books, and I'll pay it to you the way you say it or better?

HG: And they would?

MB: If the interest was low enough, I'd pay it and let the note go by. If it was high, then I'd pay it ahead of time to cut down on the interest that I would pay.

HG: And did other Hispanics have that same ability?

MB: They don't [inaudible], if they would have common sense. It's all it takes, it's good common sense. Anybody can do that. I don't care who it is.

HG: Now then, you got involved with the Chamber of Commerce too?

MB: Well, actually I started with the Knights of Columbus. Back in 1960, I became a Knight of Columbus and I was twelve years with them, helping develop charities and what have you. Then I knew I had to pay something back to the city that's been good to me, so I started with the Zoning Board of Adjustment and that's when I was gonna become Chairman of the Zoning Board of Adjustment. That was in '74, '75 and I was asked to join the Civil Service Commission because there was a lot of things happening between the department heads and the Hispanic workers. There was a conflict and they were being abused. The workers were being abused and I told the guy that brought me in, "Look I'm gonna become Chairman of the Zoning Board of Adjustment. I don't want to let that go. I want to do my work there. It's a good job but I'll go with you if need me, but only if you let me investigate the cases and the fault will fall where it will fall. I don't care if it's the department head because he's Anglo or the little

Hispanic because he's a Chicano. Whoever is at fault is gonna be at fault as far as I'm concerned. You let me do my job like that and I'll join you." So I worked through for about seven, eight years until I became assistant and then chairman.

HG: And that was a volunteer position with the—

MB: Volunteer position with the city.

HG: —city board.

MB: I have letters from people that wrote to me commending me for the kind of work that we did there and hey, I love it. And I have them to this day. I treasure them because these people took time to write me those letters.

HG: Did you see a lot of discrimination?

MB: Oh yes, oh yes. The department heads were being hard on a lot of the Hispanic workers there. There was one or two that I found a little guilt on but never to the point that they needed to lose their job or they needed to be passed over or whatever.

HG: Could Hispanics get city jobs that were good jobs and get them—?

MB: Oh, yes. Things began to happen through those years a lot better.

HG: This was in the seventies?

MB: Yes, and the eighties; and in the nineties it became even better.

HG: Yeah, and before that, were Hispanics involved in the city in the sixties?

MB: Yes, there was a lot. Oh yes, all those years were good. All those years were good. My Hispanic sector became more involved everywhere and everywhere.

HG: Okay and then when did you join the Chamber of Commerce?

MB: I think it was right around 1988, '89 as I recall it.

HG: Well, because I know—

MB: And I stayed there until—no, probably '87 as early as '87 or '88. Because as soon as I got out of being with the Civil Service Commission, it wasn't long after that that I started with the chamber. I've been involved with the chamber all my life—as a member of it.

HG: Okay, you were a member when you started your El Paso Key Fitting, did you join?

MB: I became a member.

HG: Okay, so you were a member?

MB: And the Better Business Bureau when it started. When the Better Business Bureau started out, I became a member and have been since then.

HG: Did you serve on committees?

MB: Oh, yes.

HG: All the time?

MB: Well, not all the time. Actually, I wasn't called upon, or I became interested when they started talking about doing something with the Hispanic sector. That's when I became involved and I told them, "Look like I'd like to develop the small business people of this town. And I'd like to use the big chamber to do it," rather than like other towns where they have a Hispanic chamber of their own.

HG: Right, right. That was in 1985 they started the Minority Business Council.

MB: Yes, the Minority Business Council.

HG: And you were—

MB: And I was one that started it.

HG: Right.

MB: I was the one that started the Minority Business Council.

HG: You and who else were on—

MB: Well, you were the one.

HG: Yeah, but who else—the businesses, what other businesses were involved?

MB: Well, there was a lot of them. There was Mike Dibb, which were involved in that and there were—Hector helped me.

HG: Hector Holguin.

MB: Yes, Hector Holguin, and my God, there were a whole lot of them. Arnold Peinado and Raul Peinado.

HG: He'd been president of the board before.

MB: Yes. I got them all (developed??). They did it happily with me and we were doing fine.

HG: And the chamber was open to your suggestions?

MB: Yes and they encouraged me to do it. And they set me aside, to help me set everything up. We even had a fund, which is the one that turned the whole thing sour and that's why the Hispanic [Chamber] is now what it is now. Because, at that time, we had about twenty or thirty thousand dollars that the Electric Company had given us to help develop our—and the director, at that time, of the chamber was not telling us that they were going into the red and they took all our money out of our account and used it. And that's when all the Hispanic people just went, Hey. They just left the chamber and started developing the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

HG: [Inaudible].

MB: What it is today, most of those people now that helped me are the ones that run it.

HG: Right, because the Minority Business Council started in '85 and lasted until about '91—'91, '92.

MB: When I left it.

HG: Yeah, and did the Minority Business Council do some good things for Hispanic businesses?

MB: I still have people that come to me, thanking me, because they're doing so well in their business. You were the ones that gave me the idea of doing what I'm doing that's made me successful. They still thank me. You were the one that dared to walk in the halls of the big banks and bring us in to them, to start talking with them about loans and what have you.

HG: Why did the chamber want to start reaching out to Hispanic businesses?

MB: Because they knew it was growing. The Hispanic sector was growing and it was gonna be a big factor in the city before long.

HG: And before that, there wasn't a big presence?

MB: Not in that fashion, in other words. There was a big presence and they knew it was becoming stronger and stronger by the day and things were being done by certain locals to help each other. But nothing in the form that we'd started with the chamber.

HG: Were there business people that helped you with your business that you would say, this business person really, really helped me; either contracts or advice or—

MB: Nothing that I have in writing, if that's what you're asking.

HG: No, no, no, just friendships.

MB: Just friendships, yeah.

HG: Like what kind of—?

MB: The one that comes to mind is Joe that does advertising.

HG: Joe Lopez.

MB: Lopez. You ask him and he'll tell you.

HG: He helped you a lot, encouraged you and—?

MB: Yes. He didn't encourage me. I encouraged him like the others, to go to the banks and talk to them. I told him, you have to run your business properly.

HG: So you're a mentor.

MB: You could say that.

HG: Yeah, and who mentored you? Who mentored you?

MB: No one, thank goodness. I mean, not thank goodness, but I mean, nobody ever gave me an idea of what I should do, ever, in my business. It all grew with me as I went along in business. And the more I did of it, the more successful I became. There was a time when I was doing over a million dollars worth.

HG: Really?

MB: A million dollars worth of business in this city, my business. We're doing half of that now because things started going bad, what have you. But we're still ahead. Banks have closed. In the eighties, banks closed. We never did close. We never have closed since I started back in February 1, 1952. We're still going strong.

HG: Well, a lot of people used to refer you.

MB: Still do.

HG: I remember—

MB: Federal Government offices, especially. I remember going to the federal building and one of the officers there in the FBI told me, “You know what, Mr. Beltran? You have such a good history here with us that you’ll always have government jobs. And if you don’t know it, that started back when we started working in Biggs Field, we went and looked at you and your family.” Back in 1945.

HG: They did a background check on you.

MB: Oh, yes.

HG: Because you were opening government safes.

MB: Well, no, at that time I was working at Biggs Field. I had to go to places that nobody goes into, secret places, and what have you. So you needed the FBI to talk about you quite well. So they told me I had a good history, a good history with the FBI.

HG: That was—

MB: The Federal Government and it might be so because to this day, all of those offices call us for work, every single one of them.

HG: Yeah, because that was Biggs Army Air Base at that time.

MB: Biggs Army Air Base.

HG: Yeah, my father worked out there at Biggs on the flight lines.

MB: I did too. We used to go the flight lines quite often, Henry Armendarez and I.

HG: Okay, then when did Henry—he was a machinist who—

MB: He was a machinist also. We took machine shop and mechanical drawing.

HG: So you paralleled with a lot of growing Hispanic businesses at your time.

MB: Yes, to a large degree. Not too many at my time but later on.

HG: Like what years did you see it blossom, the Hispanic business community?

MB: Actually, through the fifties and sixties and seventies, all the way. Actually, from the time I started, little by little a lot of it started blossoming.

HG: And what values did you get from your father to help you—because you had—

MB: The most important of all, that you have to have money at hand at all times. You save if you want to be successful at whatever. If you don't have money in your hands, you don't have money in your pocket; you're not worth a peanut.

HG: So your father—

MB: And if you have money, everybody will look to you. You don't have money hey; you're not worth looking at.

HG: So you were always—

MB: You go to a bank, if you don't have anything to back up whatever you're gonna ask for, they won't lend you money. Who are you? What are you?

HG: So you never went to the bank without having the collateral.

MB: Back up, collateral.

HG: Wow.

MB: You went from [inaudible] cash there with CDs, that I started developing with the bank, plus my interest in the bank, my little interest in the bank and all that. All that helped.

HG: That's where you got that big loan, from Continental?

MB: Exactly.

HG: And that was a big loan that you got. How large was that?

MB: About \$234,000.

HG: Was that to build your business?

MB: No, that was to pay off debts that my boy had created in the hollow metal door business and what have you that we were into. Yeah, I wanted to close it up and I wanted to pay everybody what I owed.

HG: So did you transition the business to your sons? Did you train your sons in the business?

MB: Yeah, well in 1994 when I retired, I gave the business over to my children.

HG: But they already knew the business?

MB: And I'm still the CEO of the company, let's put it that way. We formed a corporation but they are the owners. I gave them full blossom of the business and with everything in it.

HG: But they learned the business through you? You taught them?

MB: Yes, I educated them. I educated them in the business. From 1980 on up—actually '78, '79, I started sending them to schools around the country, Dallas, Anaheim, California, what have you, to go to different—especially when the electronic world came to be. Especially in the security business. In the security business, especially, I started developing them. So I sent them to the schools and that's what they do now, a lot of electronic work. A lot of electronic security work. We do mostly commercial work. Now we hardly do any residential or cars anymore. It's all commercial. The electronic age is upon us.

HG: So how many children did you have?

MB: Well, I had ten children; seven boys and three girls, and there was a time where almost every one of them used to work for me.

HG: Really.

MB: Right, and then they started going their ways.

HG: And now how many work with the business?

MB: Four boys and two girls, six out of the ten.

HG: So it's a family business.

MB: Still a family business.

HG: And it supported them and now it supports all these families.

MB: They're supporting themselves. They have supported themselves since 1994. The only thing I help them with is when they have to make a (loan signed??) for the loan, or what have you. Which there hasn't been too much of that either.

HG: How much of running the business is knowing the locksmithing and the other is how much is knowing running the business?

MB: It's all part of the same thing. It's all part of the same (catch??). You can't do one with out the other. You can't run a business unless you take the time to do all your bookwork properly. You have to do your bookwork. I kept telling my boys, you do perpetual inventory on your book. You take something out, see what went out. At the end of the month you already know you have your inventory, what you're gonna order. And don't order anything but what moves fast. The times back in the late eighties where we wouldn't stock anything except what would move on a monthly basis. These are little things that you have to learn. You can't have money just sitting on the shelves not creating money. So keeping it at the bank with a CD or whatever else that will give you money.

HG: And have your children taken the business to other levels that you didn't?

MB: Not really. Things have not been such that they're able to do much of that anymore. The other level that they're taking it to is that they've got more into commercial work. That's another level that I never did do or had anything to do with. Mine was always all the way around. I did everything.

HG: I remember you had to do a lot of work at the jails. I remember you were the man that went—

MB: Yes, went out of town to the Las Cruces, especially, and I did jail work out there. A lot out there, more so than here. Here I did very little.

HG: Was that the locks in the jails?

MB: The locks in the jail and the operators that would slide doors open or open up the locks to swing open and what have you. All the electronic stuff like that. I did a little at La Tuna, at one time, also.

HG: What kind of challenges did you face in growing your business?

MB: The biggest challenge is when I got into the bidding process. I got into doing door automation and gate operators. And that required the bidding process. That's when I ran into the problems that I had to beat the Anglo sector on some of these jobs and that was the difficult part.

HG: What was difficult about that?

MB: Well, that people would use your figures to go to somebody else, look, this guy will let me have the job like this, very unfair practice, and it's actually against the law to do it, but they would do it. And I caught some of them doing it red handed.

HG: So would some purchasing agents take your numbers and give them to other—

MB: Yes, they would use them to get a better deal from somebody else. Those are the things I started suffering very early in the bidding process.

HG: Was that with the schools, with the city, with—

MB: Yeah, even at Biggs Field, we used to be a lot over at Biggs Field and Fort Bliss.

HG: Really?

MB: Oh, yes.

HG: Federal purchasing agents?

MB: Oh yeah. They had their favorites who they would give the purchases to.

HG: But they knew you, how come you weren't the favorite, for example?

MB: I don't know. They just had their favorite people.

HG: Would Hispanics ever be favorites?

MB: Some of them, yes, too.

HG: Okay.

MB: I guess, you could say, that I wasn't much of a people's person in the form of spending time sitting around talking with people, forming conversations. I was always on the go. I had ten kids and I had to take care of a business and I didn't have time to sit down with anybody and shoot the bull with them. And this is what they liked because all these people, they were good at that, and I couldn't blame them. I never blamed anybody because I was never much a part of that.

HG: When you were at the chamber and you were Chairman of the Minority Business Council—

MB: I developed the Minority Business Council. It was under my auspices, and together with the chamber, that it was developed as the Minority Business Council.

HG: Did that help you in your business? Did that exposure—

MB: You have to say, yes, to that, absolutely. Otherwise, I wouldn't have done it. The better part of it is showing my kids how you pay back to the city what's been good to you. Because regardless of what I went through, the city has always been good to me, no matter what.

HG: When you're talking about the city, you're talking about—

MB: The city in general, where I have done my business.

HG: Yeah, people were good to you.

MB: Right, all the way through, all the way through. We have good customers. But the Anglo sector is the biggest part of my customers these days, almost 100 percent.

HG: Really?

MB: Yes.

HG: Because they know you from a long time ago?

MB: From a long time when I started. Still some people come and ask about me just to see if I still come around, some of my older customers.

HG: Yeah, at your shop.

MB: I call them my gringo customers.

HG: Do you still do some work at the business? Do you still go by?

MB: Oh, very occasionally when one of my boys comes upon an old safe that he doesn't know too much about, he'll call on daddy.

HG: You still have the hands for business?

MB: Oh, yes. I still help them drill the safe and what have you. I'm still strong enough, thank goodness. But yeah, at eighty [years of age] I'm still strong enough. Well, not eighty but I'm gonna be eighty. Still strong enough to do some of that work, too, and I enjoy it.

HG: So you're a trained safe cracker.

MB: You could say that, still.

HG: But people have had a lot of confidence in you to open up their safes.

MB: Right, and now they're passing that confidence over to my sons, which I'm tickled to death about.

HG: And they're good at that, too.

MB: Yes, definitely.

HG: Is that a craft?

MB: It's a craft in its own. Definitely a craft in its own.

HG: The business itself, what changes has it gone through, like the locksmithing business?

MB: Well, the electronic age came upon it.

HG: Are more Hispanics involved in that business now?

MB: Oh yes, yes.

HG: Is it dominated now by Hispanics?

MB: You could say, yes, but there are a few Anglos in the business here in town. I'm going to have to say that about 60 percent are Hispanic, or 70 [percent].

HG: Okay, okay, and your sons, are they involved in community organizations like you?

MB: Not at this point. They don't have time for it. I have to do that, leave a little of that to myself **to still on occasion** because of them. No, they haven't got time. They do belong to the Chamber of Commerce, they belong to the Better Business Bureau, and sometimes, they attend some meetings, occasionally. But they don't have the time that I did. I just started doing this when I started getting my kids working with me. I had time to put in and it still cost me. Part of going broke was part of that, back in the eighties. When I started working at the chamber, the Civil Service Commission took a lot of my time and then at the Chamber of Commerce as well. I neglected my business and that's what got me into a lot of that trouble.

HG: So you're doing community service at the expense of your business.

MB: At the expense of my business.

HG: And did you have to—

MB: It's a very jealous business. You don't attend to it when it needs to, when somebody calls you, they need you now, not tomorrow when—you know, they don't want to be told, I can take care of you tomorrow. No.

HG: So it's not a business—

MB: It's a 'now' business.

HG: —that you can have people doing for you. You were the locksmith, you were—

MB: Exactly. It's a service business that you can't hire just—and train in one day to do. You have to train people over a period of time to be able to do that and get into position where they can do what I do, in other words.

HG: So it sounds like you couldn't hire someone to do your work.

MB: No, not decently (easily??). I've trained my children to do it but it's taken time to do it. I started training them really well, especially in the electronic field, the electronics of it, since 1980. Sending them out of town on schools and they still do. They still go out, occasionally, to stay up to date.

HG: Yeah, hotels have electronic keys and—

MB: Exactly. Most of those are really done by the factories, themselves, now. They have their own people that go to the factories to get that done and none of that is really done anymore by locksmiths anymore.

HG: Okay, is locksmithing a dying breed?

MB: Huh?

HG: Is locksmithing a dying breed?

MB: In some regard, yes. In some regard, you could say yes.

HG: Moe, what would you say your biggest contribution to the El Paso Hispanic business community has been?

MB: Mine?

HG: Uh-huh.

MB: I think that I have to treasure the Chamber of Commerce. I think I did a lot of good when I was there. And I got to the point that they wanted to make me part of the—president of the big Chamber of Commerce, here in town, and I said to myself, I guess I've done my job or they wouldn't be taking a guy that doesn't have a college degree and try to make him the president of the Chamber of Commerce. That's when I said to myself, this is it. I know that I must have been doing well or that I would not have been invited.

HG: Yeah, was that about 1990?

MB: About 1990, '92, I believe. Something like that.

HG: And did you take that?

MB: No, I didn't. I passed it on to somebody else that I knew had the qualifications for it, way above myself.

HG: Another Hispanic?

MB: Yes, Hector Holguin, as a matter of fact.

HG: And are you still involved, a little bit, with some of those people?

MB: Well, no. Not the way I was then, no. I see them occasionally but that's all. When I got out of that I said, I'm gonna pay attention to my family now. My wife was the father and mother of my children for about twenty years and still kept on until I got out of the Chamber of Commerce business back in the nineties. So you could say that she was the daddy and mom of my children. Growing up she was, for the first twenty years of my life. I would come in at night, eight or nine o'clock at night, every day from work and I wouldn't see them. I'd see them in bed but then I'd go to work. That was what it was for the first twenty years of my life.

HG: And did you have major difficulties at your business?

MB: Never, thank goodness. The only difficulty that I had was when I began to neglect it because of the things I was doing at the chamber and other organizations that I used to work with, the Civil Service Commission.

HG: How many years did you serve on the Civil Service Commission?

MB: Seven to eight years.

HG: Long time. And with the Minority Business Council that was also—

MB: That was about six, seven years.

HG: Yeah '85 through—

MB: Through '92, I believe. Something like that. About seven years, also.

HG: Well, you were at the forefront of the chamber's involvement with Hispanic business, so you've seen a lot. Do you mind telling me a little bit about that story? Because the Minority Business Council isn't around anymore.

MB: No, it doesn't. They went on their own and formed the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, now as it's know.

HG: What was that about?

MB: What do you mean?

HG: How did that happen?

MB: Well, that happened, like I said, a while ago. When were at our peak, doing very well at the chamber, all this time we didn't know that the chamber was going in the red. And the director didn't let us know that. We weren't aware and, of course, he had access to our monies that had been given to us and the monies that we had formed by different organizations, especially the ones that the electric company gave us to help us along to develop the Minority Business Council, as we knew it. And we were doing fine. It got to the point where Hal Daugherty told me one day, "Moe, you know what? You bring any of your people, that you know well, that you have already screened well enough to my bank and I'll give them the loan, just like that.

HG: Hal Daugherty was president of State National Bank at that time.

MB: He was.

HG: And he was chairman of the Chamber of Commerce.

MB: Exactly.

HG: And he would give people loans based on your word?

MB: On my word alone. When I got to that point, I knew that I was doing something right.

HG: And at that time of the Minority Business Council, you were on the board of the chamber as well.

MB: Exactly.

HG: And you were chairman of the Minority Business Council for a long time. When that financial thing came about that the chamber was losing money, and they got rid of the director of the chamber at that time?

MB: Well, he left town.

HG: Okay, so they had to get another—

MB: I don't know what arrangement they did but he went out of town.

HG: They had to get another director?

MB: They had to get another director.

HG: And you had built this—

MB: At that time, that's what caused my people at the Minority Business sector that they got together and says, You know what? This is gonna happen all the time with the Anglo sector. They will never let us develop, ourselves.

HG: Well, was there an effort to have a Hispanic run the chamber, to become director of the chamber, at that time?

MB: Yes, that's when Hector came in. It was all something that I left behind.

HG: Well, that was as chairman but, I mean, as the executive director of the chamber, when the executive director of the chamber left, was there an effort to replace him with a Hispanic?

MB: I did try to get in several people in there but Hector was the most successful of them all.

HG: But he was a volunteer.

MB: Yes.

HG: But I'm talking about—

MB: No, the executive director as such, I don't know that anyone has ever been.

HG: No, but what I'm asking is, was there an effort by the Minority Business Council to have a Hispanic become director—executive director of the chamber?

MB: It never went that way.

HG: Was there an effort to do that? Did the Hispanic community want there to be a—

MB: Well, of course. We talked about it but we never did put much effort into that. It was still too young for that.

HG: Or was the Anglo community not willing to allow that to happen?

MB: Well, I don't know it was because I never tried it truly. I never tested it, to that point, so I can't really say that that might have been the case. It would be unfair—we never got to the point where I told my people, "Look, we should start putting in an executive director, here, at the chamber." We talked about it and I talked to the people, the big wigs at the Chamber of Commerce at that point. We talked about it but we never made an effort to really make it blossom into that eventually or soon enough. What we did was start to get a president in there, a Hispanic president there. That was the first step for us.

HG: And what caused the disenchantment in the Hispanic business community go form the—

MB: When they withdrew our funds from the bank and not letting us know anything about it. We were involved in certain things that we needed the money for and it was not there. The disenchantment came immediately.

HG: And so what did the Hispanic business community say that—

MB: Right there and then. That's when it did. That was when it was dissolved. When it was known that this guy had taken our money—that was it. The whole thing just blew up. It was stopped right there. They all just quit cold turkey.

HG: And then they started—

MB: They started forming their own; they started forming, what is now, the Hispanic—

HG: The Hispanic Business Chamber.

MB: The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce now, which is doing well.

HG: Because there was a lack of trust?

MB: Exactly. Well, they figured no, they'd just been leading us all this time. They'll never succumb to letting the Hispanic do anything worthwhile, really, in this city.

HG: Have you gotten involved with the Hispanic chamber yourself after—

MB: No. I belong to it but never—I do call some of the people that were with me from time to time, especially—what's her name? I saw Mindy in the newspaper the other day.

HG: Minda, Minda Villarreal, Chamber of Commerce.

MB: Minda Villarreal and she was one of the sweet ones there, at the big chamber, that always helped me.

HG: She's now vice president of the greater chamber.

MB: Exactly. And I've been meaning to call her, and I haven't done it, but I'm gonna call her, probably as soon as I get some today. I'm gonna call her up and let her know that. But I talk to the Hispanic chamber people occasionally, especially the CEO. *Cómo se llama?*

HG: Cindy Ramos.

MB: Cindy Ramos.

HG: Have you seen some real big Hispanic business successes in your time? Some people really, really take off?

MB: Well, yes, with Hector being one of them and in the contracting business also and what have you. Yes, there's quite a few now that are really, really strong.

HG: What messages would you have for Hispanic business owners who were trying to build their business?

MB: The biggest one that I have is that they should try to get together with the big Chamber of Commerce. Get involved with the Anglo sector, walk the floors of the banks with those people, learn to do that and they're gonna be all right. It's a big city and you're gonna have to do that some time. It's probably being done through the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. I don't know to what degree. But that's what should be done. That's what I would go after right now. If I was gonna do anything at all worthwhile, I would go to the Hispanic chamber and try to get them to involve themselves with the bankers in town, involve them in their meetings or what have you, like I used to do with the Minority Business Council. Talk to them and start letting them open up doors for more Hispanic people. I would train, I would use the Hispanic [Chamber] to do what I was doing at the Minority Business, train my Hispanic entrepreneurs to do their bookkeeping properly, to guide their business in the proper fashion.

HG: Do you still see a need for Hispanic businesses to penetrate into the larger community? Do you still see them as isolated sometimes?

MB: I really can't say too much of that, right now, because I've been out of it for so long. Although, I do a lot of reading; I read the paper every day and read a lot of those things like that. But to say that I really know what's really happening with the business sector and their involvement with the city fathers, not too much.

HG: Moe, what is your legacy?

MB: That I did something to promote the Hispanic with the Anglo sector in all faces (phases??) of life in the city. That has to be my greatest feeling. I did something to promote it and I continue to do it. I've done it all my life. But when I had the opportunity of working with the Zoning Board of Adjustment, the Civil Service Commission and then ultimately, the Chamber of Commerce, the big Chamber of Commerce, that to me was my glory. My glory, period. To me, I was hoping to see like the visions that I had when I was a child. Walking the streets of El Paso, I would never see Hispanics with good cars, never see Hispanics with those houses. I said, I hope before I die, I'll get to see all that, and I have. **You see now where my Hispanic – even though I never go to it, driving Cadillacs and driving Infiniti cars.** I never would have imagined a period in my lifetime that I would see such things, and it's a glory to me, to my eyes. It's music to see all that and to see a lot of Hispanic entrepreneurs that are doing so extremely well. Not just well, but extremely well.

HG: What part of town do you live in?

MB: I live in a part of town that used to be almost 90 percent Anglo and now it's probably about 90 percent Hispanic, Lakeside addition—Miller's Lakeside addition, out there by Juárez, up there by the Border Highway, out there by Ascarate Lake.

HG: And you play golf?

MB: Yes, twice a week. I still have my gringo that I go and play out of town with. We go three or four, five times out of town. We play at different places around the country. The Southwest anyway.

HG: And you were involved with the golf course, Ascarate golf course?

MB: Never, not like I used to be on the board of directors, no. (I told you about that??). When I quit the Chamber of Commerce I said, I'm gonna pay attention to my family now. I'm gonna spend time with my family now and that's what I do now.

HG: Moe, did you ever have any heroes?

MB: God, I've had many heroes. What are you talking about, any Hispanic?

HG: Both, anyone.

MB: Oh, yes. The one hero that I talk about, that I treasure an awful lot of, is my Italian friend that brought Chrysler out of the doldrums that it was in back in the—what was it, eighties? He's a good hero to me. I have a lot of heroes. I have heroes like Eisenhower. The only time I ever voted Republican was Eisenhower and what did he do? The greatest thing this country will ever enjoy, the interstate highway system. My God, how many people think about that? I mean, it's such an important part of our life in this country right now, the interstate highway system. My God, it is tremendous. I have a lot of heroes.

HG: How about local heroes?

MB: Local heroes, yes. I have local heroes. One that comes to mind is Pablo.

HG: Pablo Salcido.

MB: Salcido.

HG: He's now executive director of—

MB: I wanted him to become mayor of this town at one point. It never worked out for me.

HG: They were talking him to be executive director of the chamber at that time.

MB: At that time. I wanted him to be. I was part of that involvement.

HG: But they never did anything—

MB: But it never did because of what had happened between him and the then mayor of El Paso.

HG: Mayor Suzy Azar.

MB: Mayor Suzy Azar. He came [inaudible] or something like that. I told him, “Hey, those things happen for one reason or another.” Personal things, but still—

HG: So was that when the chamber had thought of naming him executive director—

MB: Exactly.

HG: —at that time.

MB: Considered him.

HG: And the mayor said,—

MB: You’re right.

HG: —“I won’t let you do that.” Because he had stepped on her toes.

MB: Well, she couldn't stop him but she had (Dave??). And she is a good friend of mine, too.

HG: Suzy Azar?

MB: Yes.

HG: Yeah, yeah, Pablo Salcido is now the executive—

MB: I think he's a brilliant young man still.

HG: He's now executive—

MB: And it's a shame that that kind of ingenuity that he has, and education that he has, is going to waste, as far as I'm concerned. He's doing well for himself, I'm sure. I talk to him occasionally. I haven't talked to him lately. But I was hoping that somebody else would have it in them to bring him about because he's still at that age where he can become a good mayor of this city. He has the capacity for it, he has the experience, now more so than ever, and well, he developed Channel 2 into what it is today.

HG: Channel 26.

MB: Twenty-six. [inaudible] 26. Well, not for him. He went all over this country and put it in this country like it is right now, whether they want to believe it or not. He's the one that did it.

HG: Yeah, KINT is a Spanish language station.

MB: Exactly, and look at it what it is now.

HG: —and he was the executive director.

MB: What it has become through his efforts.

HG: Yeah and did you have any heroes that were in the business community, at the time, when you were starting your business?

MB: Well, really my heroes were and still are and I still consider my friends besides, my heroes. I thought of them very much like the brothers Arnold Peinado and Raul Peinado, Montes and Sam Zambrano.

HG: Mario Montes—

MB: And all those people that I grew up at that time with that were, back in the fifties and sixties and seventies, they were being very successful people, even though they were working for these contractors at that time. They were not on their own then, but I knew them developing themselves with those companies.

HG: Do you know how they started their businesses?

MB: Well, yeah, take Mr. Zambrano and Montes, they both worked for R.E. McKee

HG: And they formed—

MB: —here and out of the country. Here and out of the country, that's where they formed themselves. They did tremendously well for R.E. McKee and R.E. McKee rewarded them tremendously well, too.

HG: Did he help them start their business, do you know?

MB: I would imagine so. I never knew exactly what happened there or to what degree he might have done it, if he did. I couldn't say anything to that effect.

HG: But those were your friends and they were starting businesses as you were starting your business.

MB: And they became big. They became real big. They became my heroes. The others should follow in their two footsteps to become likewise, in other words.

HG: How important was that friendship?

MB: To me?

HG: Yes.

MB: Extremely important; it still is. I still get to see them occasionally.

HG: Was that a source of support for you—

MB: Definitely, definitely.

HG: —that they were building their businesses at the same time?

MB: They were the big support for me when I was developing the Minority Business Council.

HG: And they helped you with your business?

MB: Well, they've always given me business.

HG: So that was—

MB: So they've been my customers all along.

HG: To this day.

MB: That's right.

HG: Urban Construction with—

MB: Urban Construction with Mario Montes and his son. And now the—what do you call it? Steven—

HG: Steve Zambrano.

MB: Yeah, I'm glad his dad's not alive to go through that.

HG: Yeah, they had to close the business. Moe, it's been very interesting to hear your story. I appreciated it. I appreciate your story. And the hope is that minority businesses will learn from those of you that went—

MB: There's so many people right now that could lend themselves to that. One regret I have is not going into becoming a part of SCORE. I was invited several times to become part of SCORE and that's one regret I have, that I quit and I said, "No, I'm gonna pay attention to my family now and I have, especially my wife. I'd decided that I wouldn't do that anymore but I do regret not being a part of SCORE. Even to this day because I think they do a wonderful job and they could do a lot more if there were some more Hispanics involved in that organization.

HG: Yeah, SCORE is—

MB: And there's people that have the capacity to be a good, contributing part of that organization.

HG: Yes, SCORE is Service Corps Retired Executives.

MB: Exactly.

HG: Help give business advice. It's an SBA program.

MB: Well, look at what we gave Segura.

HG: Roque Segura?

MB: Roque Segura. We were the ones that helped him make some letters to put that place into what it is nowadays. What is it called nowadays, with the community college?

HG: Well, he's the director of the Small Business—

MB: And has been since it started. He was the one that brought it about and we helped him by writing letters to that effect.

HG: Small Business Development Center.

MB: Exactly. I am proud of that organization, I'll tell you that. And I've used it for myself and for others.

HG: Yeah, it's a community [inaudible] funded organization to help small businesses.

MB: Exactly, that to me is one of my prized possession that I treasure a lot.

HG: So you wrote letters with Roque to help get that center funded.

MB: That center funded and started.

HG: Yeah, that started—it began in '85—

MB: Why I thought it was such a worthwhile project and what have you.

HG: Yeah, and that was important.

MB: That was important. And I love the man that still runs it so well and the people have been with him for so long.

HG: Yeah, yeah, now you spent a lot of time taking care of your children, still, even though they've got their own families. You still help your children.

MB: Oh yes, one way or another. It never fails. I was the mechanic of the house for my girls, until about last year when they all started to get new cars. Now I'm not a mechanic anymore. So I have to play golf in order to get a little exercise—good little running and walking. The guys at the golf course tell me I'm crazy because I run at eighty [years of age]. [I'm] almost eighty years [old] and I'm still running. "No, I'm not crazy," I tell them, "I need my legs."

HG: When is your birthday coming up?

MB: Third of March.

HG: And that's your eightieth birthday?

MB: That will be my eightieth birthday.

HG: Fantastic. Wonderful story.

MB: And I prize my health to that, now, more than anything else. Especially since I left the Y. I used to do it at the Y. That's something I recommend for anybody; go to the Y. My God, exercise your body, keep healthy. A healthy body brings about a healthy mind.

HG: Did you always do that?

MB: No, I only did it from '74 through almost 2000, 2002, 2003, something like that. I did it for a good thirty, thirty-five years.

HG: But and your children—

MB: It keeps you sharp. If we have good health—you're sharper. Your mind is sharper and what have you.

HG: Okay good. Well, you're still active and contributing.

MB: Oh yes, I still do. One of my sons, one of my younger sons, I call him my number eight, my number eight son bought about five acres and we're developing it. We already made a big garage where I put my RV in. I garage my RV in that place right now. It's a thirty by forty building. Yeah, we bought the supplies and told people help us out. Sat down the cement but we put the whole thing together ourselves, the whole steel building. We put it up. We made a twelve by twelve building which we call our bathroom. It's got a bath in there, a shower, in other words, it has a toilet, and it has a lavatory in there, a urinal, hey. When we were working, we would go in there and take a shower and what have you. Yeah, we're developing it.

HG: What are you gonna do?

MB: Now, he has three horses so we were gonna be developing about a fifty to one hundred area for the horses and what have you. And he's gonna build his house in that place, which I might help him get contract—I'll be the contractor. I'll get the workers and all that.

HG: Oh okay, you'll be the general contractor.

MB: Yeah, I will be the general contractor, probably. I will help him do all the contracting and I've done it in my buildings. I've made some of my buildings. I made one of them and I repaired the other one. Actually, I did two of them. The one on Texas street, I did all the inside of that building.

HG: You still have properties?

MB: Yes, I still have those properties—that one and the other one at Bassett. I still upkeep them. I get the people to help me upkeep them. And the building that I'm giving to my boys, the business building that will be their home.

HG: Were you ever involved in the political sector?

MB: Never. Never had the patience for it. Never had the (balls??). But I appreciated it and I've always read into it and I've always had—

HG: Well, and you helped—

MB: —and I've always argued into it. (laughing)

HG: And you helped politicians at times.

MB: Oh, yes. A lot of my friends. Jonathan was one of them. I have to say that that man was really something else. He came into the scene and I was already helping somebody else and I hated to be helping somebody else when we came into the scene to become mayor. Because no matter what people would say about that man, he is one man that kept this city in the black at the time when other cities were going in the red from left to right.

HG: You're talking about Jonathan Rogers.

MB: Jonathan Rogers.

HG: Became mayor of El Paso—

MB: Yes, he was a good man. He came in, he was trying to run the personnel department when I was vice chairman of it and I told him, "Look, this is my department, let me run it. If you see that I'm doing something wrong, then butt in. Otherwise, leave me alone."

HG: And you were there as a volunteer?

MB: Right.

HG: I mean, you were chairman of the committee.

MB: And he told me right there and then, at that moment, he told me, "Moe, it's yours. I just hope I don't hear anything wrong from it and you'll never hear from me." And he never did. Next time I heard from him was a letter thanking me for putting all those years with the Civil Service Commission. A beautiful letter he wrote to me.

HG: Powerful committee.

MB: Oh yeah. I treasure that in my lifetime, too. That was about as much politics as I went into.

HG: Okay. I appreciate that very, very much and—

MB: My pleasure. If you need to know something else, just let me know. I can always talk to you on the phone.

HG: Okay. This ends this interview with Moe Beltran. Thank you. Moe, let me ask you one last question, is your name Moises?

MB: Moises Beltran and no middle name.

HG: Okay. But you've always been known as Moe?

MB: Well, most of the time I have been known—my early years I was known for other different names. In my adulthood, I would say that it was mostly Moe.

HG: Why did your father name you Moises?

MB: I don't know. I guess he thought I was gonna be like Moises, the one in the Bible or something. He says it just came to him. He said, "I going to put this son, Moises." He said, the way I used to act, when I was a baby, he says, it let him think something like that so he gave me that name.

HG: And brothers and sisters?

MB: What's wrong?

HG: You have how many brothers and sisters?

MB: There were five brothers and five sisters all together.

HG: Wow, okay.

MB: Well, three from my first father's wife in California, a daughter and two brothers. Two of which have died. The other sister still lives here in town. But of others, there's one brother and one sister who have died so there's still four and four of us. Thank goodness.

HG: And then you had ten children?

MB: And I meet with my brothers every Saturday morning for breakfast. Every Saturday morning, thank goodness, and we enjoy it.

HG: And what do they do?

MB: They're retired.

HG: What did they do? Were they in their own business, too?

MB: Yes, my brother, I gotta admit (got him into??), he helped me develop the El Paso Key Fitting Company until 1974 and then I helped him get his own business going on.

HG: And what was that? What kind of business is that?

MB: Locksmithing business, out there on Trowbridge.

HG: Oh, okay, okay, Beltran's.

MB: No, no, not Beltran's. My God, I changed the name of it and what did he put on it? My God, I can't even think of the name of it. I can't believe it. But I go out there and visit him and I still can't think of the name right now. He's the one out there on Trowbridge. Manny, my older brother.

HG: Okay.

MB: And the others, one was an insurance man, all his life, and the other one, the other younger one worked for me and my brother until he retired in the locksmithing business. That was Rodolfo. There was Manny, my older [brother,] and myself. Hector died, the one who came after me and now Rodolfo and Ricardo.

HG: And your sisters all got married and had families?

MB: Yes.

HG: Good, well—

MB: They all got married and [inaudible].

HG: Yes, well Moe, thank you very much. I really appreciate your—

MB: My pleasure.

HG: —your time. This will end this interview. Thank you.

End of Interview